CHAPTER TWO
PROVERBS AND TIRUKKURAL AS WISDOM LITERATURE

The Book of Proverbs consists of nearly 3000 Proverbs, most of them by king Solomon; it also has an appendix of sayings of other wise men such as Agur and Lemuel. *Tirukkural* is a monumental work written in Tamil by Tiruvalluvar. It consists of 1330 terse, couplets. Dom Bernard Orchard makes an observation on the former work:

*Proverbs in The Bible* is a human work written by men according to the current mode of literary expression and intended to be understood according to the rules of contemporary human language (*A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* 9).

The Book of Proverbs belongs to the Wisdom Literature of Israel. Certain other texts in *The Bible* too may come under the same label in respect of their genre:

To this literary genre also belong *Job, Ecclesiastes, some of the Psalms in the Old Testament, Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon in the Apocrypha* which form a great
body of Wisdom Literature which existed throughout the Near East in the ancient times (The Interpreter's Bible Vol.IV 767).

Māshāl, the Hebrew title of Proverbs, according to Charles T. Fritsch, refers to an "ethical aphorism which is the product of the wiseman's consummate skill" (772). Proverbs consists of finely polished and succinctly worded ethical proverbs which are products of everyday language, fabricated on the basis of common human experience.

As regards Tirukkural, it is perhaps the most distinguished work in Tamil consisting of a number of purely didactic observations. N. Subramanian and R. Rajalakshmi make an insightful call for a comparison of the proverbs in Hebrew, Chinese and Tamil, underlining its generic significance:

Tirukkural is in form and content proverbial and had better be treated on par with the Chinese and Hebrew Proverbial literature of the ancient times. (The Concordance of Tirukkural 24).

The aim of this Chapter is to make an analogical study of the genre to which Proverbs and Tirukkural belong, namely, the Wisdom tradition in ancient
literature which has won for these works universal approbation and admiration.

The Hebrew "hokmah" translated as "wisdom" meant initially, "the skill and competence of a craftsman such as that possessed by those who made Aaron's vestments, Exodus 23:3, or the Mosaic tabernacle Exodus 3:5." (The Jerome's Biblical Commentary, 492).

R.N. Whybray remarks how "The Hebrew term 'hokmah' translated as 'wisdom', is represented in Ecclesiasticus and the Wisdom of Solomon as something more than an impersonal divine attribute, an attribute of God in His divine work of creation, and maintenance of the world to guide and instruct them and to confer God's gift on them" (Wisdom of Proverbs, 17).

In Proverbs, the idea of wisdom both as a human attribute and a divine gift, occurs frequently and is represented in the form of a person in a few passages of the opening nine chapters of the book. In a few other passages, for example Job 28, "wisdom" is deliberately objectified as an infinitely precious commodity:

The price of wisdom is above rubies,
The topaz of Ethiopia cannot equal it,
Nor can it be valued in pure gold

(Job 28: 18, 19).
There are certain verses in Proverbs, in which wisdom is represented also as a woman who stands in public places and declares that those who receive her instruction will find every kind of happiness and prosperity in life:

She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors .... Riches and honour are with me; yea, durable riches and righteousness (P8:3,18).

It is such a wisdom which confers on the rulers of nations, their authority and sagacity to rule over men, thereby almost enabling them to approximate the virtue of the Divine, for, after all, only God can lay claim to omnipotence and omniscience. Wisdom also makes an ontological claim that she is the first of God’s creation, created even before the beginning of the world and a witness of all the acts of divine creation. In this context, Edgar B. Jones in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes observes,

Wisdom included a knowledge of the mysteries of God as well as an understanding of the practical conduct that would bring a man prosperity and happiness (18).

The term 'wisdom' lends itself to various interpretations. Crawford H. Toy observes:
Wisdom refers to the general expression for knowledge of all good things; it is practical sagacity, Judges 5:29; II Samuel 18:8; the skill of the artisan, Exodus 31:8; wide acquaintance with facts, I Kings 4:29-34; learning, Jeremiah 8:9; skill in expounding secret things, Ezekiel 28:3; statesmanship, Jeremiah 18:18 and finally knowledge of the right living in the highest sense. The last virtue refers to the moral and religious intelligence (ICC 5).

Viewed from such a perspective, the religious element becomes practically identical with the moral.

The average Israelite used his reasoning power to understand the world around him. It was used at first in relation to certain aspects of life, concerning which, his religious teaching gave him no information or guidance. Knowledge thus acquired, based on actual life experience and observation, gave rise to the use of proverbial sayings including riddles and fables, their sole purpose being to establish rules for success in day-to-day life.

The proverbial sayings are mainly instructions with regard to life and conduct - transmitted from teacher to student, often in the form of a paternal
counselling. Their ultimate purpose was, according to Roland E. Murphy, "to train a worthy ruler and courtier, and the life setting is, clearly the royal court" (492).

According to Chambers' Twentieth Century Dictionary, wisdom means

the ability to make right use of knowledge, saying or teaching (archaic); learning, skilfulness, speculation, spiritual perception.

Further, Wisdom Literature has also been defined by Roland E. Murphy as

The writings of the ancient Middle East which consist of philosophical reflections of life or maxims and precepts about the right conduct of one's life (The Jerome's Biblical Commentary, 492).

