PREFACE

The book of Proverbs in the Bible and Tiruvalluvar's Tirukkural in Tamil are classic works of perennial charm, primarily dealing with the ethos governing two remarkable societies, one pertaining to the ancient Near East and the other to the Orient respectively. The works abound in common themes and motifs like ethics governing materialistic pursuits, man-woman relationship and the individual in the context of the society as well as their pronounced political, theological and philosophical preoccupations. Above all, both the works are basically humanistic and advocate the supreme need for 'agape', the divine love. Using the general format of comparative methodology, this thesis analyses the range and quality of the ethical code laid down by one society, in the light of the code set down by the other.

Both King Solomon and Tiruvalluvar are acknowledged legislators of tremendous imaginative and philosophic power. Their works thus emerge as veritable models of subtle craftsmanship, displaying a high degree of sophistication in their intellectual content and diction, thus challenging the modern reader to delve deep into the mystery and magic that inform their 'gestalts'. The range of their concern is enormous,
bordering on the global. Their concern is universal as they both effortlessly transcend the limits imposed by their respective societies and endeavour to enhance the over-all order of the entire universe.

While many believe that King Solomon is an agent of the Divine Author of the Holy Writ, it is interesting to note that Tiruvalluvar too has been hailed by numerous critics as an incomparable poet, whose vision partakes of the 'divine' order of the universe. King Solomon, apart from being an inspired author of a part of the Holy Scriptures, is also reputed to be the wisest monarch of the Jews. Tirukkural has been popularly accorded the status of a Common Universal Scripture (Ulakapotumarai).

It is significant that both the writers look to the character of the human individual as their common measure and parameter, to formulate their ethical codes to improve the order of the world as a whole.

There are striking similarities in the spiritual, moral, political and literary values of the works compared. Their authors are single-minded in their passionate commitment to prescribe the ethical codes that would mould the right kind of citizens in their respective societies. They both show a profound concern for a life of integrity and moral vigour in all avenues
of living, and hence, they are comparable in respect of their 'thema', 'rohstoff' and certain other self-conscious techniques they have employed. This thesis aims at comparing both the works in the context of their different backgrounds and analysing the common 'motifs' employed in respect of the familial, social and political spheres which affect the behaviour of the human individual.

The opening chapter, Age and Background, presents an analysis of the times of the writers and the circumstances in which the works were conceived and written. Proverbs belongs to the category of "Wisdom Literature", ascribed mainly to King Solomon of the 8th century B.C., consisting of eight sections including contributions from several authors, belonging to different periods which show signs of the influences of the Egyptian Amen-em-ope, the Mesopotamian Ahikar and other Wisdom Books of Babylonia, Syria and Edom. Tirukkural, being the foremost ethical literary work of Tamil Nadu, can be viewed on par with the Hebrew Wisdom Literature and it consists of 1330 couplets, with ten such couplets constituting each chapter.

There is still some mystery surrounding the exact Age of Tiruvalluvar. After a close scrutiny of the internal evidence available, eminent scholars like
M. Srinivasa Iyengar, V. V. S. Aiyar, P. S. Subramania Bharati and T. P. Meenakshi Sundaram have ventured to confirm the single authorship in respect of Tirukkural, and place it at a period not later than the closing years of the Sangam Age, i.e. the 3rd century A.D. While G. U. Pope lays claim for a possible Christian influence on the author of Tirukkural, Prof. Vaiyapuri Pillai considers him an eminent Jain and Seethalaisathanar, author of Manimekalai, an erudite Buddhist. On the other hand, several Saivites consider him an authority of Saiva Siddhānta. Tirukkural itself makes an earnest endeavour to bridge the yawning gulf among all the creeds discussed above, and thus touches the highest watermark of eclecticism in the history of Tamil culture.

The second chapter, Proverbs and Tirukkural as Wisdom Literature, attempts to analyse the Wisdom tradition in both the works and shows how elements of didacticism, lofty ideals and pragmatic vision related to man in society, are all embodied in the couplet form which can be most easily committed to memory. It also highlights the fact that in these ancient works, wisdom which is intimately connected with a theistic outlook contributes significantly to the inner harmony and equanimity of an individual, while promoting social order simultaneously.
However, whereas the Hebrew ontology of the Divine tends to be definitive and the author of Proverbs makes clear-cut anthropomorphic responses to such a God in the form of virtues and vices in the ethical sphere, Tiruvalluvar conceptualizes God simply as the Primal Being who is utterly transcendent of any emotive quality, though unequivocally in tune with the concept of Dharmā or moral laws which can be summed up in terms of purity of mind, thought and conduct. Both the writers consider God as the Prime Source of Wisdom, wielding an omnipotent sway over Man and the universe. The Wisdom writer's pronouncement on the principle of predestination and 'free will' in the context of human life is something yet to be judged, in stark contrast to Tiruvalluvar's well-known concept of 'fate' and Karmā.

