CHAPTER FIVE

CODES OF COURTLY CONDUCT

In the ancient world of the Jews and the Tamils, monarchy was the predominant form of Government in which the king, who was the head, constituted the apex of the organizational structure, and ministers and ambassadors in the court had a vital role to play, almost in the manner of the executive wing of the modern system of government. Hence, this chapter devotes itself to the analysis of the governmental structure of the ancient societies concerned, dwelling primarily on the norms laid down in respect of duties and responsibilities assigned to kings, counsellors and ambassadors who constituted the highest echelon of power in the respective states. In the words of Bruner H.,

The court ethos is concerned with the orderly function of the administration, social justice and official position of the ruler (428).

The king was, ipso facto, the chief protector and saviour of his citizens, for it was he who ensured their welfare. Being the chief source of all authority in the land, the king was virtually the most dependable means of shelter in the event of any assault from the enemy. There can be little wonder that the virtues attributed
to the king in those primitive societies, were akin to those associated with God Himself. Most critics confirm the fact that citizens had a natural tendency to associate the king with God. As for the ancient Jews, "It is true that the anointed king stood in a special relationship to Yahweh" (Roland de Vaux 110).

Further, the wise men of the Old Testament looked with favour upon the monarchy as an ideal form of government, most beneficial to the citizens. The king, in turn, established his throne by virtue of his sense of righteousness, mercy and truth, rather than sheer pride of inheritance through birth. In order to be an effective administrative head of a large administrative machinery, the monarch had to depend upon the wisdom and loyalty of his courtiers, among whom ministers and ambassadors occupied the most prominent and responsible positions. In Proverbs, the wise counsellor and reprover is described as an earring of gold or ornament of gold. The ministers in Solomon’s court were assigned duties, much similar to those of the ministers in ancient Tamil Nadu, who also had the primary responsibility of safeguarding the interests of the king and the country through their wise counsel, couched either in a pleasing language or at times, in the form of indignant reproaches whenever the king erred.
According to Weisstein, "for Comparative Literature, 'stoff', 'theme' and 'topos' are of considerably greater interest than for example 'motif' and 'situation'", and according to M.H.Abrams,

A motif is an element - a type of incident, a device or formula which recurs frequently in literature (101).

The common motifs taken up for analysis and comparison in this chapter, are those concerned with the personal and moral qualities of an ideal ruler and the vices to be eschewed by him, the exercise of power by the chief executive in the land and qualities expected of ministers and rulers.

In ancient Israel, as well as in Egypt, the king was considered to be a patron of wisdom, capable of making far-reaching decisions. Often, such decisions were made on the basis of the collective wisdom of the king as well as the highest officers who had the privilege of his ears. There was always an intimate connection between the king and the counsellors, even as Solomon and Tiruvalluvar highlight the indispensability of good counsel. Taking cognizance of the burden placed on the shoulders of the royalty, Bacon also holds quite a similar view:
The wisest princes need not think it any diminution to their greatness or derogation to their sufficiency to rely upon counsel. (Selby ed 51).

This chapter aims at analysing the nature of kingship, the virtues to be cherished by a ruler and the vices to be shunned by him, the theory concerning the divine right vested on the kings, and the role of counsellors in relation to the kings, against their own respective cultural backgrounds.

In Greek, Basileus states that the responsibility of the legal hereditary ruler "is to guide the life of the people by his justice" (New Bible Dictionary 655).

The king's power is usually traced back to Zeus, the supreme God. Later, under Plato, "we find a movement towards the idea of the king as benefactor, whose will is law, leading up to the idea of the divine king in Alexander and Caesars". (655)

In the ancient Near East, kingship was considered "to have been established by the Gods in the initial cosmological ordering of existence" (Peake's Commentary on the Bible 449):

In Egypt, the tendency was for the king or Pharaoh to be regarded as identical with the
God, in Assyria, rather as representing the God (New Bible Dictionary 655).

Roland E. Murphy is of the view that the nation of Israel had its own political and sociological compulsions to acquire a king, a strong visible symbol of the source of power:

Israel seems to have imitated Egypt in adopting the government of Kingship. In I Samuel 8:5, 20, we are explicitly informed that Israel had recourse to kingship in imitation of the surrounding nations (The Jerome's Biblical Commentary 488).

In Israel, they held the king in awe, because they saw that he had wisdom from God to administer justice. King Solomon was proverbial for his wisdom:

And all Israel heard of the judgement which the king had judged and they feared the king; for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgement (I Kings 3:28).

In the view of Roland E. Murphy, In Israel, monarchy was established to conduct itself in relationship to the law and the Covenant of God (410).
The wisdom of God was looked upon as an eternal and divine quality, traditionally available to persons occupying special offices like princes, priests and prophets.

Proverbs singles out three kings on account of their merit and statecraft: Solomon (P1:1, 10:1); Hezekiah (P25:1) and Lemuel (P31:1). The Old Testament provides concrete evidence of the type of court officials, who functioned in Jerusalem. The list of the officials in Solomon’s reign includes the offices of the priest, secretaries, recorders, commanders-in-chief and district government advisers to the king (I Kings 4:1-6). Though "Proverbs does not make any mention of political philosophy or administrative efficiency, it shows concern for what makes good government. Justice and fairness matter most " (The Family Devotional Study Bible 562).