Israel was comparatively a very young nation among the many peoples who were responsible for producing the various cultures of the ancient Near East. For a long time, the Hebrews were strangers in their new land but as it became their home, over a period of centuries they formulated their own laws, some of which had originally come from the valley of Mesopotamia. Thus wisdom movement was essentially international in character.
Wisdom Literature, whether in Egypt, Babylon, or Israel, primarily divides itself into two kinds, prudential admonitions commonly in proverbial form that they may serve the young as guidelines for a happy and successful life on the one hand, and reflective essays on the meaning and significance of life, often presenting a pessimistic view, on the other.

J. Coert Rylaarsdam in *Revelation in Jewish Wisdom Literature* says, "Israel’s Wisdom Literature is remarkably similar to that of Egypt and Babylon though produced much later" (6). The oldest collections of Hebrew wisdom are found in the Book of Proverbs, written by King Solomon whose wisdom "surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt" (I Kings 4:30).

Proverbs was also considered as utterances of men of wisdom. Sages were to be found not only in Egypt but also in Edom (*Jeremiah* 49:7), in Phoenicia (*Ezekiel* 28:2,6), in Babylon (*Jeremiah* 50:35) and in Canaan (*Judges* 5:29). Doubtless it was in court circles, especially under Solomon who had such close ties with Egypt and Phoenicia, that Israel’s wisdom movement began to flourish in a phenomenal fashion. Also politically, through his own marriage with a daughter of the Pharaoh,
Solomon was strongly oriented towards Egypt which possessed a long line of wisdom tradition.

In the words of Fuller C. Reginald, "The most striking point of contact between the extra-Biblical wisdom literature and Proverbs is to be found in a comparison of the Egyptian Instruction of Amen-em-ope inaccurately dated (1000-600 B.C.) with Proverbs 22: 1-24:22. Parallels have been noted with Arcadian and even Sumerian texts (A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture 501).

Similarities in thought and expression have been shown to exist between the Wisdom of Ahikar, an Aramaic collection of proverbs of Mesopotamian origin and the Book of Proverbs. But it is interesting to note that the wisdom literature was able to adopt itself to a more conscious selection of elements, peculiar to the culture of the Israelites. According to C.H. Toy,

The Biblical Proverbs are expressions of the wisdom of God. They teach moral values, principles of practical living, warn against destructiveness of sin and encourage spiritual diligence (30).

Instruction is considered "the companion of wisdom" and the term "instruction" implies discipline of mind and heart that enables a man to keep himself under control.
Wisdom Literature may rightly claim for its goals, lofty ideals and a high moral purpose. Its primary goal is didacticism. In Proverbs, pragmatic instruction is given to any individual addressed in the work as 'My son' who is expected to heed the call of Wisdom. It is pertinent to observe here that the individualistic democratic approach is the peculiar characteristic of Israel's wisdom literature. In dealing with the challenges of everyday routine, it does not rely on any religion, creed or divine revelation, but bases all its knowledge on the cumulative human experience over the ages. There is very little in the world of human affairs that does not come under its critical scrutiny. It also draws many illustrations of practical sagacity from the world of Nature. The didactic works do not argue nor do they seek to provoke thought or resolve doubts. Their teaching is usually positive and authoritative. The human problem is seen as whole, and, in every situation, there is an option for the right and the wrong holding the potentials of profit or pain. As R.N. Whybray observes,

As in Egypt, so in Israel, the wisdom books were at first used in the training of young men to become scribes .... It is generally recognized that the relatively highly organized Israelite state of monarchical times
presupposes a more thorough system of education for its political leaders and administrative officers that could have been provided by the personal instruction of children by parents (Wisdom in Proverbs 19).

Then there is the historic evidence that wise men were often called upon by the king and the court for counsel. Such wise men were mainly concerned with practical and philosophical matters. Since proverbs were written mainly for the purpose of instruction, often they are presented in an imperative form.

The Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament is clearly distinguished both in form and content from the other main kinds of Old Testament literature such as history, law, prophecy and psalms. Most of the other kinds of writing are firmly rooted in the specific religious tradition of Israel and are all exclusively concerned with its life and institutions. For instance, Proverbs says nothing about Israel, its history, political vicissitudes, peculiar status as the chosen people of God, cult, laws, priesthood or prophet. No stress is laid in the Proverbs on the ritualistic side of life like sacrifices and vows; the devotional aspects such as prayers, praise and reading the sacred books; or dogmas like monotheism, sin and salvation. On the
other hand, it stresses wise conduct or action which springs from insight and sagacity. At the centre of interest of the work remains the lonely human individual with his needs and ambitions, facing challenges in his inner world and those from the world outside.

*Tirukkural*, which has all along exercised an abiding authority on all major ethical subjects of the Tamil society over the past centuries, also belongs, in a general sense, to the instruction genre or wisdom literature. The literary form of *Tirukkural* is that of didactic or gnomic poetry. It consists, in the main, words of wisdom or instructions for the right conduct of the individual either as a householder, life companion, ascetic or ruler. In a short distich, as Wilber Owen Sypherd has put it, "It conveys moral truth in a concise and pointed form of instruction common in the early history of the East" *(The Literature of the English Bible 180)*.

