

Contribution of Tamil Literature to Moral Education

Parvathi Vellachami¹ & M. Rajantheran²

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to show the importance of Indian Literature in Moral Education. It plays an important role in building and instilling positive values among secondary students. Moral education is a combination of literacy and moral values. Students need to have the mental, physical, moral and emotional capacity for the betterment of the society at large. It will be a great achievement if every individual is a worthy person. Story and novels are modes to communicate character and background events, which is an effective way to nurture students and instill moral values among readers. Readers will be able to appreciate the values, and it will be forever in their minds. It should be noted, educated or not a reader should be able to appreciate moral values that he or she has read, and the end effect is that it should revitalize their souls. As humans we naturally use values to guide us in our daily actions.

Keywords: Behavior, Moral education, Moral value, Literature, Secondary schools, *Silappathikaram*

Introduction

In making Malaysia a more developed, prosperous, dynamic, progressive and a modern society, moral education plays a vital role in building and instilling positive values. As Malaysia positions itself in becoming a more developed nation, it is essential that positive values are instilled in future leaders. Moral education is another tool for Malaysia in achieving Vision 2020. When we take a look at progress of a country, it involves many aspects. The two main aspects which we will look at today is economic or material and secondly, the values supported by the community. These include moral values, social, spiritual, psychological and cultural practices which are the corner stones in constructing a more independent, civilized and dignified nation. In this context, education plays an important role. The National Education Policy implemented by the government is an effort to solve unity problems. Here,

¹ Currently teaching at a school. Completed Master's in Tamil literature. Preparing to pursue a Ph.D, at University of Malaya, Malaysia. vathi_dga29@yahoo.com

² Dr M. Rajantheran is a Professor in Indian Studies, Department of Indian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Science, University of Malaya (Malaysia). His area of expertise includes Indian Civilization, Early Cultural Relations between India and Southeast Asia, Indian Epics and Culture and Life of The Malaysian Indians. Prof Rajantheran has published fifteen books, A Tamil-Tamil-Malay-English Dictionary (forth reprint), chapters in books, journal articles, conference proceeding and has presented papers at several international conferences worldwide. Email: rajanmun@um.edu.my & rajantheran@gmail.com

the role of Moral Education comes to play as the values helps various communities in achieving their ambition and aspirations (Noorsiah Sabri, 1998:3).

The National Education Policy concluded that its main goal in education is continuous effort to produce citizens who have a good personality, balanced and integrated in terms of intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical. Moral Education syllabus outlines the objectives to educate students by emphasizing the development of moral thinking, feeling and behavior (Curriculum Development Center Ministry of Education Malaysia 1998:1). Moral Education emphasizes on seven areas of learning to enable students to understand, appreciate and practice the principles. In addition, to the spiritual and humanitarian aspects, the learning of Moral Education also stresses on social and cultural values.

By appreciating values through the education process it can produce a morally good society, willing to face challenges and the ability to resolve conflict and crisis (Hutcheon, P.D. 1972: 172-187). Moral values are a basis in shaping human development which will result in acceptance for change and modernization. Responsibility, character, good behavior and moral virtues can be carved through the understanding and application of moral values. It will not only lead one to a better life but it will also help Malaysia in curbing the rising social ills and dilemmas faces by individual and society at large.

Fostering and appreciating moral values it can enhance ones thinking, nourish emotions and develop individual behavior based on moral reasoning (Frankeana, W.K. 1973:2). It should be noted that Moral Education Syllabus 1992, recommended that teaching and learning should be based on issues and situations. This is because problems related to moral issues and situation requires rational consideration before a decision can be taken.

According to G.H Mukherjee, moral values are the basis to build prosperous individuals and communities free from social ills and moral crisis (1998:1). The decadence in moral values has resulted in various moral problems in the society today. In the pursuit of progress and change, the communities today are misguided and take wayward directions. The society today should step up and uphold values to avoid social and moral decline which plagues many. Spiritual values should be nurtured to make one more resilient and avoid negative elements among students. Education should play a positive role as a social mechanism in instilling moral values, morality, spirituality and values of good behavior so that students upholds the values for their well being. The curriculum of Moral Education in schools should pay attention to the aspects of emotion among students. (Mukherjee, G.H, et.all. 1992:18).

As we evaluate the objectives of teaching Moral Education it is clearly seen that it emphasizes on cultivating moral reasoning, emotions and behavior. The syllabus states that students must learn to make moral judgments and that they need a code of standards and values, to be used as basis of their moral reasoning (Grassian, V. 1981:2).

Literature related to the specific characteristics of a nation or a group of people. Through classic literature authors are able to convey messages and information to readers Nyana Sambantan (1999) Students on the other hand, will be able to visualize what they have read and understood. They may be able to enjoy the passionate works

of a classical author. For this reasons, classical literature should be incorporated and emphasized in the teachings of Moral Education in secondary schools.

Moral values can be instilled through classical literature. In classical literature, values can be appreciated through the indirect nature of the text. This kind of writing motivates students to understand, appreciate and recognize the problems or ideas from the given character and events. (Kamarudin Hj. Husin (1994: 36). Classical literature cultivates moral values among Malaysians in accordance to religion, traditions, customs and beliefs of various ethnic groups in the country.