Training was necessary for all such dignitaries, especially to the little world of lesser ministers who functioned in the highly organized kingdom of Solomon. Nevertheless, it is precisely in Proverbs that we find the Israelite sage’s instruction for the court official "to train a worthy ruler and courtier." (Roland E. Murphy 442).
As an individual, the king should be an embodiment of mercy, truth and benevolence. These royal virtues make him equally benevolent and accessible in the eyes of all his subjects. They endear the royalty to the poor, the weak and the oppressed in society and inspire loyalty in the minds of all citizens who look upon the king as a mighty source of protection in times of need.

The Jewish Wisdom writer speaks of political administration from a certain idealistic perspective. The ruler is expected to cultivate qualities that go with wise administration: "Mercy and truth preserve the king; and his throne is upheld by mercy" (P20:28). Commenting on the above verse, Prof. Toy makes the following observation:

Truth involves faithfulness to all obligations; kindness is not merely mercy (compassion or clemency) but general benevolence (ICC. 395).

The combination of the above two virtues constitute the basis of a character imbued with an attractive moral calibre.

The ideal ruler is thus portrayed as a benevolent despot who is most concerned with protecting the interests of his citizens and State. Further,
Benevolence and kindness endear a king to his people, and encourage them to be loyal subjects. (Kenneth Barker 974).

If mercy and truth are ascribed to the ruler as personal virtues, they reveal themselves through the king’s judgements, he, being the supreme executive of justice in the land. Such a king is bound to be exemplary in dispassionate judgement as well as scrupulous upholding of the right and honourable principles, and his judgements should also be inevitably tempered by mercy and truth. He is also likely to keep the citizens free from several needless sociological upheavals and external threats.

In Proverbs, King Lemuel’s mother exhorts him to show kindness and mercy to the oppressed, weaker section of society:

Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction
Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy. (P31:8,9).

Commenting on the above verses, C.Bridges makes the following comment:

Very soundly does the wise mother inculcate mercy upon her royal son. This is one of the pillars of the king’s throne. (526).
It is an essential virtue for a king to maintain his popularity through his righteousness and mercy.

Such a concern for the needy is a constant theme in wisdom literature, perhaps born of a realization that "we share a common humanity and are vulnerable to the same misfortunes" (John J. Collins 68).

It is an abomination for kings to commit acts of wickedness, "for the throne is established by righteousness" (P16:12). The term 'justice' or righteousness is defined by Justinian in the following manner:

Justice is the firm and continuous desire to render to everyone that which is his due

(Quoted in IB 902).

A king lends stability to his nation through his deliverance of justice. "But a person who is greedy for bribes tears it down" (P29:4). Commenting on the imperative need for absolute justice, Prof. Toy says:

The decision of the ideal king is as just as if God himself had given it. (ICC 324);

This is an ideal set before a Hebrew king whose source of righteousness and wisdom is the true and living God. (IB 874).
"The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established for ever" (P25:14); When the king "judges the poor with fairness" (P29:4); "refuses to take bribes" (P29:4), and "removes all wicked advisers" (P25:5) from his court, his throne will get established in course of time.

In an ideal situation the king becomes almost a mouthpiece for the enforcement of God's law and order:

A divine sentence is in his lips.

His mouth transgresseth not in judgement (P16:10).

If the king were to earn the goodwill of all his citizens, he must live an exemplary life before them. Further, if he was to be an impartial upholder of justice, he must also be free from corruption in any form imaginable. Hence, the ruler is advised to desist from succumbing to the allurements of the flesh. In the words of the mother of King Lemuel,

"Give not thy strength unto women nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings" (P31:3). As can be easily perceived, "It is a warning against a large harem and sexual immorality" (Kenneth Barker 989).

David and Solomon landed themselves in great difficulties, because of their excessive susceptibilities to the charms of women. It is little wonder then that
the writer of Proverbs insists on the virtues of continence. As George Lawson rightly observes,

Whoredom is the ruin of any man but none are in greater danger of being ruined in their bodies and fortunes by this vice than kings who have too often the misfortune to want a check or a reprover while the temptations that lead to sensuality are ever surrounding them (Commentary on Proverbs. 556).

There is also a strong injunction against addiction to wine on the part of the royalty:

It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine nor for princes strong drink lest they drink and forget the law and pervert the judgement of any of the afflicted (P31:4,5).

In the words of Lawson again,

Wine as well as whoredom takes away the heart, when it is drunk to excess. (556).

A man addicted to liquor is liable to pervert judgement which may eventually lead to some unjust, inhumanitarian activity and neglect of duty, and land the drunkard in some irredeemable damages, thereby grossly reducing the stature of the leader in the eyes of his people.
Further, "the threefold warning against womanizing, drinking and injustice is specially for a ruler, not just for the general population." (Jack W. Hayford, 923).

The Wisdom writer is thus of the view that the wicked who are likely to corrupt the mind of the ruler should be driven away from his presence through judicial action. Only then shall the throne be established on righteousness. Hence, "The chief virtue of a ruler is to know his subjects" (Selby ed. 54). In the words of Solomon:

Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer.
Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness. (P25:4,5).

When impurities are eliminated, gold becomes pure enough to be used in a jewel. Similarly, to establish a wise and beneficent government, wicked counsellors ought to be kept away from the royal presence:

A wise king scattereth the wicked and bringeth the wheel over them (P20:26);

As the husbandman's wheel, brought over the grain, cut the straw and separated the chaff, his sifting administration of justice brought
the wheel of vengeance on the wicked and scattered them as worthless stuff or crushed them in ruin. (C. Bridges, 313).

