



TAMIL CHILDREN STORIES AND ITS IMPACT ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT

(Based on selected stories of Ala Waliappa)

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Abstract – This article reflects the impact of children stories in the course of development of a child. It can be observed that in any and every place across the globe several children rhymes, riddles and stories are very popular while communicating and interacting with a child during his early stages of childhood. Furthermore, the forms and types and of these stories also change with the growth of a child in his childhood stages. These stories not only impact the psychological and analytical capacity but also imbibes the process of learning in the child through which it learns words, sentences, the morals and values delivered through the stories and in turn helps in a healthy growth of the mentality and analytical capability of a child to build the values and essential life learnings from a very early stage. The inception of Tamil children literature can be traced back to very early ages and can be interestingly seen that it has been mentioned in the historic Tholkapiyam which is an epic historic scripture on grammar which can be traced back to around 2000 years ago. The discussion in this article has been based on selected stories of Ala Waliappa whose stories and work on children stories and children literature is impeccable in itself. This article wishes to throw light on the positive and constructive impacts of children stories and literature and also help interested and aspiring researchers in the field to analyse and develop it further.

Key Words – Children literature, Ala Waliappa, Childhood

1. Introduction

It has been observed through the ages that during the stage after the birth of a child till it develops speech, parents or guardians sing lullabies, rhymes and other such enjoyable and likable cradle songs to a child. At this stage, the words or the speech is not understandable to the child but still it provides a sense of joy, happiness and enjoyment to the child. It also helps the child in the process of listening and positively impacts its process of developing speech. At a stage when the child starts talking and learns the process of reading, the children stories that are written for the children at this stage act as efficient tools in enhancing the experience of growth at this early childhood stage. The stories read by a child at this stage not only provides joy and entertainment to the child but also instigates the sense of learning and understanding one's surroundings through the underlying morals and lessons of wisdom imbibed in them. These stories also enhance the imaginative capacity of a child and instigates the growth and development of a creative instinct in the child thus impacting the growth of the child's mind psychologically and culturally and introducing and familiarising it to the surroundings at the same time, with a very joyous and adaptable approach for growing mind of a child. The stories of epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata also help the tender minds of the child to understand the natures and instincts of bravery, righteousness, the ideas of right & wrong and so on which prove to be very important for the development of a healthy and sound mentality of a child.

2. Methodology

The methodology used for discussion in this article is mainly analytical as well as descriptive owing to the subject matter of the topic. The analytical approach has been used to discuss about the impact of children stories in the developmental stages of a child and a descriptive approach has been used to highlight the subject matter of the stories and connect the same with the analytical viewpoints to establish the subject matter of the topic in discussion.

3. Sources of data

The sources of data used for the article are mostly secondary form of data. The data for this article has been sourced from the selected stories of the selected writers, research articles, web articles, thesis, books related to the selected stories and writers and also related to the larger topic of discussion.

4. Introduction to the author and the selected stories

Ala Walliappa was born on the 7th of November, 1922 in a place named Raiwaram in Pudukuttai District and the name of his father and mother were *Alagappa Chettiyar* and *Umayal Achi* respectively. He pursued his primary education from *S.K.D. Gandhi school* followed by his high school education from *Bumeshwaraswami High School*. Even though his institutional education was not very high, he started writing poetry from a very early age of 13 years. He started his professional career as an account's keeper at a small publication house in 1940 and then further moved on to work in '*Bank of India*' after that. In the middle of his professional career he started writing poems and articles and also worked as an editor in many children magazines out of which some are '*Preschool Flower*', '*Gokulam*', '*Balar Malar*', etc. He has written more than fifty books and thousand songs for children. '*Our Rivers*' his book on the rivers of Southern India has been translated and published in more than fourteen languages by the '*National Book Trust*'. Some of the books published by him for children are – '*Malarum Ullam*', '*Sirikkum Pukal*', '*Nila Mala*', '*Pappabukku Pattu*', '*Sudandram Piranda Kathai*', '*Munru Parichukal*', etc. In 1950, he laid the foundation of the '*Children's Writers Association*' in Tamil Nadu. His dedicated contributions in the field of Tamil children literature were also awarded and recognised with honour and gratitude. In 1982, he was awarded the '*Tamil Assembly Award*' by the *Madurai Kamraj University*. He was also awarded the title of '*Pillaikaviyarasu*' meaning '*King of Children poetry*' by the '*Chennai Bharati Youth Association*'. He was also awarded the title of '*Malalaikavi Shyamal*' by the '*Karoikuri International Children's Annual Committee*'. With all these relentless contributions and honourable recognitions during his entire life, Ala Walliappa breathed last on 16th of March, 1989.