The third chapter, Ethos of Familial Bonds, dwells on the origin and significance of the terminology of ethics as a genre and its relevance to Proverbs and Tirukkural, when viewed against their respective intellectual climates and cultural backgrounds. Especially, their common emphasis on pragmatic ethos which governs all familial bonds, renders them eminently comparable. The ideal citizen in both the works is a householder, utterly free from vices of intemperance and immorality, thoroughly devoted to his wife, children and interests of the family. The works under discussion
favour love and integrity in domestic life and earnestly advocate the cause of monogamy. In both the works, the wife is assigned a pivotal role in ensuring the prosperity of the household. Adultery is summarily castigated as a heinous crime, worse than harlotry. In such nefarious modes of relationship, the woman is depicted as an active seductress and man as a gullible victim. Children are regarded as priceless possessions. Filial love is hailed as a mark of wisdom and parental responsibility as a fulcrum in moulding upright citizens in both the works. The Hebrew parents extracted the strictest compliance to moral codes from their sons, and dishonouring parents was considered an abhorrent crime, among the Jews. Though Tiruvalluvar does not dwell elaborately on the nurture of children, he highlights the imperative need to bring up wise children, who, in turn, would bring honour to their parents.

The fourth chapter entitled Ethics for Social Harmony compares the social life in Palestine and ancient Tamil Nadu during the respective periods of the authors. Pronouncements in respect of man’s relationship with his friends, neighbours and the poor are analysed here. The works exalt virtues such as kindness, generosity, benevolence, compassion, charity, truthfulness, justice, equity, impartiality, loyalty,
humility and integrity as they tend to render any individual possessing these qualities, a lovable citizen, while decrying negative traits like slandering, scandal-mongering, tale-bearing, violence, anger, jealousy, covetousness and stealth. On the other hand, while the Jewish wisdom writer pronounces his commandments in an authoritative tone, Tiruvalluvar makes his observations on ethics employing a persuasive, essentially psychological approach. The works promise rich blessings for men of charitable dispositions and condemn those who devise evil against their neighbours. They highlight the value of steadfast and loyal friends while condemning in one voice the 'fair-weather' friends. The triad virtues in friendship, namely, correcting a person from his wrong course, offering him timely counsel and respecting his feelings are stressed by both the authors. Tiruvalluvar in particular, is keen on dwelling on each and every aspect of such intimate relationships.

The fifth chapter entitled Codes of Courtly Conduct deals with the origin of kingship, its relevance in the modern era and the role of ministers in government. Virtues such as mercy, benevolence, truth, justice and love for the poor are to be cultivated by the ruler, in order to ensure political stability and social prosperity in his land. The qualities to be
eschewed are sexual immorality, incontinence, drinking and injustice. The wicked should find no place in the presence of the ruler. While Proverbs upholds the divine right of kings in the most uncompromising terms, Tiruvalluvar considers the king only as the custodian of Dharmā. Delay, oblivion, sloth, sleep and gambling are to be eschewed by every wise ruler. As regards the values and virtues of the counsellor, both make several common observations. Ministers should offer only wise counsel even if it happens to be apparently displeasing to the king. The virtues of a counsellor are courteous behaviour, truthfulness, fidelity, diligence, gentleness, patience, forbearance and the capacity for choosing the right words at the right time, and the qualities to be eschewed are disloyalty, sluggishness, babbling and haste. Tiruvalluvar prefers patience and wisdom to rash misadventures. He also exhorts the ruler to show utmost forbearance till complete victory is secured. Further, Tiruvalluvar commends intuitive wisdom that enables a counsellor to read the unuttered thoughts of the monarch as a brilliant, desirable virtue.

The sixth chapter entitled From a Feminist Focus traces the origin and growth of the feminist movement in recent times in Israel and in India, and studies the status of women as obtained in Proverbs and Tirukkural.
It is remarkable that both the works call the virtuous woman a ‘veritable treasure’. Proverbs hails the woman who is industrious, sagacious, chaste and efficient in managing business interests as a crown to her husband, whereas the woman in Tirukkural, possessing the household virtues of frugality, thrift, industry and chastity, endows her husband with a leonine gait. Chastity, in both the works, implies obedience and a rocky strength of moral purpose. Tirukkural emphasizes the need for the woman to honour her husband, regardless of the latter's social status and accords such a woman a divine stature, meriting abundant blessings. The works enjoin chastity for man also and condemn adultery in one voice. While Proverbs stresses the role of woman in establishing one’s house, Tiruvalluvar lauds the efforts of raising a family as a manly act and raises man to the position of the natural head in the family. However, it is interesting to note that Tiruvalluvar warns man not to give his soul entirely to the lure of his wife, as only shame would result from a slavish devotion on the part of the male. The Jewish wisdom writer, on the other hand, maintains silence on this issue. Both Proverbs and Tirukkural instruct man to keep himself away from a contentious woman. Both the works accord an honoured place to mothers and regard wise children as a source of perennial joy to their parents. While
Proverbs comes down hard on disobedient children, Tiruvalluvar does not touch upon this aspect.

The seventh chapter, Salient Literary Features, deals with the comparative merits of the two writers as creative artists, in the light of the basic tenets of style, such as diction, structure, figures of speech, imagery, etc.

The closing chapter, Summing Up, briefly summarises and consolidates all the conclusions drawn in the course of the research project. Both Proverbs and Tirukkural are treated throughout as valuable works of literary art. On the whole, an eclectic approach has been adopted and M.L.A Style Sheet IV Edition has been followed in respect of methodology.