A suggestion to this effect is contained in the following verse:

When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice;
When the wicked rule, the people groan.

(P29:2).

Further, the vast power vested in the king is visualized in terms of the imagery of an Eastern despot in Proverbs:

The wrath of a king is as messengers of death but a wise man will pacify it (P16:14), and in the light of the king’s countenance is life and his favour is as a cloud of latter rain (P16:14),

In his comment on the above verse, Charles Fritsch observes,

In Eastern, even more than Western lands, the supreme court of appeal is the Sovereign in person (IB 842).

In the essay on ‘Empire’, Bacon writes:

Princes are like heavenly bodies which cause good or evil times (Selby ed. 51).
That the king’s power cannot be effectively challenged in any manner is contained in the statement: "fear the Lord and the king" (P24:21).

However, even in a society where the king is the sole dominating personality, he may pass at best, only for an ideal man. A king, however courageous, just or well-learned, can never hope to become a divine being. In other words, he is simply a guardian of Dharmā (virtue), filled with a sense of honour, justice and enthusiasm for the duties of kingship.

During Tiruvalluvar’s period, South India was essentially a country of monarchical states and the king was invariably looked upon as a leader and protector in war. Hence, the qualities that Tirukkural attributes to a king are applicable to the head of any Republic as well. It is not uncommon to see a kural being quoted in the verdicts on certain vital issues of administration of the land even today, and in the courts of law in Tamil Nadu.

Dr. M. Varadharajan in Tiruvalluvar brings in an analogy from agriculture in order to establish the fact that Tiruvalluvar’s ideas on statecraft have enough relevance in the modern context. In the olden days, agriculture depended upon bullocks for most of the
farming operations. The basic requirements of agriculture like fertile soil, monsoon, adequate sunlight and quality seeds remain the same down the ages, though several changes have occurred in respect of the implements used (Tiruvalluvar allatu Vālkkaí Vilakkam, 4)

Tiruvalluvar also discusses the most intricate problems of statecraft though, in all likelihood, he was not a politician or a man of the court. To him, Dharmā or "righteous" means "developing one's social consciousness" (T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram 70)

Among the Hindus, Dharmā or righteousness was woven into general public life including government, so that any opposition to Dharmā was not only irreligious but also treasonable and so it could be put down with the authority which has the necessary public sanction, physical force and law on its side.

(T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram 77).

Tiruvalluvar also emphasizes benevolence and kindness as the basic virtues on the part of the king:

Whose heart embraces subjects all, lord over the mighty land;

Who rules, the world his feet embracing stands. (T.544).
The king who wields his sceptre with love and sympathy, is implicitly obeyed by all his subjects:

Since true benignity, that grace, exceeding great, resides

In kingly souls, world in happy state abides (T 571).

On the other hand,

the abundant wealth of the king whose words are harsh and whose looks are void of kindness will instantly perish instead of abiding with him (T.566).

Moreover,

The world goes on its wonted way
Since grace benign is there (T 572).

The world is the king’s, if only he is capable of showing kindness, without watering down justice:

Who can benignant smile, yet leave no work undone;

By them as very own may all the earth be won (T 578).

While rendering justice, the ruler must be equitable, merciful, impartial and scrupulous. The Tamil sage compares the act of punishing the guilty to that of weeding in a garden:
By punishment of death the cruel to restrain
Is as when farmer frees from weeds the tender grain (T 550).

However, the ruler should take care that punishment is proportionate to the offence committed:

Harsh words and punishment severe beyond the right,
Are file that wears away the monarch's conquering might. (T 567).

Further, the king is exhorted to win the hearts of people by "Being easy of access where no harsh word repels." (T386). Thus, Tiruvalluvar wisely affirms the view that the royalty should never alienate themselves from the affection and loyalty of their citizens.

In Tirukkural, administration of justice is deemed as an integral part of the sovereign's responsibility, and the king is looked upon as the supreme upholder of justice in the land:

Who guards the realm and justice strict maintains
That king as God o'er subject people reigns (T 388).

The importance accorded to the maintenance of justice can be apprehended from the following definition of justice:
Search out, to no one favour show; with heart that justice loves,
Consult, then act; this is the rule that right approves (T 541).

As if to underline his concept of justice, Tiruvalluvar employs another kural, which makes a categorical pronouncement of what justice is not:

Than one who plies the murderer's trade, more cruel is the king
Who all injustice works, his subjects harassing (T 551).

Here again, it is interesting to note that Tirukkural strongly advocates the cause of justice tempered with the tender, humane virtue of mercy. Though righteousness gives permanence to the government of a king, the citizens must constantly be assured of the former's benevolence and mercy. Tirukkural underlines further the need for the king to enjoy popularity and acceptability in respect of his subjects:

Righteous government gives permanence to kings,
Without that, their fame will have no endurance (T 556).

The supreme upholder of justice must also be utterly scrupulous and free from corruption. For, if a
king maintains himself in power by accepting bribes, he will soon ruin the morale of his people:

Whose rod from right deflects, who counsel doth refuse,

At once his wealth and people utterly shall lose (T 554).

Tiruvalluvar lays emphasis on the fundamental need to provide a royal dispensation of justice by highlighting all the evils that would befall a lord who neglects administrative justice:

Where guardian guardeth not, udder of kine grows dry

And Brahmans' sacred lore will all forgotten lie (T 560).

Where king from right deflecting makes unrighteous gain,

The seasons change, the clouds pour down no rain (T 559).

