

Virtues Reflected in Children's Literature

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the significance of moral values, ethical principles, and physical as well as psychological development in shaping the lives of children. It emphasizes that the foundation of a successful and meaningful life is laid through the cultivation of positive habits and virtues during childhood. The views of several scholars support the idea that moral character developed at an early age plays a crucial role in determining an individual's future personality and social conduct.

Tamil poets and thinkers have long recognized the close relationship between physical well-being and mental development. As a result, they have composed numerous didactic poems and literary works aimed at guiding children toward healthy living and virtuous behavior. Traditional Tamil thought also highlights that sound physical health provides the basis for intellectual growth and the development of noble character.

The study further draws attention to the famous Tirukkural couplet, "Panbudaiyar Pattundu Ulagam" ("The world exists because of people of virtue"), which underscores the importance of good character in ensuring social harmony and the stability of society. Based on this perspective, the paper discusses how literary works designed for children promote ethical values, discipline, good conduct, physical health, and positive attitudes. It also explores the role of children's literature as an effective medium for nurturing moral consciousness and guiding the holistic development of young readers.

Keywords: Children, Life Skills, Ethics, Moral Values, Guidance, Virtue, Tirukkural, Tamil Literature.

INTRODUCTION

The achievements of many distinguished individuals can be attributed to the moral values and positive habits they cultivated during their childhood. It is widely acknowledged that the ethical principles they embraced at an early age laid the foundation for their personal growth and success. Learning about the lives and virtues of such exemplary individuals encourages children to develop good character, practice ethical conduct, and pursue success through righteous living.

Recognizing the importance of both the physical and emotional development of children, Tamil poets and scholars have composed numerous literary works that provide moral guidance and practical wisdom. At the same time, they emphasized that a strong and healthy body is essential for nurturing intellectual ability and virtuous character, reflecting the traditional belief that physical well-being forms the basis of overall human development. Through their didactic poems and literary contributions, these writers sought to instill healthy habits, ethical values, and social responsibility in young minds. Accordingly, this paper aims to examine how children's literature promotes moral values while emphasizing the interconnectedness of physical health, intellectual growth, and ethical living.

Life Values of Children

The importance of virtuous character in sustaining society is emphasized in the Tirukkural. Thiruvalluvar states:

"The world endures because there are people of virtue; without them, its dignity and stability would disappear." (Tirukkural- 996)

This couplet highlights that individuals with noble character form the foundation of a harmonious and progressive society. According to Thiruvalluvar, virtue is not merely a personal quality but an essential element for the well-being and continuity of the world.

A similar perspective is reflected in the writings of the renowned Tamil poet Pattukkottai Kalyanasundaranar, who urges children to seek wisdom and personal growth through his well-known lines:

"Little child, listen carefully; true growth lies not only in physical maturity but also in the development of wisdom and understanding."

Through this message, the poet emphasizes that genuine development involves both intellectual and moral advancement. He further suggests that living as a true human being requires cultivating good character, ethical values, and social responsibility. By developing these qualities, children can grow into individuals who make meaningful contributions to society and become a source of strength and support for others.

Method of Nurturing Children

Parents generally strive to support the physical growth and well-being of their children by providing nutritious food and a healthy environment. They also encourage intellectual development by enrolling children in schools and exposing them to valuable books and learning opportunities, thereby helping them acquire knowledge and wisdom. However, alongside physical and academic development, the cultivation of good character and moral values is equally important. One of the foremost responsibilities of parents is to guide children toward becoming responsible, compassionate, and ethically grounded members of society.

In the contemporary world, despite the increasing attention given to education and material well-being, the systematic nurturing of virtues and disciplined behavior is not always practiced with the same commitment in many families. This study therefore emphasizes that effective parenting should aim at the holistic development of children, integrating physical health, intellectual growth, and moral character so that they may grow into individuals who contribute positively to society.

Moral Values and Discipline in Children

Children develop strong moral values when they are introduced to ethical stories, inspiring songs, and value-based literature from an early age. By listening to and reading such works during childhood, they gradually cultivate virtues that shape their personality and behavior. Moral character is reflected through actions that arise from one's thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs.

Psychologists have observed that emotional attachments and positive commitments play a significant role in strengthening moral development and personal growth. In this context, the scholar M. Arumai Selvam explains that such attachments are not innate but are formed through environmental influences, upbringing, and educational experiences. This suggests that a child's character is largely shaped by the values and guidance provided by family, school, and society. Thus, moral values and disciplined behavior are acquired through continuous learning, positive experiences, and a supportive environment rather than being inherited naturally.