Didacticism is a vital component of Tamil Literature as the ancient Tamils had an abiding faith in the efficacy of virtues. They believed that an honest and disciplined soul is entitled to find delight and prosperity, not only in this life but in the life hereafter. Hence, *Aram* or virtue in *Tirukkural* has been visualized as a great power, embodying the ability to
reward the good and punish the wicked. For instance, a Kural states:

As sun's fierce ray dries up the boneless things,
So loveless beings [sic] virtue's power to nothing brings" (T.77)

It is such Kural's which make the German scholar Klaws observe, "The ancient Orientals were able to express the profound questions about human existence in Poetry" (The Growth of the Biblical Tradition 120). Certain elements of didactic or gnomic import in Tirukkkural present close resemblances to Proverbs.

In Tamil Poetics, Tolkappiar's work on Grammar and Linguistics, one might safely presume, had been possible as early as 4th or 3rd century B.C, simply because several generations of scholars and writers should have existed, before such an insightful and analytical classification of literary works could come into being.

In 'Sangam' literature (4th or 3rd century B.C to I or 2nd century A.D.), several sophisticated views on Aram or Virtue or Ethics or Morality were expressed by many scholars, sages and poets. According to T.P.Meenakshi Sundaram, "Tiruvalluvar is supposed to have lived in the closing decades of the Sangam, namely, the third century A.D" (Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar 3). He is believed
to have lived in between the two great epochs in the history of the Tamils - the golden past of the Sangam Age prior to the 2nd century A.D. and the glorious future of the Pallava and Chola expansions. In between these great sagas, twilight seems to have descended on the life of the Tamils. Tiruvalluvar saw his own literary mission as redressing the lost balance, even as he felt the onus of guiding the citizens in the path of virtue and bringing about a spiritual renaissance, resting squarely on his shoulders in his capacity as the leading Tamil writer of the Age. Not surprisingly, the momentum his great work gave to the evolution of the Tamil ethos continued for nearly a thousand years, until the last days of the medieval Chola power (i.e. 13th century A.D.). Tiruvalluvar's teachings were extremely popular at a time when nothing significant had taken place in Tamil history, comparable to the great Sangam Age. Thus Tirukkural came, in fact, as a response to the sociological, cultural and spiritual needs of the age. No wonder, the age saw the sudden blossoming of several works of ethical literature, including Tirukkural, all of which came to be called Patineṇ Kīl Kaṇaku, a collection of eighteen works on the ethics, supposed to govern the Tamils. Tirukkural is considered to be the best among them. In fact, it is the highest watermark
of the entire literary history and culture of the Tamils of all ages.

Tiruvalluvar is popularly believed to have created his *magnum opus* either in the decades following the Sangam Age, that is, 2nd century A.D., the Dark Age in Tamil literature, or immediately after. As some scholars have surmised, his teachings did go a long way in fulfilling the Tamil people's own inner needs and aspirations, and restoring the joy of living for the Tamils during the phase of the Pallava ascendancy. Tiruvalluvar is also presumed to have lived prior to the Kalabhra invasions who were not Tamil Kings, though they were virtually in command of the entire Tamil country between A.D. 250 and A.D. 600, a fact which impels B. Natarajan to comment: "Probably Tiruvalluvar intended his work as a note of warning and a general appeal to his countrymen to stir betimes and be up and doing something." (104).

The Tamil scholars of the time had divided their life into 'aham' ('inner' or 'private') and 'puram' ('outer' or 'public'). Stressing the significance of the above classification, many ethical works have been written, of which *Tirukkural* certainly towers as a masterpiece, which has few equals or parallels in history because every verse it presents is a short,
carefully chiselled out epigram, in the form of a neat couplet.

With regard to the couplet form adopted by Tiruvalluvar, K.D.Tirunavukkarasu comments, "Probably the Tamil sage adopted it as being the best representative in Tamil Sloka" (Tirukkural Niti Ilakiam, 1). The terse and pregnant brevity of the couplet lends a peculiar rhetorical tone and a thematic focus to each of the kurals.

The primary goal of any wisdom literature, obviously, is didacticism. The thematic structure of such a literature should be founded on the bedrock of worthy values and noble ideals. Beyond any shade of doubt, Tirukkural fulfils such a role in this regard, for it inspires every one who comes under its sway, to aspire for the highest of goals possible for any individual, by laying down highly ambitious ethical standards. Further, there is clarity and simplicity in respect of its exposition, in whatever aspect of life Tiruvalluvar dwells on, as he is quite earnest that people share his insights and concerns in their day-to-day life, which are based on his own observation, experience and knowledge.

Without making much ado about the sentiments and surface feelings of the human mind, Tiruvalluvar
arranges his pronouncements on ethics, mostly in terms of a cause-and-effect order. He accords a high priority to ideas as well as the medium through which they have to flow, rather than to refinement of feeling and imaginative embellishments. However, this historic work can also boast of distinct chapters which pay special attention to martial temper and heroic feelings, like Padaicherukku (military spirit); Nalkuravu (poverty) and inhibited sensuality in Kumatupal (Romantic Phase).