As a result, "the country will become a desert and the people uncivilized" (TPM: 122). In short, when justice is denied, chaos will result in the inner and outer worlds of the individual citizen. No form of hierarchy or social order will be sustainable.
Thus, the king is admonished against the use of oppression and injustice in order to strengthen or consolidate his own power. Permanence of the leadership depends upon the size of population who remain loyal to him:

No lance gives king's victory,
But sceptre swayed with equity (T546).

Unless the king behaves like an embodiment of wisdom and impartial administration of justice, the moral basis of a meaningful life could not become a reality:

All earth looks up to heaven whence raindrops fall;
All subjects look to king that ruleth all (T542).

The king who wields his sceptre with love and sympathy is implicitly obeyed by his subjects, "the world his feet embracing stands" (T544). Because of the benign royal souls, "world in happy state abides" (T571). On the other hand, the wealth of the king who is void of kindness will instantly perish instead of abiding long with him (T566).

The king is exhorted to win the hearts of the people by being always approachable. When the ruler is equally accessible to all citizens and objectivity is
maintained with regard to issues of justice, the country will not only be stable but also flourish:

Where the king is easy to access, where no harsh word repels,

That land's high praises every subject swells (T 386).

With regard to the question of being susceptible to women's sexual appeal and liquor, the king is strongly cautioned against any such excessive indulgence, and reminded of his obligation to the poor and the weaker sections of society. The ruler should desist passion for any woman in life, including that for his own wife, where it concerns meeting the ends of social justice:

Who to his wife submits, his strange, unmanly mood

Will daily bring him shame among the good (T 903).

Consequently, any attachment to a public woman is likely to be much worse for what she desires is not the ruler's love but wealth. The ruler who is supposed to seek universal love should not fall a prey to the charms of harlots:
Their worthless charms, whose only weal is wealth of gain
From touch of these the wise, who seek the wealth of grace, abstain (T 914).

According to Tiruvalluvar, the three cardinal sins in respect of personal conduct to be eschewed by men, especially the royalty, are public women, liquor and gambling:

Women of double minds, strong drink and dice;
to these given over,
Are those on whom the light of Fortune shines no more (T 920).

The course of Fortune is likely to deviate for the worse in respect of any man holding public office, if he becomes an addict to the habits of womanizing, drunkenness and gambling. Tirukkural also underscores the futility of reasoning with a drunkard, as no amount of logic will be of any use in such a situation:

Reasoning with a drunkard is like going under water with a torch in search of a drowned man (T 929).

The above couplet indirectly suggests also the far-reaching consequences of the habit of drinking in the case of a ruler. As the words or actions of drunkards
do not carry any moral weight, they are not far different from those associated with the dead:

Sleepers are as the dead, no otherwise they seem;

Who drink intoxicating droughts, they poison quaff, we deem (T 926).

Condemning the habits of womanizing and drunkenness, in the manner of the Jewish Wisdom writer, Tiruvalluvar goes on to decry also the nefarious habit of gambling, as another cardinal evil that leads a man to utter misery:

Gambling wastes wealth, to falsehood bends the soul, it drives away All grace and leaves the man to utter misery a prey (T 938).

The above three evils in Tiruvalluvar’s view, according to Murugesu Mudaliar, are not merely personal sins but gigantic public sins, affecting a wide circle of human beings directly and indirectly.

(Tmt.Sornammal Endowment Lectures 754).

In Gandhiji’s view also the duty of any modern State is to eliminate the above three evils of drink, damsels and dice. According to Tiruvalluvar, the king
should make every effort to seek constant counselling aid from wise men:

The king, since counsellors are monarch's eyes,
Should counsellors select with counselwise.

(T.445).

In the age of Tiruvalluvar, the Tamil State had an elaborate system of spies, who kept the ruler informed of developments in the land. Commenting on this procedure, T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram remarks:

It is necessary even in the interests of justice to know the truth about all people

(Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar 123).

Tiruvalluvar justifies the system of spies, on the ground that the spies constitute the very "eyes of the king" (T.581). The king initiates any action only when three spies, unknown to each other, file a concurring report:

One spy must not another see, contrives it so,
And things by three confirmed as truth you know. (T.589),

He also stresses incessant effort and diligence on the part of the ruler:

Effort brings fortune's sure increase,
Its absence to nothingness (T 616).
Tirukkural emphasizes the important fact that a ruler can never afford to rest on his oars:

The king whose life from sluggishness is rid,
Shall rule over all by foot of mighty gods bestrid (T 610).

Moreover, Tirukkural salutes the virtue of industry, saying that it has the potency to modify even the course of one's destiny: Perseverance and sustained effort will overcome even the course of Karmā:

Delay, oblivion, sloth and sleep; these four Are pleasure boats to bear the doomed to ruin's chore (T 605).

The king is expected to be highly alert, energetic and lofty in mind, not given to procrastination: "Whatever you ponder, let your aim be lofty still" (T 596), as "the dignity of men is measured by their minds" (T 595).

Tiruvalluvar looks at Statecraft from the point of view of Aram which does not brook any expediency. While dealing with war, he stresses the necessity of acting with due deliberation, assessing one's own strength, opportune time, and the place of assault. T.P. Meenakshi Sundaram is of the view that the fact that "the well-trained army who have indomitable courage" (T 761), is
dealt with, immediately following the chapter on the State may indicate that "the king’s army is mainly intended as a defensive force, not for any aggression" (179).

