



## **TALK ON BETRAYAL IN THE SELECT WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE AND THIRUVALLUVAR**

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the theme of betrayal as depicted in the selected works of two literary giants, William Shakespeare and Thiruvalluvar. The comparative analysis delves into the cultural, linguistic, and philosophical nuances that shape the portrayal of betrayal in the works of these distinguished writers. While Shakespeare's tragedies, such as 'Othello,' 'Hamlet,' 'Macbeth' and 'Julius Caesar,' unfold in the complex tapestry of Elizabethan England. Thiruvalluvar's Tirukkural offers insights from the ancient Tamil Nadu, where ethical teachings and moral guidance take centre stage. The discussion aims to unravel the similarities and differences in the treatment of betrayal, considering the character motivations, societal implications, and moral dimensions embedded in the selected works. Through a multidimensional exploration, this paper seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how these literary masters navigate the intricacies of betrayal within their distinct cultural and literary landscapes. This paper also discusses the limitations and future directions.

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**Keywords:** Playwright, Betrayal, tragedies, Thirukural and Virtue etc.

## Introduction

William Shakespeare is one of the greatest English playwright/dramatists in the world. His works are reached every nook and corner of the world. All his writings, primarily tragedies are stretched or tailor made one to all sort of people of the world. He said ‘All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players’. Shakespeare was the pseudonym of the Elizabethan courtier poet and playwright between 1564 and 1616. His tragedies give us the greatest sense of the value of human life likely how people live, how people love and the importance of human relationships are discussed by the writer in all his works. Shakespeare influenced from the works of Raphael Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland. Betrayal is also take a crucial part in most of the tragedies are (i.e. Othello, Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth and Tempest) written by William Shakespeare. On the other hand, Thiruvalluvar was a Tamil poet and philosopher and his best known work is, ‘Tirukkural’. His ancient Tamil scripture is considered one of the greatest works of classical Tamil literature and is highly regarded for its moral and ethical teachings. The Tirukkural or kural consists of 1,330 couplets that cover a wide range of topics, including virtue, morality, love, governance, and everyday life. The versatility of its teachings makes it applicable to various aspects of human existence.

Thiruvalluvar is believed to have lived during the Sangam period in Tamil Nadu, India, around 2,000 years ago. While much about his life remains shrouded in mystery, the impact of his magnum opus, the Tirukkural, is unequivocal. The Sangam era was characterized by a rich tapestry of literature, and Thiruvalluvar's work emerged as a pinnacle of philosophical and ethical thought. The Tirukkural is divided into three books, each addressing different facets of life. Aram (Virtue) focuses on ethical conduct, Porul (Wealth) delves into matters of statecraft and economic principles, and Inbam (Love) explores the nuances of human relationships. Within these books, Thiruvalluvar covers a remarkable array of topics, providing readers with a holistic guide to leading a righteous life. He covered the areas such as Universality and Timelessness, Ethical Wisdom and Secular Nature. Tirukkural stands as a beacon of moral and ethical wisdom, casting its light across the ages. Thiruvalluvar's timeless teachings continue to guide individuals on a journey toward virtuous living, reminding us of the enduring power of literature to shape the human experience. As we navigate the complexities of the modern world, the Tirukkural remains a steadfast companion, offering insights that are as relevant today as they were centuries ago.

Therefore, William Shakespeare and Thiruvalluvar belong to different cultural and literary traditions, there are some similarities in their contributions. Both Shakespeare and Thiruvalluvar have left an indelible mark on the literary world. Their works are considered classics and continue to be widely read and studied. Both writers demonstrated versatility in their works. Shakespeare wrote plays, sonnets, and poems that spanned a wide range of genres, including tragedy, comedy, and history. Thiruvalluvar, similarly, covered diverse topics in his Tirukkural, addressing ethics, governance, and love. Shakespeare and Thiruvalluvar delved into profound philosophical insights in their works. Shakespeare explored complex human emotions, while Thiruvalluvar provided moral and ethical guidance in the Tirukkural. While the two writers come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the similarities lie in the enduring quality of their writings, their exploration of universal themes, and their profound impact on literature and culture.

### **Hypothesis**

- It is assumed that betrayal is one of the commonest themes in Shakespeare's works
- It is also assumed that betrayal and false friends' hood could teach the life skill through literature.