Tiruvalluvar is concerned with ethics which hold a beaconlight to the young as well as to the old. He underlines the needs of ethics for the individual, primarily in terms of personal virtues and ethics in the context of society and polity. Thus, genre-wise, Tirukkural does belong to wisdom literature as it embodies the essential principles and duties of an individual in the context of a specific society, executed in the form of pithy, rhythmic couplets which can be easily committed to memory. The telling mode of its expression and mnemonic idiom vouch for the fact that the entire work has flowed from the quill of one and the same person, by the sheer strength of their consistent intellectual virtuosity. Despite the severe handicap imposed by the structure of the couplet, a relatively cryptic medium, consisting of words and images of unusual opacity, Tiruvalluvar's ideas have
ultimately found a fluent expression and an instant rapport with several generations of readers, often charming the literary connoisseurs among them with a rare foresight and clarity of vision.

Development of the individual is 'sine qua non' of human civilization, and the factors which contribute to the development of harmony and integration within the individual, the family and community and the world at large, all stem from the acquisition of essential wisdom, which, in its turn, derives its strength and meaning from a cogent and consistent ontological relationship with the Divine manifesting itself, often, through human insight into the socio-political relations and a certain intuitive or metaphysical vision. Often, the individual's ethics depends very much upon the needs of his society and it is the community that frames a complex of values and code of conduct for every individual to imbibe within himself, a fact which explains the temporal nature of all codes of behaviour. The teachers of wisdom focus their attention, however, on a much larger context than do the average individuals, and hence the greater relevance and validity of their pronouncements in respect of theology, sociology, ethics and politics.
Judaism is as ancient as Hinduism and both the ancient Israelites of Babylon and Mesopotamia and the Indians were nomads and this probably resulted in the similarities in their general attitudes to life and customs and social practices. For instance, Suguna Deva Sundaram, in her book on Anthropology, highlights the outdoor nature of existence of the ancient communities where the males had a more prominent role to play, by virtue of their superior physical strength:

The perception of God mainly as male, the allocation of priestly functions to man, the male domination in religious and secular life, the practice of sacrificing birds and animals in the temple, composing hymns to adore the Heavenly Being and writing out the salient features of their pilgrimage seemed very much alike. These aspects have continued largely unchanged (Roots of Suppression of Women in India 37).

The Hebrew ontology of the divine was rigorously monotheistic and definitive, and hence from the point of view of its uncompromising tenets, any tendency towards secularization was looked upon as utterly untenable as it would be tantamount to an implicit compromise of faith in Yahweh's power. However, the lifestyle that Proverbs fashions out, depends abundantly on a healthy
respect for an omnipotent and all-sufficient God who sustains and preserves all.

Thus wisdom in Proverbs is not only uncompromisingly God-centred in its essence but also asserts God's mastery over the entire humanity. He is not simply the Lord who led the chosen people of Israel out of Egypt but the One who manifested Himself as the Universal Lord. In the words of John J. Collins, "He is not the God of Israel alone but of all humanity, and is in principle accessible to all" (36). Thus, in a significant contrast to the books of Prophets, Wisdom Books of the Bible seldom speak about the special dealings of God with Israel.

As regards Tirukkural, Tiruvalluvar also believes in the eternal Primal Deity, who is the Alpha of Creation, the very first element of the entire universe. God to him, in short, is the first essence, the basic premise or the 'centre' in the system of all ethics and moral codes:

A, as its first of letters, every speech maintains;

The 'Primal Deity' is First through all the world's domains (T 1)

This text suggests a definition of God closely akin to the theological "Word" in St. John: 1:1: "In the
beginning was the Word; the Word was with God; And the Word was God."

G.U.Pope translates "Āti Bhagavan" as the "eternal, adorable one", while Beski interprets it as "leader". K.C.Kamaliah in his preface to the Kural simply remarks: "The world has God as its head."

In this context, it will be only proper to remind ourselves of the fact that in Tolkappiar's age, people worshipped assorted deities assigned to the different tinai, that is, classification of literary works along the lines of the different kinds of land, such as desert, fertile land, jungle, etc. The Tamils believed in the multifarious manifestations of the Divine, ranging from obvious natural elements like fire to the hallowed, heroic ancestors such as Rama. The definition made in terms of tinai was surely quite prevalent till the period of Silappatikāram, according to Kamatchi Srinivasan, who goes on to point out: "However, Tiruvalluvar, as a monotheist, never alludes to such a custom." (1975, 7).

The wisdom writer simply highlights the fact that the Lord is the Creator of the Universe. In Proverbs 8: 27-31, Wisdom traces its origin or existence to a time before God created the earth, fields, plateaux and mankind. He also endowed Man with physical strength and
power of the senses: "The hearing ear and seeing eye: The Lord has made them both" (P20:12). "The rich and the poor meet together. The Lord is the maker of them all" (P22:2).

Also, God is defined in the wisdom works in terms of his omniscience: "The hearts of the children of men are before the Lord" (P15:1); "Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own ways?" (P20:24). Thus God is described as the Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipresent Being.

Tiruvalluvar also emphasizes God's unlimited superiority and power over man and the universe almost in similar terms. He is variously described as "the Disposer of all things" (T 377) and "Assigner of human destiny" as implied in "He that shaped the world" (T 1062).

