



# Cultural Regeneration: A Revival Of The Lost Tradition Of Grandma's Story Telling in The Post Pandemic Era.

Dr K.SivaShankari

Head & Assistant Professor (UG Department of English)

Shrimathi Devkunvar Nanalal Bhat Vaishnav College for Women, Chromepet  
Chennai

## Abstract

The Post Pandemic Era poses more threats to the mental health of children, beyond one can imagine. Once again people have got into the roller coaster ride of making a survival. The world now is highly competitive and complicated. The roiling uncertainties after the pandemic and a pretentious, 'survival of the fittest' mode of life has made living a tedious task. The Pandemic has created an inconceivable, profound negative impact on the mental health of the people especially children. Neither the adults nor the children have joyful, fun-filled pastimes. They do not relish the lovely delicacies of simple living like sharing stories of the day at dinnertime, a calm Sunday afternoon nap, a walk to the neighbourhood place of worship, an uninterrupted chat with the family, a casual visit to a relative's house. Getting ready for online school or office, chatting constantly on social media, attending myriad classes, preparing for exams online have become daunting tasks, depriving the people of pleasure and leisure. This study aims to probe and revive the culture of 'Story Telling' as a useful pastime among families, when stepping out is undesirable in this post pandemic times. It wishes to bring back the age old tradition of narrating or listening to simple stories from grandparents or parents which proves to be useful tools in bringing about holistic development in a child. The study shall primarily focus on children and animals fiction.

KeyWords : Culture, Creativity, Imagination, Fantasy , Rejuvenation, Curiosity.

Everything a child hears, listens and reads during formative years leaves an indelible mark in the mind. In the present scenario, children are becoming scatter brained, too serious in pursuit of some achievements that their energy and enthusiasm has lost its childish flavour. To rejuvenate the minds and fill it with imagination and creativity, stories are to be narrated or to be read to children by people at home or school with physical eye contact. Here story telling does not include digital modes where the listener is deprived of a personal touch . Louise Phillips asserts this view in her article when she writes that

Young children have a natural tendency to be drawn to narrative (Cooper, Collins & Saxby, 1992, p.i). As a storyteller I have found young children to be consistently interested and enthusiastic towards told stories. This interest supports children in gaining and extending many skills and pieces of knowledge, especially when stories are well told. There is ample research that has found valuable learning potential in storytelling experiences for children.

Stories accelerate their mental wellbeing by soothing their minds and triggering their curiosity. Values can be best imbibed through the medium of Story Telling. This study will highlight the invincible role of stories in raising children as value based, erudite human beings. Native Stories are the hope of mankind. Special focus will be on animal stories and moral values. Aleks Krotoski observes  
Stories are memory aids, instructional manuals and moral compasses.

Primitive man felt the futility of his struggle against the physical forces of cold, darkness, hunger, thirst, weariness, disease and death just as we of today may become disheartened in our battles against the subtle powers of disappointment, the disloyalty of others and our own moral weaknesses. What then could be more natural in such circumstances than that our pre historic forbearers should dream of a sun hero whose shafts of eternal light could put to death the dragon of darkness; or of a goddess of plenty whose cornucopia poured fruits in abundance; or of a being from the air whose magic was strong to stay death and heal all hurts? In some such ways it seems that the first myths arose and grew and changed with much telling until they become comparatively fixed. Today we often turn to those stories that embody our hopes- hopes at times we have called dead. Man still finds in his fictions and in his true stories an effort to obtain vicarious satisfaction from an unyielding world. The weary mother loses herself in her work but really finds her ideal self in the happy outcome of a story that brings rest after labour and is a solvent for

the same sort of worry that has eaten her own soul. We need to analyse our own experiences to multiply examples of how in the story world we find what our ancestors near and remote used to find in fictional creations, whether their own or told by others – the satisfaction that life has denied or has seemed to deny to them. It is not only children who lead story lives blessed anodynes for real cares! Even the minority who have melancholy joy in stories that end in disaster and ruin, feel themselves to suffer the losses of the victim of perfidy, of trickery, of nature, of fate for it is a satisfaction to be able to pity ourselves cordially – a very human satisfaction nor a strengthening one. So we find in this state of mind no exception to what appears to be a general experience that stories hold the interest of the children because they transport them to a realm where things work out in somewhat the way that seems to us to be a typical of life, either as it is or as we should like it to be. Have you ever noticed a child gone to bed smarting under a real or fancied injustice and fallen asleep picturing himself/herself as a powerful fighter fighting with the animals or flying to the moon or any such fantasy.