Virtues Reflected in Grammatical and Literary Traditions

Moral Lessons through Grandmother's Stories and Songs Traditional storytelling, particularly the stories narrated by grandmothers, has long served as an effective medium for imparting moral values to children. These stories encourage children to think positively, perform good deeds, and believe that virtuous actions lead to positive outcomes. They also teach important life lessons such as avoiding laziness, developing diligence, refraining from jealousy, recognizing the value of hard work, being honest, and understanding that deception ultimately harms both oneself and others. Furthermore, children are taught that harmful actions eventually return to the wrongdoer and that excessive greed often leads to significant loss.

Beyond conveying timeless ethical principles, these traditional narratives also reflect the social realities of earlier generations. Through stories and songs, grandmothers sensitively introduced children to social issues

such as child marriage, polygamy, and the oppression of women, encouraging them to recognize and reject such injustices. In this way, oral literature not only preserved cultural heritage but also functioned as an instrument of moral and social education.

Similarly, children's songs have been used to educate young learners about the dangers of harmful habits. For example, the poet Gnanamani warns children against alcohol consumption by explaining that addiction can destroy families, lead to poverty, and cause hunger and lifelong suffering. The poem encourages children to understand these consequences while they are young so that the moral lessons they learn in childhood will guide their decisions throughout life. Thus, such songs reinforce the importance of self-discipline, healthy living, and responsible behaviour, highlighting the enduring role of children's literature in character formation and social awareness.

Promoting Ethical Conduct through Children's Literature

Children's literature plays an important role in educating young readers about the harmful consequences of substance abuse. Through simple yet meaningful songs and poems, writers explain that the consumption of alcohol and other intoxicating substances can lead to serious physical, emotional, and social problems. Such habits not only damage an individual's health but also result in the loss of self-respect, financial hardship, and family suffering. By illustrating the experiences of those whose lives have been ruined by addiction, these literary works encourage children to adopt healthy lifestyles and make responsible choices. In doing so, they contribute to guiding children towards a positive and fulfilling way of life.

Similarly, children's songs also emphasize the importance of honesty, integrity, and patriotism. In one of his poems, Tamilmani Chinnathurai Rasa Karuna advises children to reject immoral practices such as theft, lying, and deceit, and instead live with sincerity, freedom, and a clear conscience. The poem further encourages young readers to cultivate love for their country and to become responsible citizens who contribute positively to society. By promoting truthfulness, ethical conduct, and national responsibility, such literary works play a significant role in shaping children's moral character and civic values.

In traditional Tamil grammar, quality nouns (panpu peyar) are recognized as one of the categories of nouns and are used to describe the characteristics of an object, such as its colour, taste, size, shape, and other attributes. Similarly, the terms virtue (panpu) and character (gunam) are commonly used to describe the moral qualities and personal traits of individuals, particularly children.

Virtuous character is developed through the consistent practice of ethical behaviour and disciplined living. Just as conduct can be classified as either good or bad, character may also be understood in terms of positive and negative qualities. Children's songs and literary works play an important role in encouraging desirable virtues while helping children recognize and avoid undesirable traits. Through their writings, poets serve as moral educators who shape young minds and guide children toward ethical and responsible living.

Children's literature also promotes cultural values, harmonious relationships, compassion, and respect for all living beings. It teaches that life should not be lived solely for personal benefit but should also be dedicated to serving others and contributing to the welfare of society. By encouraging empathy, kindness, and concern for the well-being of others, these literary works help foster social responsibility among young readers. Furthermore, the study suggests that the inability of contemporary education to adequately impart practical life skills and moral values at the appropriate stage of childhood has contributed to the emergence of various social problems. Consequently, children's literature continues to play a significant role in complementing formal education by nurturing ethical awareness, emotional maturity, and responsible citizenship.

Benefits and Harmful Influences in Children's Development

In earlier generations, it was customary for parents and grandparents to feed children while simultaneously entertaining them with stories and songs. This practice not only nourished children physically but also enriched their imagination, language skills, moral understanding, and cultural awareness. Grandparents and parents often played a greater role than formal educational institutions in introducing children to storytelling and music

that conveyed ethical values. However, with changing lifestyles and social structures, these traditional practices have gradually declined. As noted by Dr. Mu. Varadarasanar (Mu. Va.), the disappearance of storytelling and singing within the home has increased the importance of written children's books and song collections in transmitting moral and cultural values to younger generations.