In Tirukkural, the ruler is looked upon as "the custodian of Dharmā" (TPM, 70). Tiruvalluvar does not seem to accept the Divine Right Theory, though in the following couplet, he concedes it partially in the form of a simile:

Who guards the realm and justice strict maintains,

That king as god o’er subject people reigns

(T.388).

Further, Tiruvalluvar refers to the king as 'irai' which means God. Murugesa Mudaliar in his "Lecture on Polity" agrees with the view that the kural does not attribute divinity to the king though he possesses 'oli' (light) in couplets, T.390, T.556 and T.698. This does not refer to "the 'halo' or the divine light but simply glory which the kingly state does bestow on an individual. It can never safely be asserted that Tiruvalluvar equates king with God " (Tmt. Sornammal Endowment Lectures 529).

Prof. A.S.Gnanasambandan’s interpretation seems to suggest that it is the citizen who attributes divine aspects to an exemplary ruler:
There is no Godhead in the king but if he behaves as expected of him, he will be looked upon as God (Valluvar Vahutta Arasiyal 170).

Viewed from the perspective of the ruler, Bacon's conception of the king seems to be only a vague echo to that of Tiruvalluvar, as the latter does not subscribe to any such 'divine' right:

Remember that you are a man and remember that you are a God or God's vice regent (Selby ed.51).

Tiruvalluvar is also of the view that the wicked should be driven away from the ruler's presence. It is further pointed out that a king should study carefully whether a person has any inclination for riches, women or other kinds of pleasures and then choose him as his minister:

How treats he virtue, wealth and pleasure?

How, when life's at stake, Comfor5ts himself? The four-fold test of man will full assurance make (T 501), as wicked counsellors are quite likely to become agents of destruction of the state.

A large number of proverbs and kurals deal with the relationship of a king with his citizens. The king
was the centre of power in that age, who ensured political order and social stability. Hence, he must possess the virtues of mercy, benevolence, truth, justice, and love for the weak and the oppressed. Further, he should befriend wise counsellors, and eschew sexual immorality, incontinence, drinking, injustice, etc. Like the Wisdom writer, Tiruvalluvar also feels that learning and wisdom are quite essential for a king. In the ultimate analysis, Tiruvalluvar's portrayal of the king is that of a benevolent despot, who exists for protecting the interests of the citizens and the State, and, significantly, Tirukkural exhibits a pronounced bias favouring the people, rather than the king. The emphasis in the Tamil work of wisdom is on the duties of the ruler rather than on his rights. In contrast, Proverbs simply upholds the Divine Right of kings. Tiruvalluvar accords to the king merely the status of the custodian of Dharmā, which has definite transcendental implications.

According to Solomon, the king should heed the voice of good counsellors:

Where no counsel is, the people fall; but in the multitude of counsellors, there is safety (P11: 4); and Every purpose is established by counsel (P20:18).
Thus, the safety of the king and the kingdom rests on good counsel.

The term 'tahbuloth' in Hebrew means "skill or guidance, and conveys etymologically, the concrete image of rope-pulling for the purpose of steering a ship" (C. Bridges 27). The original sense of nautical expertise is transposed to the political domain which demands skill and insight in finding solutions and offering timely advice to leaders. In the context of a sagacious discourse, the term denotes the art of solving problems and meeting challenges that face the body-politic requiring experience and intuition in matters of battle strategy, diplomacy and negotiation. Hence, the Wisdom writer says,

For by wise counsel, thou shalt make thy war; and in multitude of counsellors there is safety (P24:6).

On the other hand, if too many counsellors are given a chance to speak, action may get delayed and confusion may set in:

However, in the give and take of group thinking, something generally emerges that is better than the conclusion that any one person could have produced by himself (IB 848).
Wars are won by wisdom. The Hebrew term ‘teshulah’ or victory means basically deliverance, implying that "where there is deliverance from enemy, there is victory and thus safety" (IB 848). By employing proper counsellors, the king is more likely to ensure the safety of the land.

Even Aristotle is of the opinion,

The most desirable form of government is that which enables everyman, whoever he is, to exercise his best (S.H. Butcher, trans. Aristotle’s Theory of Poetry and Fine Art PXII).

Further, it is the duty of those who have the ears of the kings, to give faithful and just counsel and to tell them the much needed, though at times displeasing, truth. In doing so, they will eventually gain royal favour, while flatterers may end up as objects of justifiable abhorrence.

"Righteous lips are the delight of kings and they love him that speaketh aright" (P16:13). The king loves trustworthy advisers:

A wicked messenger falleth into mischief;
But a faithful ambassador is health (P13:17)
In the opinion of Oesterley,

Both the Hebrew and the Egyptian sages are referring to the envoy who was an important government official or to a scribe who was classified as one of the wisemen from the earliest times because he could write and therefore hold a responsible position (103).

Wise conduct is enjoined before a king in court (P25: 8-10), in speech (P25: 11-18) and in dealing with enemies (P25: 19-22):

Do not go hastily to court, for what will you do in the end when your neighbour has put you to shame? Debate your case with your neighbour, and do not disclose the secret to another, lest he who hears it expose your shame and your reputation be ruined. (NKJ P25:8-10).

Prof. C.H. Toy interprets the above verse as

Go not forth to strive hastily of thy neighbour's affairs with thoughtless impropriety, lest thou know not what to do (ICC 461).