It is significant that Tiruvalluvar does not attribute any anthropomorphic emotive qualities or disposition to the divine Creator in Tirukkural. To him, the Creator is an inexorable Being whose vicissitudes and states of mind, if He has any, are utterly beyond the comprehension of man. On the other hand, the Wisdom writer does refer to various
anthropomorphic reflections or responses to the Divine Being such as His possible likes and dislikes, pleasure and displeasure.

To the wisdom writer, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (P9:10), and "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (P1:7). As pointed out in the Family Devotional Study Bible, these verses suggest "a good relationship with God, based on reverence and respect for Him and His commands" (547). To Goodman, it is "Obedience to God; trying to carry out His will in everything one does" (85). It even implies "hatred of evil" (P8:13). Man’s express dependence on someone greater than himself is the very foundation of wisdom, which consists in the shrewd and sound handling of one’s affairs in complete submission to His will. That such an absolute trust is demanded of man in the Wisdom Books can be seen from the following verses:

Trust in the Lord with all thy heart and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths (P3:5,6).

Further, God is also defined as the Prime Source of wisdom: "The Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding." (P2:6).
Tiruvalluvar calls God simply 'Vālarivan', interpreted by Parimelazhagar as a "Person of pure wisdom and pure intelligence" (T.2). G.U. Pope alludes to Him as "The Purely Wise One":

No fruit have men of all their studied lore
Save they the' Purely Wise One's feet adore.

(T 2).

The Wisdom writer goes on to enumerate the following blessings as rewards for the man who has such a reverential "fear" of God. It "prolongs his days" (P10:27): "provides confidence to his children" and offers him "a place of refuge", "which enables him to depart from the snares of Death" (P14:25,26). Moreover, "he shall abide satisfied; he shall not be visited with evil" (P19:23). It will also give him "riches, honour and life." (P22:4).

In striking contrast to the repeated emphasis of "fear" for the Lord in the Jewish Wisdom Book, Tirukkural observes a profound silence. Instead, the Tamil wisdom work suggests a certain interpersonal intimacy and mutual accountability on the part of the individual devotee and the Creator, whose 'feet, who o'er the full-blown flower hath past', who gain. In bliss long time shall dwell above this earthly plain"
(T.3). The one who has triumphed over his senses and found the abode in Him shall prosper:

Long live they blest, who have stood in path from falsehood freed;

His, "who quenched lusts that from the sense-gates five proceed" (T.6).

Such an individual who has merged himself with God will be rid of all fear and

"His foot" to which none can compare', men gain,

"'Tis hard for mind to find relief from anxious pain" (T 7).

These Kurals make an ontological attempt to define the superiority of the Divine Essence over man, highlighting the former's purity, desirelessness, temperance and power.

With regard to Tiruvalluvar's concept of God, T.P. Meenakshi Sundaram is of the following view: "The emphasis on all these suggestive descriptions is on God being the very basis of the world, on His perfect qualities, on His unsullied glory, on His kindness and Dharma, or the path of goodness, wherein selfishness has no place. His conception of God is related to the conception of Dharma in its wider aspect" (85). The
final goal of all beings is freedom from pain, illusion and Karma. It is, in short, an eternal life weaned away from the endless, successive births and it is such a reward that Tiruvalluvar's Divine One offers to his true devotees. This, in fact, is not far removed from the vision presented by the Wisdom writer who also stresses God's omniscience and omnipotence: "The lot is cast into the lap but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord" (P16:33). "The horse is prepared against the day of battle but safety is of the Lord" (P21:3).

However, an essential difference between the author of the Proverbs and Tiruvalluvar is that while the former "stresses the seminal essence of the Divine in the process of creation of everything that is good", Tiruvalluvar makes a much taller claim for man's innate potential:

He who toils hard can even subdue fate; Though fate divine should make your labour vain Effort its labour's sure reward will gain

(T619)

God, to the author of Proverbs, is, above all, a lover of justice and fairplay, and hence, is constantly engaged in an act of monitoring: "The eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the good and the bad" (P15:3). This verse has been interpreted in the
following manner with a pronounced stress on divine judgement by Charles T. Fritsch: "God is in His watch tower keeping watch over the good and the bad and this is really a warning that God will punish the wicked and of course reward the righteous." (P868). In this context, the Wisdom writer obviously stresses predestination: "A righteous man's heart has many plans but the Lord directs his steps." (P16:9).

It is interesting to observe here that, in terms of pure philosophical formulation of the conflict between predestination and free will on the part of the human individual, both the writers pit the same metaphysical and dialectical entities against each other.

Further, it is all the more intriguing to find that both the writers are equally equivocal and paradoxical, as far as their final pronouncements on the subject of the Divine Being are concerned. Perhaps it is impossible for any human intellect to probe into the source and nature of the power of predestination on the one hand, and the conditions defining the exercise of the principle of free will on the other, beyond a point, in view of the fact that the human span of life and the capacity for vision are limited. Nevertheless, powerful intellectuals and seers like these wisdom writers strain their utmost intellectual and intuitive energy in order
to find the relative strength of two modes concerning dispensation of human affairs on earth, namely, predestination and free will and in the process of applying one or the other mode to the question of life's ultimate meaning, reach, at length, their limits, and are compelled to resort to equivocation or an inevitable paradox, as their findings in the final analysis are far too complex to warrant any naive or simple linguistic formulations.

The Hebrew Wisdom writer is of the view that man is created with a purpose and all human affairs are controlled by God who is very much at the 'centre':

The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole decision of it is from Yahweh (P16:33).