Just as nutritious food supports physical growth, stories and songs contribute significantly to the intellectual, emotional, and moral development of children. Children's literature is carefully designed to help young readers distinguish between right and wrong, encouraging them to understand which actions should be followed and which should be avoided. By learning these lessons in an enjoyable manner, children gradually develop sound judgment and ethical awareness.

Scholar Sami Palaniyappan compares a child's mind to adhesive paper, suggesting that it readily absorbs whatever is impressed upon it. According to this view, both positive and negative values can be instilled during childhood, and the beliefs and behaviours nurtured at this stage are likely to influence an individual's future character. Therefore, it is essential to cultivate constructive values and healthy attitudes from an early age.

Virtues to be Cultivated in Children

Children are encouraged to develop virtues that promote ethical living and responsible citizenship. Qualities such as spiritual awareness, love, compassion, kindness, generosity, truthfulness, diligence, justice, honesty, helpfulness, empathy, and patience are regarded as essential characteristics of good moral character. These virtues enable children to build healthy relationships, contribute positively to society, and lead meaningful lives.

Conversely, behaviours such as dishonesty, jealousy, harsh speech, violence, and other harmful habits are considered undesirable traits that should be avoided. Children's literature plays a crucial role in helping young readers recognize the distinction between these positive and negative qualities, thereby fostering moral responsibility and supporting the holistic development of their character.

Spiritual Awareness among Children

Spiritual awareness is regarded as one of the fundamental influences in the moral development of children. Faith in a higher power helps children distinguish between right and wrong and encourages them to cultivate ethical values and responsible behaviour. Although languages, religions, and cultural traditions may differ, belief in the divine is widely recognized as a universal aspect of human life. Likewise, while forms of worship vary across faiths, the practice of seeking spiritual guidance is common to societies around the world. Such spiritual practices help guide children toward a life founded on discipline, compassion, and moral integrity.

This idea is reflected in the children's songs of Azh. Valliyappa, which present prayer as a means of nurturing virtuous thoughts, speech, and actions. In one of his devotional songs, children pray for divine grace to think positively, speak kindly, and perform good deeds. Rather than emphasizing ritual alone, the song highlights the importance of developing purity in thought, word, and action through spiritual consciousness. In this way, children's literature uses simple devotional expressions to foster inner discipline, moral awareness, and the cultivation of virtuous character.

Respect for Elders among Children

Respect for elders is an important moral value that children's literature seeks to cultivate. In contemporary society, there is growing concern that some children tend to overlook or show insufficient respect toward older people. Children's songs and poems therefore emphasize the need to value the wisdom, experience, and contributions of elders while encouraging young readers to treat them with courtesy and dignity.

This message is clearly conveyed in the poems of Muthu Manickam, which encourage children to greet and honour elderly people with respect. The poet reminds children that ageing is a natural and inevitable part of human life. Today's elderly were once young, just as today's children will one day grow old themselves. By

understanding this universal cycle of life, children are encouraged to develop empathy, gratitude, and compassion toward older generations.

Through such moral instruction, children's literature teaches that respecting elders is not merely a social obligation but also an expression of humanity and cultural values. By instilling these attitudes from an early age, these literary works help children develop humility, responsibility, and harmonious relationships within the family and society.

Following the Path of Great Leaders

Respecting the elders who live among us and valuing their guidance are essential aspects of a child's moral development. Equally important is learning from the lives of great leaders, scholars, and exemplary individuals who have left behind enduring values through their words and actions. Their life experiences serve as a source of inspiration and provide practical guidance for leading a meaningful and virtuous life.

Children's literature often introduces young readers to the achievements and sacrifices of such distinguished personalities, encouraging them to follow paths of honesty, perseverance, and service. Through simple and engaging poems, children are invited to learn from those who attained success through hard work, determination, and moral integrity rather than through shortcuts or unethical means.

One such poem invites children to come closer and learn about the lives of those who struggled, persevered, and ultimately achieved greatness. The poet emphasizes that understanding the experiences of these exemplary individuals enables children to choose the right path in life and motivates them to face challenges with courage, dedication, and confidence. In this way, children's literature functions not only as a source of entertainment but also as a guide for character formation and ethical living.

Learning Equality and Noble Values from Great Leaders

Children's literature frequently introduces young readers to the lives of eminent leaders and reformers whose achievements and values continue to inspire society. By presenting these personalities as role models, such literature encourages children to appreciate qualities including equality, courage, patriotism, scholarship, linguistic excellence, and selfless service.