Discussing a disputed matter in private and trying to settle it then and there, is preferable to taking it to
court. Also, it is better to maintain silence concerning other people's matters because a babbler is universally despised. Above all, a counsellor should utter the right words at the right time and context:

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver (P25:11).

Further, to be able to receive wise counsel is considered as valuable as connoisseurship of jewellery:

As an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear (P25:11).

For instance, Job shows an acute awareness of the value of counsel, when he says: "How forcible are right words " (Job 6:25).

Fidelity is the most praiseworthy virtue in envoys, especially because they are not under the immediate eye of the masters:

As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him, he refresheth the soul of his masters (P25:13).

C. Bridges explicates the above verse in the following manner:
The cold of snow would be most refreshing to the parched and fainting reapers. So is the faithful messenger to them that sent him. (EOP, 403).

A king should also never put his confidence in an undependable man during a crisis, which is "like a broken tooth and a foot out of joint" (P25:19). As John Garlock observes, "The pain is both acute and chronic" (Bible for Spirit-Filled Living, 917).

Similarly, an unfaithful messenger can cause untold misery:

A wicked messenger falls into trouble but a trustworthy envoy brings healing. (P13:17).

A good counsellor's soothing words bring about healing, as his tactful and honest approach benefits both the parties:

By long forbearing is a prince persuaded and a soft tongue breaketh the bones (P25:15).

Patience and gentleness are powerful tools in such a situation:

He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding; but he that is hearty of spirit exalteth folly. (P14:29).
According to C. Bridges,

To be slow to wrath is a proof of great understanding .... There is often a sourness of spirit that sits upon men by which they are angry at they know not what; lighting into a flame at the most trifle matters, such as in cooler moments we shall be ashamed at having contended for terrible flames have arisen from these trifling sparks. This is indeed exalting folly on an eminence to be seen by all. (173).

Another thing despicable in an ambassador is sluggishness:

A sluggard ambassador is so despicable as vinegar to the teeth and as smoke to the eyes (P10:26).

Such an incompetent ambassador is as irritating as vinegar and smoke. Here John Garlock makes the following comment:

A lazy employee is not only unproductive but also irritating (Bible for Spirit-filled Living, 897).

So also "the king's favour is toward a wise servant; but his wrath is against him that causeth
shame" (P.14:35). In sharp contrast, a diligent man is honoured by the king and respected by his subjects:

Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men (P22:29).

Speedy execution of a king's command is a virtue that the writer of Proverbs appreciates by instinct. The king's search for the most diligent and capable men of the realm in order to place them over certain affairs of the kingdom. C.Bridges remarks: "The diligent man will bear rule in his own sphere" (EOP 365).

In the case of Tiruvalluvar, he assigns, to start with, ten couplets for discussion of the role of ministers in Porutpal (Materialistic Sphere) which underscores the significance of counsellors. According to Murugesha Mudaliar, a modern critic,

The minister is a part of five grand councils, i.e. ministers, astrologers, military chiefs, envoys and scouts and eight popular assemblies, i.e. assemblies of citizens, guardsmen, workers, treasurers, frontiermen, etc. and the minister has constantly to speak to them (Tmt. Sornammal Endowment Lectures 598).
In short,

It was a society which relied on learned assemblies and councils in local and central governments. (TPM. 125).

Counsellors are referred to as "monarch’s eyes" (T 445), a fact which implies the indispensability of the learned and wise executive arm of the State, in safeguarding the interests of the king and the country, either through "suggesting in a pleasing manner things such as are desirable and not disagreeable" (T 696), or "thundering out reproaches when the king errs" (T 447).

A king who would endure bitter words of reproach is, in the final analysis, safe and secure and "beneath the shadow of his power, the world abides secure " (T. 389). This view of Tiruvalluvar is expressed in another kural that ends up with a rhetorical question, for emphasis:

What power can work his fall, who faithful ministers Employs that thunders our reproaches when he errs? (T447).

The most important counsel that Tiruvalluvar proffers to the minister of a king is that he ought to dare "to say the very truth aloud though unwise kings
may cast his words away" (T.638), at times, even at the cost of his own security or position. The minister should never waver in his mission of offering the right counsel and must possess incisive insight, ready apprehension of issues involved, clarity in formulating a resolution and a strong will to initiate and execute the necessary action.

Further, the minister ought to be a great diplomat in international politics so as "to utter calm, conclusive word whenever needed" (T.634). V.V.S.Aiyar interprets this clause, as "the positiveness in expression of opinion", which is possible, "only in a responsible minister who deliberates deeply and speaks discreetly" (T.595). That Tiruvalluvar places a great prize on unambiguity in speech in a monarchy is a pointer to the fact that "Tiruvalluvar was really anticipating the modern concepts of democratic process." (Tmt. Sornammal Endowment Lectures 595).

Only good counsels can offer a king both stability and invincibility as he who "lacks support of friends knows no stability" (T.449). In the words of Bacon, "The life of the execution of affairs resteth in the good choice of persons." (Selby ed.54).

While listing out the qualifications and role of ministers in the light of Tirukkural, Parimelazhagar is
of the opinion that ministers are "equal in weight to the king himself" (Tmt. Sornammal Endowment Lectures 594).

Tiruvalluvar gives prominence to "integrity and soul-determined truthfulness" (T 638), in the rulers. An ambassador sent on a mission should be firm of mind, pure of heart and engaging in his ways and words. He should have an abundant measure of "native subtlety combined with sound scholastic lore" (T 636) and "sense, goodly grace and knowledge exquisite" (T.684).

