

## Thomas More's *Utopia* and Namakkal Kavignar's *Avanum Avalum Virumbiya Naadu* - A Comparative Study

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*"I think all literature should be read as comparative literature and I think we should write out of what we know, but in the expectation that we can be changed at any moment by something we have yet to discover."*

- Margo Jefferson

### Abstract

*Comparative literature as the name suggests, is a comparative study of literatures with a view to enhance a total understanding of literature. Comparative literature is a growing academic discipline, and particularly India offers a wide scope for comparative study with her rich tradition of arts and literature. The present comparative study on Thomas More's *Utopia* and Namakkal Kavignar's *Avanum Avalum Virumbiya Naadu* brings to limelight the global view of the authors and how their outlook of the world slides with each other so smoothly. Both these authors had a vision of an ideal world, where men lived happily and everything went on well. They pictured it in their work and thus satirized the existing world affairs. Their yearning for a harmonious world and their anger against the evils in the society brought them together for the purpose of comparative study.*

**Keywords:** Thomas More, *Utopia*, Namakkal Kavignar, *Avanum Avalum Virumbiya Naadu*, Comparative Study

Thomas More (1478-1535) a journalist, lawyer and a Saint was well known for his book *Utopia*, which was the forerunner of the Utopian literary genre. He served as a counsellor to King Henry VIII of England, but later he refused to accept the king as Head of the Church of England. He was tried for treason and beheaded. His other notable works include *The History of King Richard III*, *The Four Last Things*, *A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation* and *The Sadness of Christ*.

Namakkal Kavignar Ramalingam (1888-1972), the poet Laureate of Tamil Nadu stands as an undying symbol of a vibrant Tamil nationalism. He was influenced by Gandhian principles. He was a renowned poet, novelist, painter and an orator. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan by the Indian government. His famous works include *Tamilan Idhayam*, *Sangoli*, *Avanum Avalum*, *Kavidhanjali*, and *Malaikkallan etc.*

Though they belonged to different time periods and linguistic backgrounds, they essentially had the same spirit of social consciousness. They both fought against the existing social vices. Thomas More rebelled against the king. On the other hand, Namakkal Kavignar

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was a freedom fighter. Both of them wanted to eradicate the evils of the society and dreamt of an imaginary land.

*Utopia* was originally written in Latin was published in 1516. It depicts of the narrator, Raphael Hythloday who claims for an ideal human society, the island of Utopia.

More was introduced by his friend, Peter Giles to Raphael Hythloday, a traveller. Raphael Hythloday vividly described the geography and lifestyle of the Utopians. He gave an account of their agriculture, cities, government, occupations, education, science, philosophy, slaves, marriage, treaties, war, religion etc. From his description, it is evident that Utopians maintained a proper social order and led their lives peacefully and joyfully.

*Avanum Avalum Virumbiya Naadu* is one of the poems in the collection, *Avanum Avalum*. The lovers wanted to live in a world, which is devoid of all malice and hatred. There is justice, equality, dignity and religious tolerance.

Both authors talked about the administration and the life of the people in the imaginary land. Both works have the same theme and the gist of the two have many resemblances. The works are set in an imaginary land. The name *Utopia* refers to an imaginary place or state of things in which everything is perfect. The title *Avanum Avalum Virumbiya Naadu* indicates a dream land of the lovers, where ideal social order is maintained. So the same setting is found in both pieces of literature.

Thomas More and Namakkal Kavignar advocated more or less a similar type of administration. In *Utopia*, there was an administrator called 'phylarch', who was the leader of thirty households. Then there was a senior phylarch, head of ten phylarchs. The same is found in *Avanum Avalum Virumbiya Naadu*. Each city had a committee of ten members.

In *Utopia*, every year three representatives from each city gathered in the capital city and framed a common policy. *Avanum Avalum Virumbiya Naadu* depicts that the committee discussed about general issues.

Every Utopian was involved in farming. Every day they worked hard for six hours and then spent the remaining time in music, gardening and whatever they liked. Likewise in the Dreamland of lovers, all were employed. There were no idle persons.

Utopians maintained a stern order that no one should discuss issues outside the committee, so that there was no chance of conspiracy. Similarly in *Avanum Avalum Virumbiya Naadu* the people didn't engage in arguments. So there were no malice, betrayal and resentment.

Utopian leaders and judges never received bribes. Similarly, the heads in *Avanum Avalum Virumbiya Naadu* were impartial. Each Utopian child was granted thorough education. The studies were in native language. In *Avanum Avalum Virumbiya Naadu*, there was a school for every ten houses. Amaurot, the capital city of *Utopia* was along a river. So Utopians didn't suffer from shortage of water. In a similar manner, imperishable river Kaveriflows through the country desired by the lovers. So, the inhabitants had surplus water.

In *Utopia*, when a city produced surplus grains, the excess grains were transferred to other city without any charge and during harvest; extra men were called from other cities for

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help. Likewise in *Avanum Avalum Virumbiya Naadu*, there was exchange of grains. There were no gold and silver and exchange of money.

Utopians never locked the doors, because there was no fear of theft, robbery etc. And the people of *Avanum Avalum Virumbiya Naadu* didn't close the boxes. Everything was safe and secured.

Utopian men and women can marry only when they were above twenty two years and eighteen years respectively. Likewise child marriage and other superstitions were not found in *Avanum Avalum Virumbiya Naadu*. Sick people were looked after with care in Utopia. Handicapped people were supported and respected in *Avanum Avalum Virumbiya Naadu*.

Utopians hated war and tried their best to avoid it. They involved in war only to protect them or to free the oppressed people. Similarly, there were no rivals to *Avanum Avalum Virumbiya Naadu*. The citizens had no desire for other countries. If anyone tried to destroy their homeland, they chased them away.

In Utopia, many religions were followed by the people. People belonging to different religions met in the same Church. Priests gave sermons on the similarity between religions. Priests were highly upright. The country longed by the lovers also had temples. But there were no conflicts. Thus, both countries had religious tolerance.

Even though *Utopia* and *Avanum Avalum Virumbiya Naadu* are similar in many aspects, there are slight variations between them. First of all, they belong to different genres. *Utopia* is a prose, whereas *Avanum Avalum Virumbiya Naadu* is a poem. In *Utopia*, Raphael Hythlodais the narrator and we are not sure whether Thomas More agreed with him in all aspects. For example, More disagreed with Raphael Hythlodais' idea of communal property.

On contrary, in *Avanum Avalum Virumbiya Naadu*, the poet is the narrator. So he pours out his own beliefs in the poetry. Raphael Hythlodais, a traveller talked about Utopia. More and Giles listened to him. So it is in the form of group discussion. On the other hand, in *Avanum Avalum Virumbiya Naadu*, the lovers yearned for the country. The poet narrated the features of the land without any hindrance.

In Utopia, *divorce* is allowed in case of adultery or abuse, and if premarital sex was found, they were not allowed to marry forever. But the poet expressed that such immoralities were never found in *Avanum Avalum Virumbiya Naadu*.

Utopians involved in cunning ways in warfare, like promising throne to the brother of the opposite ruler and separating them. But in the country desired by the lovers, the inhabitants faced war in a courageous manner and they didn't involve in treacherous dealings.

Thus *Utopia* and *Avanum Avalum Virumbiya Naadu* bring out the longing of the authors to live in a blissful world, free from inequities and controversies. The two writers can be united by the thread of their universal view. Their works have stood the test of time and share the common perspective and if their perspective comes true, surely the world will become a place of merriment and tranquillity.

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