In the year 2002, a publishing house by the name '*Pari Nilayam*' collected some stories of Ala Walliappa, which were published in some magazines and papers, and published them by the name '*Tirumbi Vanta Man Kutti*' and the first story that was included in it was '*Tirumbi Vanta Man Kutti*' which means '*The Returned Fawn*'. The story delivered a very significant moral that the saying of the elders should not be disobeyed or mistreated. The story begins with a conversation between the mother deer and the fawn and she advises it not to roam around all by oneself because although there were no tigers or lions in the jungle but there was the fear of poachers coming into the jungle. The fawn innocently asks the mother what harm can be done by the poachers and replying to that the deer recites it a story from her childhood. During her childhood, the deer was taken by a poacher and sold to a very rich man who had a son and a daughter. In the sorrow of not being able to be with her parents, the deer slowly became unable to eat anything but the people tried to keep her alive by feeding her through a bamboo pipe. At this pitiful sight of the deer, the son and the daughter of the man asked him to take her back to the jungle and at the end when there was no other option left the man took her to the jungle and left her there. Hearing this story, the fawn asks her why she had left behind the lavish life and big house, the beautiful garden and the two children who loved her so much to come back to the jungle to which the deer replied that she did this as she couldn't bear the sorrow and the longing to stay with her friends & family in the jungle. Also, during the time when she was in that house, she was caged up and tied to chains and this made her neck ache whereas on the other hand in the jungle she could move about and do anything she wished without any boundaries. In the jungle she could eat anything she liked but when she was kept there, she had to eat only whatever she was given even if she didn't like it. They talked for a very long time in that manner and the fawn said that it would have never left such lavish amenities at any cost. Kuttiman was the name of the fawn and from that day onwards it only dreamed about ways to go to a rich family's house and stay lavishly for the rest of the life. One fine night when around twenty-five deer were sleeping together in the jungle, Kuttiman ran away from there with only one wish in its mind that he would somehow end up in a beautiful mansion by the end of the next night. While it was thinking about which direction to go in, it saw a rabbit running towards it from one direction and so Kuttiman asked the rabbit what actually happened. The rabbit told him that a poacher captured it and one of its friend's and sold them to a very rich family in town. They were living very happily for a month but suddenly when one day there was a feast arranged in the house, they slaughtered his friend and ate him. There was a lady named Uma in the house and she loved them a lot so she feared that the people of the house will slaughter the other rabbit too so she freed him in the jungle. Kuttiman was shocked to hear this and told the rabbit that he only knew about lions and tigers eating them but never imagined that humans will also do so. The rabbit affirmed that he was telling the truth and hearing this the calf realised that she shouldn't disobey his mother's words as it may lead it to end up losing his life so he started racing back towards the jungle not in search of some rich mansion but towards his mother's unbiased love for him. Through the character of Kuttiman Ala Walliappa tries to deliver the moral lesson on how one should never disobey one's elders' word. He also tries to give a small picture of the atrocities that human do on animals.

'*Punnam Sudandiram*' is another story that was included in '*Tirumbi Vanta Mankutti*' and it meant '*Independence of Punnam*'. It depicts the story of Punnam, a school boy who disrespected the eve of Independence Day celebrated on the fifteenth of August and the consequences he had to face as a result of that. Punnam was a boy studying in the fifth standard and he always used to wake up as early as 6 AM in the morning but on the Independence Day he slept over till 8 AM. His mother tried to wake him up several times but he retaliated saying that he was not given the independence to sleep on the eve of Independence Day listening to which his mother went into the kitchen to do the chores. Punnam's father wakes him after returning from the flag hoisting ceremony in the office and then again, he complains the same thing of having no independence to sleep according to his wish in the house and asks his mother for something to eat. His mother asked him to brush his teeth and then come along to