While elaborating on the most important aspect of a minister's professional art, Tiruvalluvar emphasizes oratory of speech, which perhaps constitutes a most salient asset of any leader in a modern democracy. Dr. Balasubramaniam is of the view that the art of eloquence is at once the symbol of democracy and the strength of a government .... The righteous and beneficial injunctions to be followed by the ministers and the need for them to cultivate and cleverly manipulate the art of rhetoric and practice of debate go to prove that in Valluvar's polity, the ministry was democratic

(Tmt. Sornammal Endowment Lectures 718).
Further, the minister has to "make his speech well-adapted to various hearers' state" (T 644), and his manner of delivery has to be such that it binds his friends to himself and makes even his rivals value his friendship. Being "mighty in word and fearless in speech" (T 647); the counsellor should "hold the listeners' ear spellbound" (T 643), "rightly speak the right" (T 641), in an affable manner, eschewing harsh words (T 685) since "gain and loss in life depend on speech" (T 642). For, those who are incapable of setting forth their accomplishments before others, are like "flowers blossoming in cluster and yet without fragrance " (T 650).

While analysing the office of the minister which, in the eyes of Tiruvalluvar involves a dynamic philosophy of action, T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram remarks:

In the treatment of this intricate problem of diplomacy, he shows his greatness which arises again from his basic human approach (137).

After a thorough study of an issue, a minister should venture to suggest the right remedy, ever mindful of the need for timeliness of action and spirit of enterprise:

A minister is he who grasps with wisdom large, Means, time, work's mode and functions rare he must discharge. (T.631),
Moreover, the minister must have a "determined mind, interest in the welfare of the subjects, learned wisdom and manly effort" (T 632), in order to execute the plan.

An able minister must further possess the capacity to eschew sticky partners and reach out to even those who have been for a time estranged, if they are found valuable. In addition, whenever "action calls for sleepless care" (T 672), with "steadfast will and mind unslumbering" (T 668), he must show "firm resolve and do the deeds that pleasure yield at last" (T 669) and be constantly alert for seizing time by forelock under any circumstances, as "delays have dangerous ends" (Henry VI: Part I. III Act II Scene 1.33). Also Tiruvalluvar cites firmness of mind and tireless industry as the essential prerequisites of a minister, for it is the former virtue, which, when directed towards morally good ends, yields fruits, avoiding all pitfalls.

It is also significant that, to Tiruvalluvar, purity of means is extremely sacred:

What has been obtained by fairness,
Though with loss at first, will afterwards yield fruit (T. 659).

and

For a minister, to protect his king with wealth obtained by foul means is like preserving a vessel of wet clay by water (T 660).
The above kurals highlight how Tiruvalluvar values purity of purpose even in the sphere of diplomacy. To him, an ideal ambassador will never stoop to cunning or deceit, because he eventually believes in negotiating from a morally superior position of strength.

A man should never venture into an action that is apparently hopeless. However, if anything goes wrong in course of time, after he has thrown himself into an enterprise, he should remain calm and face the situation boldly:

In action be thou' ware of act's defeat;
The world leaves those who work leave incomplete. (T 612).

Moreover, he should think and decide on the right time for action:

A crow will conquer owl in broad day light;
The king that foes would crush needs fitting time to fight (T 481).

The initiative of any action must remain always with the ruler: "He should think and then dare the deed" (T 467).

Tiruvalluvar insists that a minister should be thoroughly familiar with the ways of the world and must
have practical experience, for though a person has acquired all the bookish knowledge, it is of no avail if he does not "follow common sense of men in all" (T.637). For instance, Tiruvalluvar offers a pragmatic counsel where it concerns overcoming an enemy. One should simply bide one’s time:

If one meets his enemy, let him show him all respect until the time of destruction comes; when that comes, his head will be easily brought low (T.488).

In 'Conduct in the Presence of Kings', Tiruvalluvar suggests certain formulae: "They should, like those who warm themselves at the fire, be neither too far nor too near" (T.691). For, "If the king’s suspicion is once aroused, none can remove it, and he should avoid the commission of serious errors" (T.692). He should steadfastly repress "all whispered words and interchange of smiles" (T.694), in the presence of the king, and should not be so inquisitive as "to seek and ask for the secret of the king, and give ears only if he lets the matter forth " (T.695).

A minister may be considered a gem among men and be regarded as a deity, if he has sufficient intuition and astuteness to read the unuttered thoughts of the king and scan the silent minds of men. He is also
expected to be loyal, humble and circumspect in the presence of the king, regardless of the age and nature of the monarch, for, if obedience to and respect for authority do not exist, there will be only chaos:

Say not, 'He's young, my kinsman', despising thus your king;
But reverence the glory, kingly state doth bring (T 698).

A minister, who, standing by the king's side plots evil, brings "worse woes than countless foemen" (T.639). As this kural is so strongly worded, it is obvious that Tiruvalluvar does not mince words on the question of betrayal. It is interesting to note Ilango Adikal, famous sage-author of the Tamil epic, Silappatikaram, places disloyal ministers in the same category as other degenerates like a rascal monk, unchaste women, seducers, liars and informers (Sil 5:128-131).

T.P. Meenakshi Sundaram is of the view that Tiruvalluvar's conception of the role of ministers is "worthy of study by members of assemblies of the modern world", as they lay emphasis on high ideals, while "giving us practical hints" (125). Thus, it goes without saying that the constitutional monarchy and democratic ministry in Valluvar's polity set a model
even to our own contemporary political structure and organization.