The method of determining the divine will through the casting of lots was probably universal, not particularly confined to Judaism or Hinduism in the ancient world. In the Old Testament times, decisions on important public and private affairs were taken, ostensibly, with divine approbation. Further, the procedure adopted was mostly casting of lots.

For instance, in the place of Judas Iscariot, the eleven disciples of Jesus proposed two names - Joseph called Barsabas and Matthias, and prayed to God. Then
they cast lots and the lot fell on Matthias, and thus he was numbered with the eleven apostles." (Acts 1:26).

The term 'lot' was treated almost as synonymous with one's part or portion. Since human life is totally controlled by God, man is expected to acknowledge, obey and trust God and allow Him to control all his decisions. Even kings cannot exempt themselves from such a divine ordering of things, for "No human wisdom can avail against Yahweh" (P21:30).

Victory or defeat in battle is decided by God, in spite of human arrangements and expectations or fears: Moreover, "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will " (RSVP 21:1).

In these words of the author of Proverbs, the sovereignty of God expresses its authority through the disposal of the ways of human individuals, as God not only determines the events of a man's devices but every step in his progress. In fact, this divine purpose works through every human activity and God is infinitely stronger than man. For instance, it is the sovereign pleasure of God that decides whether a person should be prosperous or poor. However, curiously enough, according to the Wisdom writer, the providence of God does not interfere with the free will of rational man.
Hence, he exhorts the reader "to commit our works unto the Lord and our thoughts shall be established" (P3:3). According to George Lawson, "divine wisdom of God does not interfere with the free will of a rational creature" (234). True faith, in the opinion of some critics, means implicit, unquestioning submission to God's omnipotence. As Dake puts it, "True religion consists of full acknowledgement of God in all human affairs" (642).

Tirukkural, on the other hand, does not dwell elaborately on the dialectical issue over God's predeterminism or on the free will of man. To Tiruvalluvar, man, on the whole, is either reaping the benefits of good deeds he has done in his previous birth, or paying the penalty for the errors of his past. In short, Tirukkural presents human life on earth itself as almost like a phase of judgement calling forth retribution or reward. This is in sharp contrast to the teleological vision of the Proverbs which presents human life as something whose merit is yet to be judged.

Proverbs presupposes a teleological order in human life, underlining the necessity for the individual's self-discipline, for the sake of the establishment and the preservation of the social order. It presents the universe as created with a predetermined purpose. Though God has implanted in all men, a knowledge of the
right and the wrong, in most, such a knowledge is defunct. Hence the emphasis in the work is on the need for a God-centred life: "To fear the Lord is to hate evil" (P8:13). There are also further exhortations for righteous living which entails not only earthly returns but divine blessings, as can be seen in the following verses: The rewards for doing good are God's gift of "sound wisdom" (P1:7); "stability" (P10:25); "deliverance from trouble and death" (P11:4, 11:8 and 11:21) and, above all, "eternal life" (P10:16, P11:28 and P14:32).

God is capable not only of supplying all the temporal needs of the righteous, but punishing the wicked by undermining their wealth and strength: "He will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish, but he casteth away the substance of the wicked (P10:3). Thus, the entire creation is founded on the conviction of a superhuman, divine justice.

Proverbs also anticipates a scheme of things in which each individual plays a crucial role. It is God who provides security and stability to the righteous by ensuring a long and blessed life for them on the earth: "The righteous shall flourish as a branch and he shall be recompensed in the earth" (P11:28 & P11:31); "The root of the righteous shall not be moved" (P12:3), and
"the house of the righteous shall stand" (P12:7). "As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more; but the righteous is an everlasting foundation" (P10:25). Those who obey God are entitled to divine protection: "A good man is delivered from death and trouble" (P11:3) & (P11:8). However, life on earth is not a bed of roses for the righteous all the way either. At times, they too may have to undergo pain and suffering, though overall divine protection is assured to them. That the righteous do undergo spells of suffering can be deduced from verses such as the following:

Behold the righteous will be punished on earth.

How much more the wicked and sinner? (P11:31),

Prof. Toy interprets the above verse as "he who sins even a little will be punished, and he who sins much will receive greater punishment." (213).

Tiruvalluvar also explains how righteous life is to be based on the principle of Aram or righteousness through a consistent practice of virtues which makes life more meaningful. The attainment of God-realization is possible only through self-realization on the part of a pure and disciplined soul. It is through human realization of values of Goodness, Truth and Justice that divinity is affirmed. Prof. Toy observes, "Human
relationships are based on moral laws of Truth and Goodness sustained by love and justice. It is those cardinal virtues which contribute to the cultural life of the people." (160).

The term "wicked" is employed in Proverbs as a general term for those who discard and disobey the divine law designed in wisdom. The man of evil devices may prosper for a time but he shall not be established by wickedness: "The wicked shall be cut off from the earth and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it" (P2:22); "The candle of the wicked shall be put out" (P24:20).