eat to which he replied with a question if cows and goat brush their teeth before grazing. This agitated his mother and she asked him to graze with cows and goats outside for that matter. Punnan again brings in the context of Independence Day and complains that if he is not allowed to do anything as per his own wish then what is the meaning of Independence Day. Bored at staying in the house Punnan walked out to the street and saw a dog and starts pelting stones at it. The dog, annoyed by Punnan runs towards him and as a result Punnan runs away from there saying that he doesn't even has the independence to pelt stones. So, he walks towards the market and on the way a car comes up behind him. He paid no attention to the car and walked in the middle of the road even when the car kept honking. This created a traffic jam on that busy market road and so the driver of the car asked him why he was walking on the middle of the road like a cow to which he replied bossily saying that it was Independence Day so he would walk on the road as he wished. The driver with an intention of spooking him out slowly tucked him from behind. Punnan was very scared by it jumped to the side of the road when he slipped off and hit a stone. The shopkeepers nearby were watching his tantrums and were happy to see him get the result accordingly. The driver along with a two more people take him to the hospital and then drop him home after which his father sits beside him and explains him the meaning of independence very calmly and lovingly. His father says that the true meaning of independence is to respect others, to work dedicatedly towards one's responsibilities and understand one's rights and duties to obey and work honestly towards them and he also tells him that once he realises these few things, he would be able to understand the true meaning of independence. Listening to his father's words Punnan slowly walks towards the photo of Mahatma Gandhi and bows his head in front of it. The parents feel happy to see the change in the mind and understanding of their child. The story ends in such a manner and tries to display and portray a very simple character yet it tries to deliver a very clear and adequate meaning and essence of independence towards the end of the story. Children can very easily understand the underlying value of independent through the story and also with this moral leaning the author tries to advice the children to not behave in an unruly way owing to a wrong notion of a deep value or learning.

The next story that was included in the publication was '*Undi Vi*' and its meaning is '*bow and arrow*'. This story is of two boys Somu and Basu of which Somu was a very good and decent boy whereas Basu was a boy who always roamed about and never liked studies. Somu always went to school but Basu sometimes skips school and lies down in the shadow of the tree to have a good sleep. Even though both were two side of a coin but still they met every day even if it was five in the evening. Basu used to come and wait below the tree near Somu's house and he used to slowly and silently sneak out of the house at the sight of Basu after which both of them used to go to the other end of the village to hunt birds. Basu never went home without hunting birds and he was teaching his hunting skill to Somu. Every they used to hunt down at least two to three crows, pigeons or any kind of bird for that matter. Somu's father comes to know about this misdeed and explains Somu that only being good in studies is not enough but being a good person is very essential. He asked Somu why they hunt down the birds and also advised him not to team up with Basu to do such a thing again. Somu stayed in his home for two to three days like the good old boy he was but then again started to team up with Basu and go hunting with a bow and arrow. Somu's father being very concerned about Somu walking towards a bad path in life took the opportunity of the summer vacations and sent him over to his uncle's place. After reaching his uncle's place Somu sat down to eat something after which he started feeling very hot so he started searching for an electric fan and asked his aunt for the same but his aunt told him to take a bath instead. Somu went ahead and took a bath and again asked his uncle where the electric fan was to which his uncle very sadly started to tell him the story of an incident that took place a month ago. There used to be a bird's nest behind the photo of their god in their house and on one day, after the baby birds hatched, while both of them were sitting in the room under the electric fan talking about something when they heard a sound. They saw that the mother of the baby birds got hurt by the electric fan and they tried to save the bird but failed. The baby birds cried all night and they stood awake listening to the cries of the poor baby birds. The next morning, they saw that another bird came to the poor crying babies and provided food for them. Gradually the babies grew up and flew away one fine day and in that same place another bird has come and laid eggs. So, they removed the electric fan from that room so that the same mistake doesn't repeat itself again. Somu started repenting gravely after listening to the story and a couple of days later went back to his village. As soon as he reached the village, he straightaway did one thing. He took his bow and arrow and went to Basu's place and says that in the company of Basu's he also got engaged in some misdeeds and broke the bow and arrow there itself and came back home. He realises that his friendship with Basu was broken that day just like the broken bow and arrow but still he was at peace in his heart. The story ends this way and through this story one thing was aimed to be highlighted that though some children either due to bad company or due to any other reason may get engaged in hunting down birds or such other misdeeds but it is very important for them to learn the dark side of the misdeed and get themselves back to the right track through deep realisation.

