ORIGINAL ARTICLE

TRADITIONAL TEACHING METHOD - CONCEPT OF MORAL EDUCATION AND PEDAGOGY IN AATHICUUDI

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Abstract

This Paper tries to describe about the ancient teaching of Tamilnadu. How the education system was established by the early Tamils? And how one person become a teacher in the earliest and what are the names given to them and what are the tools used for the teaching. The earliest education based on moral development. Moral values are much needed "to inspire, propel, and equip the learners with adequate skills, awareness, and values was taught. However, this paper tries to answer for the origin of the Tamil alphabet and how the bardic culture and Thymesian culture evolves in ancient education. and also this paper deals how the scribal culture helps us for the teaching.

Key words: Tinnai Pallikudam, Scribal culture, Tradition Pedagogical, Bardic culture.

Background

In ancient period each village had a school known as Grama Padachalai (Village School). The schools were also called as **Tinnai Pallikudam** (Primary School) as the teaching conducted outside of the house in veranda (tinnai). Kingston Pal Thamburaj (2015.2020)[1]. Occasionally

temples too served as education institute. In old Tamil tradition, teachers were called as Kanakaiyar, Vidvan, Mahavidvan, Kavirayar and Navalar. The teacher who teaches in Tinnai is called **as Kanakaiyar.**

Teaching and Learning Tools

In older days, students neither have pencils, boards, notes nor text books to learn and write. Alternatively, they used sand to write and learn. Each student will bring sand in small tiny sack. They spread the sand on ground and used it as a medium to write down alphabets. While writing the students learn to pronounce the alphabets. Once the class finished they restore back the sand into the tiny sack. This method of learning developed their motor skills as well.

The teaching and learning continues with the study of Aathichuudi (single line insightful quotes written by the great poet Avvaiyar), Konrai Vendan (poem collection on the importance of education for mankind written by Avvaiyar), Moothurai (time honoured wisdom explaining on moral principles written by Avvaiyar), Nalvali (The good way), and Times Tables. Students are required to memorise these sets of work on living principles. It is a compulsion for the students in those days to memorise and read out their lessons. Once completed with this session, they progress to learn Nigandu (alphabetically arranged lexicon), Thivagaram (lexicon), Nanool (work on Tamil grammar) and cinool (Small book on Grammar). The whole lesson is single- handedly conducted by the Kanakaiyer. The student whom learns and memorises quickly will be rewarded as the class leader and assists the teacher. The class leader is known as Sattampillai.

In the first phase of teaching and learning in Tinnai Pallikudam, the importance is only given to memorising. Students will memorise the moral principles without understanding their meaning. This set of learning is called as **rote learning** whereby the students are practised to repeat the learning as a routine without any comprehension. Hence the main focus of **Tinnai Pallikudam** is to learn, write down the alphabets and memorising. This teaching system is used due to the lack of the printing materials at those days.

School holidays for the students falls on Velluva (full moon day) and Kaaruva (new moon day). The second phase of teaching involves **self-learning**. Once completed with the rote learning students will seek for the teachers to teach them the meaning of what they have learnt previously. These teachers are known as Pulavars (Learned-Poets). In addition, the students also go to the Madalaiyam (centre place for learning) to learn grammar and literature. At Madalaiyam the high memory power of the students will be tested and the process is known as Avathanam.

Traditional Pedagogical Culture

This paper has look into the Tamil traditional pedagogical culture into three namely:
i) Olai-scribal culture
ii) Peripatetic bardic culture
iii) Thymesian culture

Olai-scribal culture

Ancient knowledge transmission was only by word of mouth. The process of writing begun when figures, decoration and different types of letters were inscribed on the stone, soil, sand or timeless material. In the course of time, they were easily attainable and substantial at the same time.

In traditional Tamil pedagogical culture, certain trees such as palm leaves and bamboo leaves were used in the process of documenting. Olai (palm leaf) plays a prominent role as a source of writing element. Whereas, scribal culture is the "textual evidence and material culture of reading and writing left behind by societies with a tradition of manuscript production" (Askin, 2018)[2]. In this article scribal culture refers specifically to olai-scribal knowledge in which the teaching and experiences passed on from generation to generation by using Olai.

Olai scribal culture treats knowledge as an authority system. It governs the use of resources, respect and an obligation to share. The teachers preserve the Olai and hand it over to the student. If the student excels he may copy the text from the Olai. This type of pedagogical culture helps in the transmission and the preservation of the knowledge across the generation.

Bardic culture

Bardic culture also serves as an important pedagogical culture in Tamilnadu. In this culture a group known as Paanar is involved in the knowledge transmission. The group consists of Isai Paanar- the singer, Yaal Paanar- the instrument player, and the third one Mandai Paanar- collects money from the audience. These information holders deliver the messages and knowledge of politics and religion through singing and dancing.

Thymesian culture

This paper defines the Thymesian culture of the Tamil people as the culture of committing vast amount of verses to memory. This type of pedagogy emphasizes the rote learning. The student required to memorize the whole text and tell to everyone by heart. Teacher listens and rectifies any mistake done by the student.

Teacher- Descent

They were two types of education system in the traditional teaching namely primary education and higher education. In primary education student learn from Kanakaiyer in Thinnai Pallikudam whereas in higher education the lesson is perceived form Vidvaan. Upon finishing primary education, the students seek for the Vidvaan whereby they were taught more into the comprehension part. Here the students are driven towards knowledge which leads them to more understanding and more skills. The student then progresses into writing poems.