“The heart of a child is a scroll

A page that is lovely and white ;

And to it as fleeting years roll

Come with a story to write

Be ever so careful, O hand-

Writ thou with a sanctified pen

Thy story shall live in the land

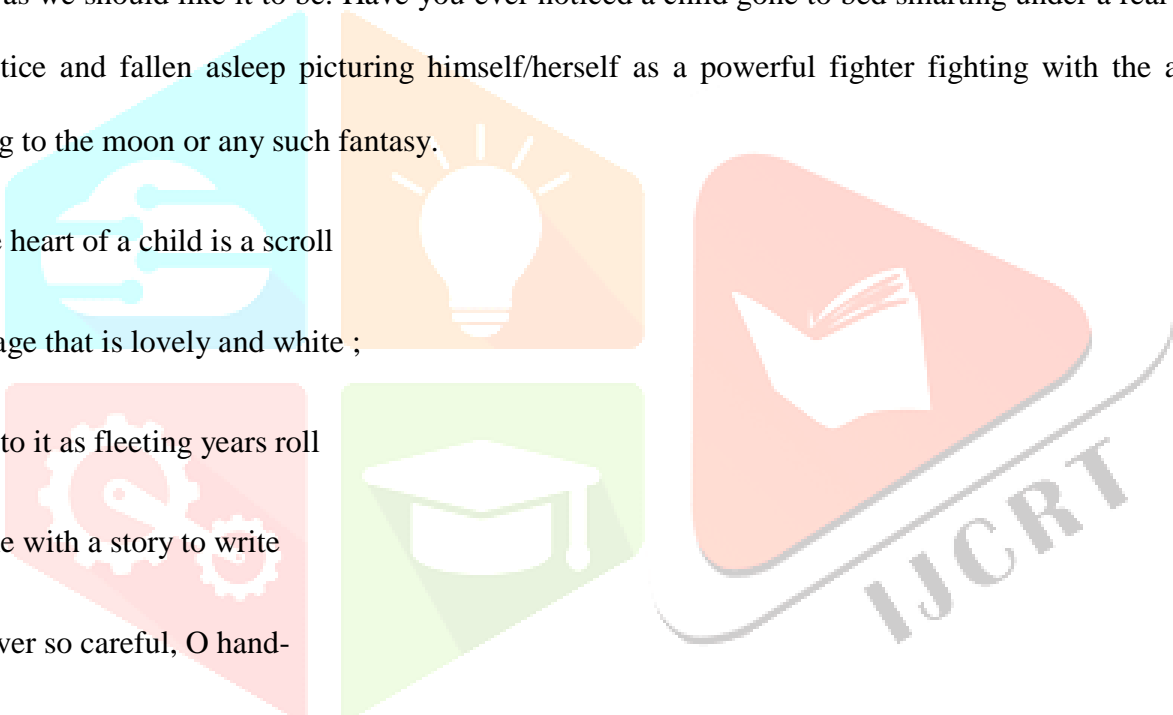
For years ,in the doings of men.

It shall echo in circles of light

Or lead to the death of a soul,

Give here but a message of right,

For the heart of a child is a scroll



Anonymous

Children naturally take to the idea of poetic justice and readily fictionalise the outcomes of slights and favours. But before we apply this trait to character training we must consider two other foundation principles. Stories often lead the children to form moral judgements. The place of the moral in the story or rather the importance of not drawing obvious moral in storytelling must be touched on later but here let us say this, one of the chief educational values of story-telling takes care of itself in the conscience of the child if the story is well arranged and adequately told. As soon as children come to the stage when they begin to distinguish between good and bad, generous and selfish, kind and cruel conduct in themselves and others they involuntarily feel more or less clear reactions from the conduct of the story people who are presented to them. This part of the problem of the story teller, therefore is to select such stories as will lead the child to form sound moral judgements rightly approving or condemning the actions of the characters in most cases without uttering a word. To excite such discriminations is a subtle function of the story teller and a vital one at that from our grown up experiences we can draw many illustrations. A wholesome story may paint evil realistically yet delicately and we are led to see not only its enormity but its consequences and that without a single word of preaching. Just so moral judgements not at all necessarily on great questions are inevitably formed in the spirit of the child by hearing to such stories as Reynard the Fox and others raise issues of conduct. Stories stimulate all the mental and moral processes. Sense appeal in stories that deal with colour, sound, touch or smell may be just as educational as it appeals to emotions. The story let it be remembered may excite any sort of reaction which it skilfully planned to call forth. The child's brain functions will definitely be invigorated. As recorded by the Fukushima Journal of Medical Science,

In children, storytelling provides many psychological and educational benefits, such as enhanced imagination to help visualize spoken words, improved vocabulary, and more refined communication skills.