Moreover, Proverbs warns of death for the unjust: "Treasures of wickedness profit nothing but righteousness delivereth from death" (P10:2). Prof. Toy translates the above verse in the following manner: "Violence and injustice are sure to bring divine or human vengeance on man's head. Justice, on the other hand, by avoiding such vengeance secures to its possessor, a long and peaceful life, exemption from premature death, which is regarded in Old Testament as a direct divine judgement"(199). In short, God metes out due reward to everyone both in the land of the living and that of the dead, in accordance with the deeds
performed by the individuals during their sojourn on earth.

In contrast, unlike *Proverbs*, *Tirukkural* talks of rewards and punishments purely in a frame of temporal consequences, implying successive births in tune with the Hindu thought. According to Tiruvalluvar, a man is either reaping the benefits of his good deeds in his previous birth or paying the penance for his misdeeds in the past. It should also be stressed here that Tiruvalluvar has an abiding faith in the doctrines of *Karmā* and rebirth.

*Karmā* means primarily 'action'. In general terms, it seems to vindicate the law of cause and effect, applied to all human activities pertaining to body, mind and spirit. Nevertheless, oriental scholarship, in respect of the doctrine of *Karmā*, relates it to its inevitable dimensions of spirituality. According to Sri Satchithanandam Pillai, "Action done with attachment produces a relation but non-attachment to action, frees the soul from contact of the effect of that action" ([Saiva Siddhanta Lecture 14](#)).

Thus to a Hindu, birth is neither just an accident, nor a totally new beginning but the consequence of a complex of the individual’s past deeds. In the words of N.Subramaniam, "Each person’s present condition is the
result of only his or her own past deeds" (History of Tamil Nadu, 64).

Another interesting point that distinguishes the works discussed here is the prominence accorded to Fate in the Tamil work. Tiruvalluvar, being a typical oriental thinker, can never for a moment, ignore the omnipotence of Fate in human existence:

What powers so great as those of Destiny?
Man's skill
Some other thing contrives: But fate's beforehand still (T.380).

Tiruvalluvar also takes cognisance of the resultant effects of the destined acts of commission and omission, committed in the former births of the individuals as implied in the following couplet:

Even those who gather together millions will only enjoy them as it has been determined by the Disposer of all things (T1 377).

Karmā does include in its broad embrace of implicit meanings, moral consequences of the individual acts which ought to be circumscribed in a scheme of things, under a God-centred dispensation. It operates on a moral plane, meting out rewards and penalties, primarily through "the form of births". The practical and social concern of the doctrine seems to have been to
infuse into the common man, a sense of resignation to the present, for the sake of his inner psychological stability while implanting in him at the same time, a perpetual nervous concern about the hereafter, so that he would conduct his affairs in a manner acceptable and beneficial to society.

All the sufferings in the world inflicted on an individual at birth are attributed to his evil deeds in the past. As Tiruvalluvar says

The fruit of virtue need not be described in books; it may be inferred from seeing the bearer of a palanquin and the rider therein

(T1 137).

and,

The wise will say that men of diseased bodies, who live in degradation and in poverty, are those who separated the life from the body of animals in a former birth (T1300).

In order to evade the wrath of fate, Tiruvalluvar cautions men to cling fast to God who is far above all desires, and to rise above all earthly attachments for their own spiritual good. In this context, it may be appropriate to quote G.U.Pope's elegant version of the Kural, despite the poetic license indulged in at the close of the couplet:
Desire the desire of Him who is without desire.

In order to renounce desire, desire that desire (T. 350).

Though Tiruvalluvar does underscore the inexorable nature of Fate time and again, he does not belittle the virtue of human endeavour in manipulating the course of karma. It is perhaps Tiruvalluvar's wish that man should aspire to thwart the course of Fate itself, through his strenuous efforts as an individual. Man may even become the architect of his own fortune; for sustained and courageous human effort of mind and spirit may outwit even the might of Fate:

Who strive with undismayed unfaltering mind
At length shall leave the opposing Fate behind (T 620).

According to this kural, it is human ingenuity that overcomes the course of Karma, despite the part played by determinism.

If Tirukkural presents the Supreme Being as an undefinable and impersonal God who remains simply a Philosophical Absolute, in Proverbs the Supreme Being is presented as an omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent God, who is yet a Personal Being, interested and involved in the affairs of every individual.
With regard to the Divine Personality of God, the Jewish Wisdom Book describes Him as the Creator who is also the ultimate Disposer of things. His all-seeing eyes monitor and weigh all the deeds of men and weigh all their intentions. Also, He looks for an uncompromising kind of conformity on the part of man, to a highly demanding ethical code, and takes delight only in a man who is perfectly upright. Any trace of offensive behaviour on the part of man is utterly abhorrent to Him. Thus, the Jewish sages affirm their faith in monotheism. Proverbs therefore, highlights the justice and power of God’s dispensation in the world and His affirmation of an ethical code, perfectly in tune with a logo-centric vision.

It is remarkable that for an oriental thinker who lived in a land that worshipped literally countless deities of her pantheon, Tiruvalluvar states his faith simply in the 'Alpha' of creation, who constitutes the basic premise in the system of ethics and the prime source of wisdom. The Hebrew tradition, on the other hand, sees wisdom as an impersonal divine attribute which manifests itself through human insights into earthly experiences.

In Proverbs, Wisdom is conceived of as "a woman who has erected her house with seven pillars" (P9:1),
where the inexperienced can find shelter. That such a Wisdom provides a source of instruction for the individual soul, can be seen from the reference that Wisdom has set up a permanent establishment in which, she is at all times to entertain all who come to her (C. Bridges 625).