Solomon in *Proverbs* speaks for himself when he affirms that the king should be the friend of the gracious servant, by which he implies "purity of heart" or "moral influence of the purity of character", and place refinement over the whole character (C.Bridges 354).

With regard to the values and virtues of counsellors, both the Wisdom writers think in similar terms. The ministers should always offer wise counsel though it may be displeasing to the rulers at times. The virtues indispensable for the envoys in the presence of the king are truthfulness, loyalty, fidelity, diligence, gentleness, patience, forbearance, speedy execution of an action at the right time and right place, and, above all, a persuasive tongue. The vices to be eschewed are unfaithfulness, sluggishness, babbling and haste. Tiruvalluvar also offers practical counsel to the ministers regarding how to conduct oneself with one's foes or rivals - to show all courtesy until the time of their destruction. However, a good counsellor should never be mean or unscrupulous. In Valluvar's society, there is an all-pervasive influence
of Aram which listed out definitive do’s and dont’s regarding life public and private, and this ethical code enjoyed a great approbation.

The king depicted in Proverbs is a benevolent despot dedicated to the cause of his people’s welfare. Despite being formidable in power and a mighty source of protection, he is also capable of personal virtues such as mercy, compassion, benevolence, truth, loyalty, wisdom and justice, all considered as divine attributes. In order to have his kingdom strongly established, the ruler needs to be totally free from wickedness and vices.

In Tirukkural, the king emerges as the supreme upholder of justice, wields his sceptre with personal virtues like love, sympathy, and kindness, and treats with benignity all his subjects. In order to ensure the continuum of his sceptre, he avoids vices like pride, anger, avarice, drinking, harlotry and gambling. It is interesting to note that gambling does not figure in the list of vices mentioned in the Jewish work. Unlike the Jewish Wisdom writer, Tiruvalluvar lays a special stress on the evil that befalls a gambler, who at the end, is bereft of his good manners, wealth and other virtues. While Proverbs stresses the basic need of justice for
the king, Tiruvalluvar finds it necessary to warn the king against all kinds of nepotism. This perhaps was occasioned by the fact that Solomon as a ruler was held in such a high esteem and enjoyed such a power that none in the administrative structure could hope to have his ears easily, whereas Tiruvalluvar found that the citizens in Tamil Nadu at his time seemed to have an easy access to the principal seat of power. Both the authors advise the rulers to be extremely wary of wicked counsellors in court. Significantly, though Solomon stops with advocating the cause of justice on the part of the king, Tiruvalluvar is so passionately committed to the cause of social justice that he says the ruler will turn into a murderer if he fails to uphold social justice, tempered with mercy directed towards the weak and the poor. Further, Solomon observes: "When the wicked rule, the people groan." (P 29:2). But Tiruvalluvar dwells at length on the misfortunes that befall a land whose ruler is not fair or just, by warning that there will be absolute chaos in the universe during the reign of such a ruler.

It is significant that the Wisdom writer accords Divine Right to the king, though he does not grant him infallibility. Tiruvalluvar, on the other hand, discerns certain attributes in any good ruler who reigns
upholding justice at all times, keeping the sacred yet
unwritten dictates of Dharmā close to his heart. It is
pertinent in this context to note that in the tradition
of the Tamils, Dharmā is held in a much greater esteem
than simple legal justice, as the former is invariably
associated with profound underlying virtues such as
compassion, charity and 'agape'.

Tiruvalluvar sees in the king a model citizen of
the land, who is sufficiently critical of himself in
action at every stage:

Faultless the king who first his own fault
cures, and then

Permits himself to scan faults of other men

(T 436).

The king here is looked upon with a veneration akin to
that shown to God because both play the roles
essentially of protectors.

It is remarkable that both the writers compare the
king's benignity to clouds that bring rain upon the
land, anticipating nothing in return. The counsellors
recommended by both the writers are men who are
righteous, just, merciful, loyal, wise, diplomatic,
persuasive and utterly free from self-interest, deceit
and fear.
However, Tiruvalluvar's definition of a good counsellor includes minute details such as the need for circumspection, winsome rhetoric that is irresistible to the ears of even their adversaries, intrepid disposition, punctuality, ceaseless industry, high degree of integrity, purity of purpose in statecraft, equanimity of temper, a sound sense of anticipation and an extraordinary foresight. Strangely enough, Tiruvalluvar endorses the Machiavellian trait of dissembling before an enemy, with a view to dealing a fatal blow to him, at the most opportune moment.

It is interesting to note that both the Wisdom works caution the counsellors from getting too near the presence of the king. While Solomon counsels a prospective counsellor to avoid any trace of conceit before the eyes of the king, the Tamil sage, using a graphic image, warns a man in a similar situation to treat the royal presence as 'fire', avoid whispering and interchange of smiles with fellow courtiers, and restrain himself from showing any anxiety to learn of royal secrets. Further, the writer of Proverbs advises the counsellor simply to fear the king, while the Tamil sage specifically instructs the courtiers, not to despise any ruler on account of his youth or immaturity.
Thus, there is, by and large, plenty of common ground covered in respect of the conduct of kings, counsellors and courtiers in both the Wisdom works, despite the vast differences in their backgrounds. The insights, disseminated through these two great authors with regard to administration and diplomacy, bear an eloquent witness to their extraordinary political acumen as individuals as well as the high degree of sophistication attained in Statecraft, in both the ancient cultures.