### **Objectives**

- Explore/to find out the cultural backgrounds of Elizabethan England and ancient Tamil Nadu contribute to the portrayal of betrayal in the works of Shakespeare and Thiruvalluvar.
- To understand the societal norms, values, and historical contexts influence the treatment of betrayal in each literary tradition.
- Examine the motivations behind acts of betrayal in both Shakespearean tragedies and the Tirukkural. Consider whether characters act out of personal ambition, jealousy, or political intrigue.
- Identify and analyze specific works by Shakespeare that prominently feature the theme of betrayal, such as 'Othello,' 'Hamlet,' or 'Julius Caesar.'
- Explore how the internal struggles and conflicts of characters contribute to the portrayal of betrayal in each literary tradition.

## **Research Questions**

1. How do the theme of betrayal manifest in both Shakespearean tragedies and the Tirukkural? Are there common motifs explored by both authors?
2. How do the character portrayals contribute to the overall impact of the works by the authors?

## **Methodology**

Shakespeare's tragedies delve deep into the complexities of human nature, portraying characters with intricate psychological profiles. The depth and authenticity with which he explores emotions, motivations, and moral dilemmas resonate universally. The themes in his tragedies are timeless and relatable across cultures and eras. Themes such as love, jealousy, ambition, power, betrayal, and the consequences of human actions are enduring and continue to speak to audiences today. His ability to create complex and multifaceted characters is unparalleled. The characters in his tragedies, such as Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, and King Lear, are iconic figures whose struggles and conflicts are deeply human and universally recognizable. Betrayal is a common theme in many of William Shakespeare's plays. Here are a few notable instances of betrayal in some of his works

### **Bird's eye view on their works**

Brutus, despite being a close friend of Julius Caesar, Brutus joins the conspiracy to assassinate him. This betrayal is particularly significant because it involves a trusted companion turning against a friend for what he believes to be the greater good of Rome.

Iagos' betrayal of Othello is one of the most famous instances of betrayal in Shakespeare's plays. Iago manipulates Othello into believing that his wife, Desdemona, is unfaithful, leading to tragic consequences.

Hamlet's uncle, Claudius, betrays his brother, King Hamlet, by murdering him and marrying his widow, Queen Gertrude. Hamlet's quest for revenge is driven by this act of betrayal.

The Macbeths betray King Duncan, who is their guest, by murdering him in their own castle. Macbeth's subsequent actions to secure and maintain his throne involve further betrayal and violence.

King Lear's elder daughters betray him by scheming against him to gain power and later mistreating him. Their betrayal is a central element of the play's tragic plot.

Prospero's brother, Antonio, betrays him by usurping his position as Duke of Milan. This betrayal sets the stage for the events that unfold in the play.

Betrayal is a complex and often tragic theme in Shakespeare's works, contributing to the dramatic tension and emotional depth of the plays. Different characters betray for various reasons, ranging from political ambition to personal gain or jealousy.

### **Tirukkural**

Even if some goods come out of the gains generated by  
being unfair, desist, from making that gain.-113

Even shade and water, when noxious, can be baneful  
Kith and kin, when malicious, can be harmful.-881

Fear not foes, overt like swords; But those faking as friends  
Fear the ties with them.- 882

Fear internal strife and protect yourself; during trouble, like a tool  
That cuts wet clay, it will hurt without fail.-883

When internal strife that disconcerts minds appears,  
It gives rise to flaws that unsettle the kith.-884

It maybe tiny as a split sesame,  
But disaster resides in internal strife. -889

### **Findings on the theme of betrayal in Shakespeare's tragedies**

Motivation for betrayal, Shakespeare's tragedies depict betrayal driven by a variety of motivations, including ambition 'Macbeth', jealousy 'Othello', and political machinations 'Julius Caesar'. The multifaceted nature of human motives adds depth to the theme.

Betrayal and power dynamics, several tragedies, such as 'Julius Caesar' and 'Macbeth,' explore betrayal in the context of political power. Ambitious characters often betray those close to them in their pursuit of authority, leading to tragic consequences.

Betrayal in personal relationships, often fuelled by jealousy and suspicion, is a recurring theme. 'Othello' exemplifies the devastating consequences of betrayal in a marital context.