D.B. Orchard sees in the above verse, an instance of Objective Wisdom which emanates only from God. It is the moral law which is an emanation of the essential holiness and justice of God which makes itself heard by the voice of conscience and also embraces the preaching of God's ministers and speaks and acts with divine authority (476).

Tirukkuval, equally didactic, popularly seen among the Tamils as "Ulagappotumarai" (The common global Scripture) is a comprehensive code of ethics which devotes to 'Aram', Dharmā or virtue of the individual and his role in society, thirty-eight chapters consisting of 380 couplets.

T.P. Meenakshi Sundaram makes the following observation in the light of the philosophy of Tiruvalluvar:

The perfect men, the sages and seers are the embodiments of Dharmā and expound that Dharmā
by every conduct of theirs .... The term "aram" refers not only to all the groups of missionaries especially Buddhists, Jains and Sanyasins in the Sangam Tradition but also to those who have undertaken the duty of Dharmā. They are the standing paragons to be followed by those desirous of Virtue. The virtuous are called "Antanar" (a personification of divine virtue) in a genuine sense because in their conduct towards all creatures, they are clothed in kindness (The Philosophy of Tiruvalluvar 39).

The above critic interprets "Antanar" further as those of cool and beautiful nature, i.e. the people of kindness who live according to their ideal of being upright and kind to every living being (47).

Dharmā is defined as a disposition that knows no envy, greed, anger or bitter words. Hence, Aram refers to moral laws which can be summed up in the following single commandment:

Spotless be thou in mind, this only merits virtue

All else, mere pomp of idle sound, no real worth can claim (T34).
Through Aram, Tiruvalluvar emphasizes also purity of the intellect which "consists in the absence of "avā" or the hankering after pleasures of selfish life" (TPM 42). Thus, Dharmā ultimately implies purity of mind, thought and conduct.

Further, Aram signifies good deeds. Goodness of nature is the best virtue in man as it is a divine quality. If a man sacrifices himself and suffers for others, he possesses a divine spirit within him which endows him with a certain higher realization of happiness:

What form virtue floweth yieldeth dear delight,
All else extern is void of glory's light
(T 39).

Thus the primary concern of king Solomon and of Tiruvalluvar are man as an individual and man in society, rather than man as belonging to a particular nation or religion. This is illustrative of the fact that these teachers of wisdom have transcendent goals before them, irrespective of race and religion. As Edgar Jones remarks,

The maxims and insights of the wisdom teachers apply to the experiences of every man in all
lands and nations. They represent the accumulated experience of the ordinary man (27).

Further, Humanism and individualism are doctrines emanating from a growing sense of reality whose truth is perceived by ordinary men and women. To the Israelite sage, virtue is logo-centric. As the existence and providence of God are affirmed in the Wisdom works, so is the existence of a moral framework for man's action.

In a sense, both king Solomon and Tiruvalluvar can be easily perceived as masters of wisdom literature at a transcendent, global level. In the Bible, king Solomon is readily recognized as a direct agent of the Divine author of the Holy Scriptures, for St. Paul says "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (I.Timothy 3:16). On the other hand, Tiruvalluvar has carved a niche for himself as a law-giving sage in the popular imagination of the Tamils, and a profound poet of Man-centred wisdom.

Austen Warren's observation in Theory of Literature seems to be pertinent with regard to the sources of inspiration in Proverbs and Tirukkural:

Inspiration, the traditional name for the unconscious factor in creation is classically
associated with the Muses ... and in Christian thought with the Holy Spirit (86).

Tirukkural contains in a nutshell, the quintessence of the Vedas and Indian Philosophy and the social and cultural code of the Tamils. Acknowledging the great value of wisdom as expressed in the couplets of Tiruvalluvar, Albert Schweitzer says:

There hardly exists in the literature of the world a collection of maxims with such lofty wisdom. (200).

Yogi Suddhananda Bharathi, the great religious pandit and scholar, points out the greatness of Tirukkural in the following manner:

Tirukkural is a guiding light to humanity, It leads humanity to live as it ought to live in moral pursuits, spiritual knowledge, eternal wisdom in perfect health, wealth and prosperity (22).

While recognizing the God-centredness in Proverbs and Tirukkural, it should also be stressed that the visions of Solomon and the Tamil spiritual writer have a direct bearing on the pragmatic issues of daily living. Even ancient writers like Horace, have seen the vital connection between poetry and the daily, dull routine of human life. The experienced poet as an imitative artist
can look only to human life and character for inspiration to create his models and derive from them, a language that is authentic and relevant. In the process of distilling truth from the life around them the artists tend to achieve transcendence through the "shape" or "form" of their arts, which Weisstein refers to as "gestalt".

Both the works under discussion here expound profound issues relating to human existence and are explicitly didactic. Both stress the need for practising God-centred ethical values for leading a good and profitable life on earth with a transcendent goal. Their spiritual recognition of a God-oriented life reinforces the value of the ethics they advance and their preoccupation with pragmatic wisdom makes them eminently comparable with each other on a thematic level and hence a full-length comparative study of the works concerned has been undertaken here, in order to define the finer aspects of each work in terms of the other.