The child will gradually understand the reactions of the characters, the depth of the situations and mentally judge them and form some kind of conclusions in his/her mind which will be justified to her/him. The child will start analysing whether or not the character or situation is right or wrong in her own mind and she will personify certain qualities. Let us go through the definite effects of fiction on the personality

of the child. First let us see what is meant by personality through its baffling definition. It is that which marks an individual as being himself or another. Therefore it is known by its manifestations. It is blended force of “What is” “What thinks” “What wills” and “What does” that to paraphrase Robert Browning that, which constitutes the man. Personality is both positive and negative in nature. It leads to action. A boy, say it self-willed, selfishly tenacious and cares not a whit for the good opinion of others except that he is pained when his mother is sad.

He begins to show ideals of honour, but he has a somewhat warped personal code, by whatever affects his own happiness and that of his mother are his sole standards of good and bad. Hedonist in his attitude the child looks for his happiness in what he sees around him. To harmonise personal happiness and the happiness of those around seems to be uppermost in his mind. Stories help him to realise this ideal by showing the way. It is not enough that the child be led to form judgements as to what is right or wrong in the actions of the story- people. When a story seizes to hold to the imagination, its power for good-or for evil is unspeakable. Muhammed Ali Isik delineates the influence of stories in a child's mind ,

Children's inner deep feelings are also very much influenced from stories like fairy tales as they help them find different solutions and strategies for overcoming the problems they face with. One of the effects of the fairy tales is that it helps them understand the difference and existence of both good and evil as they are given with concrete divisions through villains and heroes. The cutting edge division between the villains and heroes makes things easier for children to grasp at early stages as they are not developed enough to comprehend more abstract scenarios. Identification is much easier at this stage, and it helps the child to make some simple associations like if he wants to achieve something in his life he/she should be like the hero/heroine of the story and if he/she does not behave well, the end will always be bad.

Think how an unworthy motive may be inhibited and a noble one substituted by the stories for children. The purpose of supplying dynamism to the personality should be prominent in all story telling. But there are many other phases of personality as we see upon a little reflection and all these may be moved upon story. The morbid brooding child may be allured from over sensitiveness to the stolid. We cannot assume hastily that development of personality is altogether or even chiefly a matter of storytelling. We lay emphasis on the story as being one and only one important element in child culture. The wise guardian of the child will constantly coordinate the whole regimen for training – physical, social, intellectual and

moral well being through stories that may illustrate and teach and because the fiction we read reacts so vitally upon our own characters, the parent, the nurse, the teacher, the temporary guardian, whose privilege is to tell a story to a child, owes a primary obligation to herself/himself to select for her/his own reading a type of fiction that tends to develop in her/him a worthy personality!

Obviously we do not urge that a story reading should be namby- pamby for stories that teach a robust , uplifting philosophy are anything but sugar coated : Inner victory is more important than outward success and when that success is denied it leaves us with the feeling that good is more powerful than evil. The very first demand that we need to make upon story tellers is that they develop in themselves a personality whose charm and optimistic vigour is worth transmitting in the stories they tell to others, young or old. Every line of the foregoing implies that if in any degree pessimistic and sordid fiction may not harm the storyteller it will be entirely due to the reaction by which a healthy nature throws off the depressing an experience that is by no means universal. But a child is not so constituted for its personality is as yet undeveloped or may be already beginning to develop in wrong directions. What care, then should be given to choosing for the little ones those stories which suggest right ideals move them to wise choices and inspire vigorously good action.

Hence the story teller needs to develop a strong personality which is built upon good ethical values. The stories that he relates should envision an ethically sound society. The role of the story teller thus becomes an invincible in an egalitarian society. This paper aims to make a sample study of some of the stories from the collections of Aesop's Fables ,Panchatantra and Hitopadesha. This study has been undertaken after having been a teacher and personally observed the effects of stories on growing minds.

Children love stories and animals. Very often they have animals as pets and relate to them like relating to other humans. So animals are very attractive to children and so animal stories can be really engaging. Anthropomorphism is assigning human characteristics and traits to non human entities, like animals. This is a very suitable method used by story tellers to engross the children totally in the story and help the animal characters to express themselves effectively.