Another story of Ala Walliappa in the publication is '*Udabad Telephone*'. There was a person named Kartik in the district who owned a shop where all kinds of items were available but he was a very narrow minded and selfish person. On night a man came over to him and requested him for a small help telling him that his child was suffering from high fever from the last two days and that he just needs to make a phone call from Kartik's telephone and call a doctor so that he could come over and check his son who was in a severe condition and was not even opening his eyes. But Kartik didn't let him make a call saying that it was a bad habit and if he allowed him to make a call today then someone else may also come in the same way and people would start using his phone in that manner. The man prayed to Kartik helplessly but instead Kartik told him to go and make a call from the public telephone booth. The man started rushing here and there and entered the third lane and reached a telephone booth to made a call from there and was somehow able to save his child that night. The same day at midnight a small boy knocked on Kartik's door and Kartik inquired why he was knocking on the door. The small boy replied to it saying that a fire broke out in a house in the lane nearby and so he needed to inform the fire brigades urgently and call them up from Kartik's telephone. But Kartik rather replied furiously and told him that he was not concerned if a fire broke out and didn't let the boy use the phone.

The fire slowly grew and spread out to the neighbouring houses. The fire was so big that the people could gather only a few essential things and run out to save their life. The fire slowly spread to Kartik's house as well and then he remembered that the boy came to him to ask for help and call the fire brigades. He ran towards the house to make a telephone call but by that time the entire house was on fire. The boy who was chased away by Kartik ran all the way to the fire departments office as he was left with no other option because Kartik didn't let him inform them even if he had a telephone in his house. But by the time the fire brigades reached the spot Kartik's house as well as shop was burnt down completely. Even if Kartik had a phone in his house it was of no use and he never helped anyone in any situation so ultimately due to this attitude and character he had to lose everything that he had. The story ends this way and delivers a very significant displays the results and consequences of a selfish and negative mentality through Kartik's character.

Another entertaining story of the writer is '*Kuppuswami Kullai*' which means '*Kuppu's hat*'. Kuppu was the son of Palani Swami and he was very poor in his studies. He always used to sit in the last bench of the classroom with Sarbanan and Shankar and they also performed poorly in their studies and they called him 'trash'. As per the story he once suffered from fever and at that time his grandmother offered prayers to the Tirupati Balaji Mandir and prayed that if he gets well, she will offer his hair to the temple after that. Soon after he got well, they went to the Tirupati Balaji Mandir and Kuppu offered his hair to the temple. Kuppu's father had a shop and he used to steal eatables from his father's shop and eat them with his friends in the last benches when the teacher teaches in the class. After returning from Tirupati, Kuppu started wearing a cap and started hiding the eatables that he stole from his father's shop in his cap. On day while he was hiding the food in his cap and leaving his father's shop, two crows saw him and one of them told the others that the boy was hiding food in the cap and one of them will steal the cap and the other will steal the food. As planned, one of the crows snatched away his cap but as soon as it did all the food including the kajus, raisins, etc. fell on the ground and the powdered substances fell on Kuppu's head. The other crow while trying to snatch away the left-out grains on his head, hurt Kuppu's head. This whole thing was seen by a friend of Kuppu's father and he told Palani Swami everything about it. When his father asked him what happened to him, Kuppu promised that he will never do such a thing again and hide food in his cap and listening to this the people gathering around there started laughing. So, his father consoles him nicely and takes him inside the shop to apply medicines to his wounds. Over and above the story provides a humorous setup but the author also delivers a very important lesson on how if one runs away from one's duty, as was seen in the case of Kuppu running away from his studies, and gets engaged in mischievous acts then the consequences are also having to be faced accordingly.