Tragic consequences, Betrayal frequently leads to the downfall of central characters. The tragic consequences highlight the destructive power of betrayal in Shakespearean tragedy.

Shakespeare's exploration of betrayal introduces moral ambiguity. Characters are not strictly good or evil and the consequences of betrayal are often intertwined with broader moral dilemmas.

Shakespeare employs dramatic irony to heighten the impact of betrayal. The audience's awareness of impending betrayal creates tension and adds layers of meaning to the unfolding events.

### **Findings on the internal strife in Thiruvalluvar's (select) Tirukkural**

Thiruvalluvar address the theme of betrayal in his work that is Tirukkural. In the Tirukkural, he covers a wide range of topics related to ethics, morality, and virtuous living. While betrayal may not be a central theme, it is a subject that is touched upon in several couplets within the Tirukkural.

Tirukkural places a significant emphasis on ethical living. Internal strife is often depicted as a struggle between righteous conduct and unethical behaviour. Internal strife in the Tirukkural is portrayed as a conflict between virtues and vices. The inner turmoil arises from the choices individuals make between right and wrong.

Thiruvalluvar underscores the importance of personal integrity and adherence to virtuous principles. Internal strife is a result of the tension between one's inner moral compass and external influences. He suggests that internal strife arising from moral dilemmas has consequences not only in the present but also in terms of one's karmic journey.

Internal strife is not only an individual struggle but also has implications for the broader community. The Tirukkural emphasizes the interconnectedness of personal choices and societal well-being.

Therefore, Thiruvalluvar's concern with the ethical dimensions of human relationships, the importance of trust, and the negative consequences of betrayal. While not

the central focus, these reflections on betrayal are part of Thiruvalluvar's broader exploration of virtuous living and moral conduct in the Tirukkural.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of the study are as follows

- Restricted to limited number of plays and poems taken.
- Only four tragedies and six poems to take and interpret for this study.
- The study was limited to deal only one theme (i.e. Betrayal)
- English translations of Thirukkural may not fully capture the depth and subtlety of Thiruvalluvar's original Tamil verses, affecting the precision of the comparison.

### **Conclusion**

The motif of betrayal in the play King Lear shows, how betrayal can be a strong force that not only leads to downfall and corruption but also a force that causes a raise and fall in power. Betrayal hurts because it reminds us how vulnerable we truly are, people thus love avoid relationships and act in authentically in order to avoid the pain of what we see as inevitable betrayal.

Macbeth and Mrs. Macbeth betrayed King Duncan in order to secure and maintain his throne. It conveys the violation of trust and infidelity. A family or society troubled by internal grudge causes enmity that leads to destruction. Thiruvalluvar's philosophy is that of common man and hence he developed his ideals in such a manners that man ought to live as a true human being and cherish as the human values, promote to earthly views, establish social harmony, engage in domestic life. He was more concerned with the problems of life and ideal solutions of for socio-political and moral issues. Thirukural considered a common creed, providing a guide for human morals and betterment in life. It advocates a consciousness and a spiritual centered approach to the subject of business ethics based an eternal values and moral principles that should govern the conduct of business leaders.

Shakespeare and Thiruvalluvar the two great legend of English and Tamil literature lived in two different eras namely in 16<sup>th</sup> century and (2000 years ago) Elizabethan era and sangam period portray the motivation behind the acts of betrayal, the social norms, values and historical contests influence the treatment of betrayal and the internal struggles and conflicts of betrayal as a picturesque. Especially Shakespeare depicts the motif and the result of betrayal

in his plays such as Othello, Hamlet, Julius Caesar and Macbeth. In the play Othello Shakespeare creates a tragic plot. In this play the villainous character Iago portrays jealousy. He took revenge on Othello for not promoting him to Lieutenant. It is the theme that, it is easier to forgive an enemy than to forgive a friend.

Betrayal lies at the heart of the play Julius Caesar. Cassius betrays Brutus' trust in him by falsifying letters to prompt Brutus to join the Conspiracy to kill Caesar. Open enmity can be taken without fear whereas the hidden variety must be cautiously handled with fear.

This research explored, both the two literature legends Shakespeare and Thiruvalluvar have the same insight on the theme of betrayal. Such as the motif, cause and the consequences are the same. Betrayal forces to examine the areas of one's self, lives and actions.

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