In the chapter “Why Anthropomorphism in Children’s Literature” of *Elementary English* book published by National Council of Teachers of English, Juliet Kellog Markowsky talks about the use of animals in stories and anthropomorphism. The first reason she gives is that it allows young readers to recognize the animals. Adding anthropomorphism to the animals helps the child to easily identify them with the character. Children can easily relate themselves with naughty Peter in Beatrix Potter’s *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. The second reason she gives is the flight of fantasy itself. Talking animals can let children into another world which they may not enter without their help. For example talking rabbits let the children into the world of woodland where exist creatures with their own social structures and social behaviour that imitate and express our own. The third reason is for variety. An author can create variety of characters in a short book with few words if an animal is used to express attributes commonly assumed to represent the creature. For example by simply being a possum, a being can be slow in wit and lazy, no further build up of character is necessary. Fourth reason is for humour. The humour is often based on the animal’s picture and on what it says.

Native wisdom and moral values are found in abundance in animals stories from the Jataka tales, Hitopadesha and the Pachatantra . Talking about the moral values to be imparted to children Dr Felix Adler a renowned observer in his book “Moral Instruction to children” says

The Jataka Tales contains deep truth, and are calculated to impress lessons of great moral beauty. These tales are as everyone must admit nobly conceived lofty in meanings and many a helpful sermon might be preached from them as texts.

The Jataka tales or birth stories form one of the sacred books of the Buddhists and relate to the adventures of Buddha in his former existence. It seems that Buddha himself has narrated these stories as representations of right conduct.

There are many animal stories and fables which are popular for their capacity to rouse the flagging interests of the readers especially children. 550 Jataka tales have been depicted at the Petliek Pagoda , located in Bagan, Myanmar Burma. The Starving Tigress , where a Bodhisattva offers his own life as a prey is a tale of compassion, selflessness and generosity. The power of honesty is beautifully illustrated in the story The Baby Quail, where a bodhisattva is born as a quail and lives a life of honesty and purity .

Due to this he suffers ceaselessly but in the end he is rewarded. The Ruru Deer is a story which delineates the harmful effects on betrayal. The Buffalo teaches young children to be patient with the powerless, by enduring injuries. The stories are facile and lucid. The values and wisdom they impart are multi fold. Each fable serves as a sugar coated capsule offering life lessons. Teaching and learning of moral values have been in vogue from times immemorial. Though each family has a different value system, teaching a code of conduct through story telling is imperative. It teaches the eight fold path : Right understanding or perspective, Right thought, Right Speech, Right action, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness, Right concentration.

King Amarashakti ruled over Mahilaropya situated in southern India. He beseeched the Sanskrit scholar Vishnu Sharma to teach his three sons ,who were not so intelligent. Vishnu Sharma tried many ancient methods of teaching and was unsuccessful. The scholar decided to use story telling as a way of teaching the sons. So he composed the Panchatantra tales in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century BCE . Pancha means five and tantra means to weave. So Panchatantra comprises of the stories based on the five tantras namely Mitra-Bheda – the separation of friends, Mitra Labha or Mitra Samprapti – the gaining of friends, Kakolukium – of crows and owls or particularly on war and peace, Labdapranasam- loss of gains and Apariksitakarakam- ill considered actions . It has ubiquitous application with over 84 stories. It was first translated into Pehlavi and Arabic. Borzuy was the personal physician of the Persian Emperor Nushirvan. He visited India around 570 CE , looking for a herb called Mrutasanjevani. He did not find the herb but found the panchatantra instead. After reading it he understood that the magical herb was knowledge and the corpse was ignorance. The dominant theme of Panchatantra is ‘Knowledge is the true organ of sight, not the eyes.’ It is a practical user manual to the art of intelligent living. Narendra nair in an article” The Relevance of Panchatantra “ in ETimes dated Dec 4, 2008 records that

Vishnu Sharma chose the fable as his medium because he understood that humans can accept their own foibles if they are presented entertainingly, configured as storied about beasts that they believe to be inferior to themselves in many ways. Tales of greed, treachery, stupidity, deceit, adultery and loyalty, unravel like a matroshka, a succession of Russian dolls- within- dolls.

Franklin Edgerton, the Yale professor known for his masterly translation of the `Bhagavad Gita', calls the `Panchatantra' Machiavellian. He notes,



"This is a textbook of artha, 'worldly wisdom', or niti, polity, which the Hindus regard as one of the three objects of human desire, the others being dharma, 'religion or morally proper conduct' and kama 'love'... The so-called 'morals' of the stories... glorify shrewdness and practical wisdom in the affairs of life, and especially of politics, of government."

Thus we can conclude that the animal stories are a great repository of moral values. They can be explored and exploited to teach and reach the young minds to ingrain and foster native wisdom.

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