Another story of Ala Walliappa with an underlying moral learning is '*Iru Kokkaigal*' which means '*two crows*'. There lived two crows in a huge jungle who nested in two branches of the same tree. Both of them woke up early in the morning and flew three kilometres away to a village in search of food. If there was any function in the village also the people gave both of them food to eat. One day while they were sitting on the side of the pond and eating the food that they collected, when one of them said that what is the point in travelling so far for food when they can make their nests in the tree near the pond. But the second crow rejected the idea on the grounds that the tree near the pond was very old and its was risky to build a nest there. Also, the mischievous boys in the village may come and steal their eggs from their nests while they were away. But the first crow did not agree to it and built her nest in the tree and started living there while the second crow went back to the jungle and stayed there. Several months passed by like this and both of them laid eggs and their babies also hatched out. But one day a heavy storm came by and the tree near the pond collapsed and the babies also died in that incident. The first crow being very sad, sat on a stone at the side of the pond and started crying. At the same time, the crow from the jungle came there and seeing her friend in such a sad state, asked her what happened. The crying crow explained everything to her and asked her if nothing has happened in the jungle. Then she said that the storm came there also but as there are many trees in the jungle, they were able to resist the storms and no harm was done in the jungle. Hearing this, the crying crow decides to go back to the jungle and live in her old home and by the evening both of them flew back to the jungle. The story tries to deliver the message of being stronger when together. It can be observed in each and every story of Ala Walliappa that there is some underlying value or learning in the backdrop of the story and this understanding of wisdom and life are very necessary for a child to adapt and learn at a growing stage of childhood. Another observable phenomenon in the stories of Ala Walliappa is the display of subject matters like animals, nature, society, values etc. and the use of magic or supernatural aspects is very low. On the other hand, he tried to deliver knowledge on wisdoms and values by centralising his stories around children only. His stories are easily understandable for the children with some similarities in common incidences, mischiefs, moments of right and wrong, etc. that the children come across in their childhood. Such learnings help in the constructive development of a child and also helps them to pave the path of building themselves as a good citizen in the future.

5. Conclusion

The impact of children literature is undeniable in the constructive growth of a child's thinking, mentality, rationality and psychology. In this context, children stories are a very effective medium of delivering the impact on shedding light on some very important and necessary moral values, life lessons, duties, righteous nature, etc. in a very joyful and entertaining approach through some instances and settings that are familiar and easily adaptable and understandable to the tender growing mind of a child during childhood. The discussion on the selected stories of the author Ala Walliappa clearly shows that all his stories contain an underlying moral teaching or message and also all his stories are designed in a backdrop which is relatable to the common surroundings of a child during childhood. Moreover, most of his stories are written in a such a way that it delivers the underlying message or moral through the setting of a story that provides both joy and entertainment to the child reader which is a major character which reflects the ability to attract the tender minds of a child but in the process also perform the function of delivering the essential learnings through a humorous medium that is readily adaptable to the child. These children stories which display a very common setup and use the common characters seen in the surroundings yet delivering it in a creative manner like the two talking crows, the rabbit and the fawn having a conversation on the atrocities of the human on animals but at the same time the love of the small girl child who left the rabbit in the jungle in the fear of the other people trying to harm it, the love showed by a bird to the orphan babies of the dead pigeon, etc. portray both the good and bad pictures to the child so that it can develop a constructive understanding of the good and bad around it. Also, the stories that reflect the consequences of a misdeed or bad habit or action not only function towards delivering an effective moral learning but also provide a factual picture of the suffering or embarrassment of loss that one can incur by behaving in an irrational, mischievous or inhuman way. Such an example can be seen in the case of Punnann when his ignorance and arrogance ended up getting him hurt but at the end he learnt the real value of the teaching even if he had to get it the hard way, the loss of Kartik who acted selfish and arrogantly and never helped anyone but at the end had to learn it a hard way by losing everything, the embarrassment that Kuppu had to face as a result of stealing from his father's shop and not doing his duties honestly but instead engaging in mischievous activities ultimately suffering and learning the hard way. All this stories not only show the bad part or misdeeds but also deliver a moral factually by showing that the misdeeds will always end up with pain and suffering so one should always be honest and righteous and such a process of delivering the moral message of wisdom and life lesson is not only enjoyed by the child but is also like a advice against misdeeds and bad paths of life, in addition to the underlying impactful moral message of the story.

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