The **teacher- descent** concept is widely known in traditional teaching. It was implemented until the 20th century in Tamilnadu. This concept demonstrates the subject proficiency possessed

by the teacher (Kingston Pal Thamburaj, 2015)[2]. This type of teacher masters the whole concept of the particular subject and has all the information in his/her fingertips through memorising. This high memory power built them to be well versed in particular subject. The teachers are capable of memorising and retaining each and every single line of the text. When needed, the information flows flawlessly. The student whom outshines in the class will gradually assist the teacher and become the next teacher. The process repeats itself as a cycle forming the teacher-descent concept.

Lady teachers - Avvaiyar: The Myth

This paper suggests that lady teachers in Thinnai Pallikudam during the old period might have known as Avvaiyar. The name Avvaiyar serves as a generic title rather than a specific name of a person. The history of Avvaiyar traces back since the Tamil Sanggam period. It is believed that they were more than four lady poets known to be Avvaiyar lived in the periods of Sanggam (AC 150-220), period of AC 9th-10th century, period of Cholan's Kingdom (AC 1071-1022) and during 14th century (Ayotidasappanditar, preface 1999)[4]. It was during the period of Cholan, Avvaiyar written the works of Aathichuudi, Konrai Vendan, Moothurai and Nalvali. The most interesting thing is she is the one who teach us the Tamil alphabet and she introduce the the alphabet Ai and Ou.

Aim of Traditional Teaching- Cultivate Moral Values

The education is said to be complete only when a person gains mental and moral development. Moral values are much needed "to inspire, propel, and equip the learners with adequate skills, awareness, and values" (Asif, 2020)[5]. Traditional teaching in Tamil tradition emphasizes the cultivation of moral values through the literature. Poems are considered to be a fit material to transmit the moral values. Athichuudi, Konrai Vendan, Moothurai and Nalvali are always kept as the first Tamil lesson for the kids in Thinnai Pallikudam. The teachers in Thinnai Pallikudam and Madalaiyam serve a pivotal role in grooming these moral values into the children. Each moral lesson highlights the good and evil nature that represents morality and immorality respectively. Poems in Aathichuudi, Konrai Vendan, Moothurai and Nalvali become as a part of the culture that accompanies with the child growth. The lesson taught on this, integrate the child into a group that shares knowledge, traditions, customs and literature.

As discussed previously, in Thinnai Pallikudam the moral education cultivated through poems was only meant to be memorized. During this period, **remedial reading** is focused on the poem so that the students will be able to read and pronounce each of the words correctly. Any learning disability of the student is skillfully overcome by the teachers. Thus, "remedial reading" is the best moral education when it is needed. After finishing Thinnai Pallikudam, the student goes to the Madalaiyam. There, the moral education was installed through comprehending the poems. The comprehension of the poems not only results in character building but also teach them to cherish the beauty in thought, word and deed from the poem. In the end, the traditional teaching creates a student who developed spiritually, socially, physically, emotionally, intellectually and morally. The students also will have a sense of belonging and responsibility towards the community.

Concept of moral Education and Pedagogy in Aathicuudi

This part in paper will be discussing historical background of Aathichudi, structural elements of the Aathichudi poems and moral education as described in Aathichudi.

Historical Background

Aathichudi is a moral code of conduct. Consisting of 109 aphorisms it covers all the four basics of life namely Aram, Porul, Inbam and Veedu (Moksha) (Mani, T.P., Murugan, C. 2010)[6]. The couplets not only bring sense to the physical and mental health but also lead to the righteous path. This particular work has been contributed by Avvaiyar who lived during Chola Dynasty. It is the most widely read work by Avvaiyar. The verses in Aathichudi are incorporated at such young age that even it can be clarified at any age due its language simplicity. The speciality of this work is along with the moral values it also introduces the young children to the Tamil alphabets. Each alphabet is emphasized through values of life. There are different versions of Aathichudi but so far only few have been recovered (Ayotidasappanditar, S.1999.p.18)[7]. Among them are uyir ezhutu version (follows 12 set of alphabets) and uyirmei ezhutu version (follows 18 sets of alphabets).

The structural elements of the poem

Aathichudi is a work full of phonological competence. Phonological competence is regarded as a core component in linguistic competence. Phonological competence refers to "the ability to recognize and produce the distinctive meaningful sounds of a language, including consonants, vowel tone patterns, intonation patterns, rhythm patterns and stress patterns (Flores, 1997),[8]. Most of the Aathichudi is in the form of Trisyllabic (having three syllables) and polysyllabic (having more than one syllable) (Varatha Raju, 2020)[9]. This means the poems are very short and simple. This form eases the comprehension of the Aathichudi. It supports the finding of Anderson (1993)[10] whom found, "syllable length of significant importance for the comprehensibility" (Raman Kutty, S. 2019)[11]. Analysis of sound effects in Aathichudi poems shows improved the phonological elements of the poetry. These poems have pleasant sound effects which were created by the words selection, rhyme, assonance and alliteration. The existence of syllabic words rhyming at the end of the lines creates pleasant musical effects. The poem is creating a pleasant musical effect in the mind thereby assisting the memory to memorise and understand easily.

Moral Education in Aathichudi

Avvaiyar has a broader outlook of education. In her Aathichudi, she has given importance on "when to get up, what is the opportune time and age for getting oneself educated, what company one should have and what one shall not learn. As a true educationist she preaches on listening and choosing the right preceptor" (Rajaram, preface to the English edition of Detailed Explanation to Aathichudi, p.20)[12]

Due to the vast ethical information Aathichudi is also known as ethical literature. All the 109 aphorisms brought under the following heads namely:

   i. General code of conduct
   ii. Communication
   iii. On virtue
   iv. On friendship
   v. Planning
   vi. Education and learning
   vii. Agriculture

Avvaiyar stresses learning into two kinds. The former is the education that helps to get basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter and social meetings. The later is emphasized on virtue, wealth, happiness, bliss and the means to attain the supreme life (Nadarajan Thambu, 2020)[13].

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