

M. A. Previous Sem-2

Of Friendship by Francis Bacon

Francis Bacon begins "Of Friendship" with an anthropological statement of Aristotle i.e

"Whatsoever is delighted in solitude, is either a wild beast or a god."

It is humans' nature that whenever they come across solitude, they act as wild beasts due to 'natural and secret hatred' and 'aversation towards society'. There are however, examples of few men like 'Epimenides the Candian, Numa the Roman, Empedocles the Sicilian, and Apollonius of Tyana', all these men tried to sequester themselves for a higher conversation. Bacon calls their attempt 'false and feign' without supporting his argument, he leaves it to the reader's evaluation to decide whether they were 'false and feign' or righteous in their pursuit.

Bacon further demonstrates that solitude may also prevails in company; faces may be nothing more than 'a gallery of pictures'; conversation may be 'tinkling cymbal' where there is no love. As a Latin saying clearly supports Bacon's point, "Magna civitas, magna solitudo".

Great cities are great solitudes. The reason behind this very statement is that in greater cities, friends are scattered and there is no fellowship. Bacon says it is the miserable solitude that compels a person to make friends and a person wills to want true friends without which the world is not other than a place of wilderness.

In second paragraph of his essay, Bacon describes the utilitarian approach of friendship. He elaborates utility of a friend in life.

The Principal Fruit of Friendship:

The principal fruit of friendship is the ease and discharge of the fullness and swellings of the heart, which passions of all kinds do cause and induce. The diseases of stoppings and suffocations are the most dangerous in the body, so, a true friend helps to unload emotional burden. A person may take 'sarza to open the liver, steel to open the spleen, flowers of Sulphur for the lungs, castoreum for the brain' but there is no dose to open the heart except a true friend. A true friend can be utilized to impart griefs, joys, hopes, suspicions, counsels, and whatsoever lies upon heart to suppress it.

In the third paragraph, Bacon tells some bitter realities of friendship. He luminates some examples from the history where friendship took place between emperors and their servants. The rulers rose their servants or subordinatives so high that later on they caused immense inconvenience for them. Those

subordinatives knowing the weakness of their royal friends, made attempts to make them their own subordinatives. Firstly, he gives example of L. Sylla, the commander of Rome, who raised the general of his forces, Pompey to great height. Afterwards, Pompey vaunted himself for Sylla's overmatch.

Brutus had slowly made his way to Ceaser's heart. He was Ceaser's closest confidant and advisor. As a reward of the enduring companionship provided by Brutus, Ceaser in his will had made Brutus his heir after his nephew. Brutus had cast a spell over Ceaser, an influence the latter never suspected as wicked. This was to become Ceaser's nemesis later. Ceaser had all but dismissed the senate because some ill omen portended a calamity. His wife's deadly dream about an impending danger strengthened Ceaser's desire to do away with the senate. Brutus stepped in at the last moment to prevail upon Ceaser to hold back his decision of discharging the senate until Culpurina (Ceaser's wife) dreamt something better. So great was Brutus's sway on Ceaser that in one of Antonius' letter, mentioned by Cicero in his speech, Antonius has disparagingly called Brutus 'venefica' – a witch, who had 'enchanted' Ceaser for evil designs.

Augustus elevated Agrippa high up in the royal hierarchy despite the latter's mean birth (not from a noble family). Agrippa's clout in the royal court had soared ominously. He was enjoying enviable privilege and power. When Augustus consulted the royal counselor Maecenas about the marriage of his daughter Julia, the counselor proffered an awkward advice. He suggested to Augustus to give his daughter in marriage to Agrippa. There was no way anyone else could win her hand with Agrappa around. If this was not agreeable to the emperor, he would have to eliminate Agrippa. There was no third option.

In the same way, Bacon gives some more examples of Tiberius Caesar and Sejanus, Septimius Severus and Plautianus etc. All these men tasted a bitter fruit of friendship.

All the characters described above were not novices. They were not soft-hearted and noble-minded like Trajan, or Marcus Aurelius. In fact, these eminent members of Rome's royalty were hard-nosed pragmatists. They took no major decision relating to governance without enough care, caution and confabulation.

Yet, why did all of them fawn over their friends in such bizarre manner? This is explained by the fact that these powerful persons craved for friendship in their quest for worldly happiness.

Bacon reiterates his contention by saying that all these eminent men had access to all pleasures of life, had families, wealth and power. They failed to draw a line

in their relation with their chums. Later, the same adored friends brought them defeat, disaster and even death.

Bacon shares the parable of Pythagoras; *Cor ne edito*; 'Eat not the heart'. It may seem dark but it is true that those that want friends to open their hearts are killers of their own hearts.

The First Fruit of Friendship:

The communication of a man's self to his friend, works two contrary effects; first, it redoubles his joys and second, it cuts his griefs in halves. Because, there is no doubt when a person imparts his joys to his friends, he joys more than others. However, when he imparts his griefs, they become less. It is a fact that, bodies become healthier upon natural actions such as joy and happiness. Whereas, they are weakened and become dull on sad and violent impressions, same is the case with the mind.

The Second Fruit of Friendship:

As the first fruit is for the affections, the second fruit is for understanding of things under different perspectives. It makes 'daylight in the understanding out of darkness and confusion of thoughts'. Moreover, a friend is undoubtedly, a witty counselor. He helps in different tough circumstances for making a way right out of trouble. Sharing one's problems with a friend is far more fruitful than a day's meditation. A friend's counsel always works when a person himself is not clear with his thoughts. It is need of wisdom to think critically on a situation, hence, two minds can think more excellently than a single one. Bacon says, 'the help of good counsel is that which setteth business straight'. However, only that friend is legitimate for counsel who is wholly acquainted with a man's estate. Otherwise, his counsel 'will rather distract and mislead, than settle and direct.

The Last Fruit Of Friendship:

First two fruits helps for peace in the affections and support of the judgement. The last fruit is like pomegranate, full of many kernels. It helps in several ways and has manifold fruits in itself. There is an ancient saying,

'A Friend is another himself; for that a friend is far more than himself'.

There are many things which, a man cannot do himself, and then a friend is an appropriate alternative. Undoubtedly, the death is inevitable, so if a man dies, a true friend is highly suitable to do his unfinished work.

A man owns a single body that is confined to a single place, but where there is friend, 'all offices of life are as it were granted to him, and his deputy. For he may exercise them by his friend'. A man cannot speak to his child except as a father. On the other hand, his friend can fulfill his job in a better way. A man has many proper relations that he does not want to put off. So, a friend can be helpful in handling his public and personal relations.

At the end of this essay, Bacon concludes with a rule, 'where a man cannot fitly play his own part; if he have not a friend, he may quit the stage'.