One children's poem by P. Ganesan highlights the distinctive virtues of several renowned personalities. It encourages children to learn from E.V. Ramasamy (Periyar) for his commitment to social equality, Robert G. Ingersoll for his rational thought and intellectual influence, Pavendhar Bharathidasan for his mastery of the Tamil language, and Subramania Bharati for his extraordinary poetic genius. The poem further presents Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose as a model of courage and patriotism, Jawaharlal Nehru as an example of scholarship and wisdom, Mahatma Gandhi as the embodiment of high moral character and non-violence, and K. Kamaraj as a symbol of simplicity, integrity, and dedicated public service.

Rather than merely introducing these historical figures, the poem urges children to understand their lives, internalize their ideals, and adopt their virtues in everyday life. By encouraging young readers to preserve these values in their hearts, children's literature serves as a powerful means of character formation, inspiring future generations to become responsible, ethical, and socially conscious citizens.

Inspiring Children through the Lives of Great Leaders

Through this poem, Valasai P. Ganesan stimulates children's curiosity and motivates them to learn about the lives and achievements of eminent leaders and reformers. By introducing these inspiring personalities in a simple and engaging manner, the poet encourages young readers to explore history and understand the values that shaped these remarkable individuals.

The life story of every great leader offers valuable lessons in perseverance, integrity, equality, patriotism, and social responsibility. Studying their struggles, accomplishments, and ideals provides children with practical models of ethical conduct and responsible citizenship. Therefore, it can be confidently concluded that the

biographies of such exemplary figures serve as powerful guides in directing children toward a righteous path and in nurturing moral character, inspiring them to become responsible and compassionate members of society.

Patriotism among Children

Just as children are taught to love, respect, and care for their parents and elders, they should also be encouraged to develop love and responsibility toward their country. Children's literature has long served as an effective medium for fostering patriotism and civic consciousness. Through poems and songs, poets inspire young readers to appreciate their nation's history, culture, heritage, and achievements. Before children can develop a sense of patriotism, it is essential that they understand the unique characteristics and historical significance of their homeland.

In this regard, Mu. Varadarasanar's poem introduces children to the ancient geographical divisions of Tamil Nadu and the distinctive features associated with each region. By presenting these historical and cultural identities in a simple and memorable form, the poem helps children gain a deeper appreciation of the richness and diversity of Tamil heritage. Such literary works strengthen children's sense of cultural identity and encourage pride in their homeland.

Building upon this objective, poet Ve. Nallathambi also composed poems that nurture patriotic feelings among children. His works aim to inspire young readers to value their country, respect its traditions, and recognize their responsibility as future citizens. Through these literary contributions, children's literature plays an important role in cultivating patriotism, civic responsibility, and a commitment to preserving the nation's cultural and social values.

Patriotism through Children's Songs

Children's songs play a significant role in nurturing patriotism by introducing young readers to the ideals and achievements of their nation. Through simple, inspiring, and memorable verses, children are encouraged to value truth, justice, peace, and national unity. Such literary works help develop a sense of belonging and responsibility towards the country from an early age.

In one of his patriotic songs, Ve. Nallathambi portrays India as a nation founded on the principles of truth and righteousness. He celebrates the country's unique achievement of attaining freedom through non-violent means and expresses deep admiration for its beauty and greatness. By presenting the nation as a source of pride and inspiration, the poem encourages children to cherish their homeland and develop a strong emotional bond with it.

Thus, children's literature serves as an effective means of cultivating patriotism and civic responsibility. By instilling love for the nation alongside moral and ethical values, these songs contribute to the holistic development of children and strengthen the belief that they can grow into responsible, virtuous, and socially committed citizens.

CONCLUSION

Children's literature serves as an effective medium for guiding young readers towards moral and ethical living. Through songs, stories, and poems, children learn the virtues they should cultivate as well as the harmful consequences of adopting negative habits and undesirable behaviour. These literary works enable children to distinguish between right and wrong while encouraging them to make responsible choices in their everyday lives.

The study demonstrates that children's songs promote essential values such as spiritual awareness, respect for elders, learning from exemplary leaders, patriotism, and love for one's language and culture. By nurturing these qualities from an early age, children's literature contributes significantly to the holistic development of children, strengthening their moral character, social responsibility, and emotional maturity. Consequently, it

provides a strong foundation for children to grow into ethical, compassionate, and responsible citizens who can make meaningful contributions to society.

As Pattukkottai Kalyanasundaranar aptly observed, "A child grows through love, and noble character is shaped through good values." This thought reinforces the central argument of the study that moral education, when imparted through children's literature, plays a vital role in developing virtuous individuals and building a harmonious society.

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