In Malaysia, Moral Education is taught as passive subjects. This is because in secondary schools students are taught to memorize the definitions of each value in order to get marks in examinations. The teachers who teach in secondary schools are not concerned on methods to diversify their teaching. This is one of the reasons, why Moral Education is becoming passive subjects in schools. Most of the teachers teaching moral education actually do not major in the particular subject. Passive teaching lacks motivation and therefore students are unable to fully comprehend moral values.

The process of teaching and learning which incorporates classic literature, it will help create awareness among students and such good values can be applied in daily life. Classical Literature taps the external sense of students which is the faculties of sight, hearing, touch and this will encourage students in a holistic manner. Teaching becomes active when a student plays out a role of a character, read and understood from a classic literature reading. This method can reduce boredom among students in classrooms. Therefore the values of Moral Education will reach students effectively (Abdul Rahim Abd Rashid (1993: 31).

Recently, the emphasis is on emotional intelligence in education but, teaching based on appreciation of emotional intelligence seems to be less effective and outdated. Feelings and emotions such as crying, sadness fear and laughter shapes attitudes and personality of mankind (Kupperman, J.L. 1983:52). Individuals who have high levels of emotional intelligence are an individual who can control their own feelings and acts. This individuals will be resilient in achieving their goals in life, will be able to manage negative feelings and they will make friends easily (Goleman, D. 1995). By integrating elements of classic literature it will be embedded in the minds of the young and the end result will be the excitation of positive emotions among students. Events in a literary character or role will initiate students to be more aware to explore study and value the subjects that are presented in human forms.

In general, studies on emotional intelligence are common in western countries. Here in Malaysia there is less emphasis on this field. It is clear integrating classical literature can enrich the emotional intelligence of students through the learning's of Moral Education. Inculcation of moral values should be applied in appropriate manners. It is important to know that Secondary School Moral Education syllabus also emphasizes the moral dimension of thinking, feeling and action to create comprehensive human beings.

There is a disregard in the importance of application of moral values in the school curriculum here in Malaysia (Curriculum Development Center, 1998:1). There is an assumption which exists that teachers will indirectly teach a so call hidden curriculum, which promotes values and certain interpersonal and intrapersonal

skills to students. However there are several subjects which meet to certain extent the development of values such as Islamic Education and Moral Education in Malaysia.

The question arises whether students actually appreciate the moral values which are stressed to them? It is a norm that youths today lead a temporary form of friendship and it pertains to fun and entertainment only. Students now days, lack the sense of sacrifice and cooperation to do good for the community that they live in. They also do not understand the meaning and value of a real friendship (B. Vishalache, 2011: 204-205). This is due to the influence of western culture and values which is based on hedonism, freedom and self centeredness.

The social skills refer to skills to forge friendships and relationships with others which include communication and negotiation skills. There are some teenagers who fail to interact with society which leads them to self-isolation (Rokeach, 1973:10). The failure of an individual to maintain general communication is due to low self esteem and low self confidence. Teenagers who do not have a good personality and displays bad habits are considered to be impolite.

By inculcating moral values to students through classic literature is an effective learning method than the traditional one (chalk and talk). Classic literature such as *Silppathikaram* can improve student's interpersonal and intrapersonal skills through the example of events. This is coherent with the theory of John Wilson who is concerned of the welfare of others (Wilson J, 1972: 19-20). Active learning using simultaneous examples in classic literature can instill positive behavior.

In Malaysia, social and emotional learning are taught indirectly and not as a subject itself. It does not have a direct role in the school curriculums. When we look at the Malaysian society a student is measured by the number of 'A' grades that are obtained in their examinations. This is why Malaysia's education system is said to be exam orientated and that the public measures ones success through public examination certificates. There must be a revamp in the school education system and maybe it can take into suggestion that Moral Education can play a role in developing interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and good values among students.

Malaysians are often defined as a society with diverse culture and religion. It said to be that Malaysians have a high standard of moral values. All religions teaches us positive values such as good moral, ethics, respect, human and environmental preservation. If people embrace good values, they will be more civilized and be able to lead peaceful lives within themselves and also with the community at large. Moral values are an indirect catalyst towards transforming individuals with integrity and good values (Fatimi binti Hanafi, 2006: 24-30).

In this modern age that we live in, some high school students do not recognize the concepts and elements of religion. Some of them would have never have heard the word karma in their lives. Most of them do not understand the meaning of karma. What is karma? Karma is derived from a Sanskrit word which refers to the principle of causality where intent or actions of an individual influence the future of that individual. Students are rarely taught by stories associated with these elements. There should be an emphasis on faith through Moral Education for improving self development among students. Students should be exposed to the laws of karma and elements recommended in every religion. These elements are emphasized in classic literature and it can broaden and sharpen a student's mindset.

Moral values through classic literature can increase student's intellectual intelligence. Reasoning and problem solving skills can enhance student's critical and creative thinking. Thus, it will develop students self esteem and they may enjoy a good and prosperous life. The theory of Kohlberg, Jean Piaget and Wilson emphasize cognitive development among students. In this method, teachers will be able to develop student's cognition and they may be able to measure how far the students have developed. Cognitive development helps facilitate the process of an effective teaching and learning process (Lovell, K. 1968 :109).

Methodology

Research methods are structured ways to obtain information before using that information for subsequent evaluation. Usually research is divided into two methods which are qualitative and quantitative research (Lawrence Neuman, 2000:122). The current study which we are looking at, is based on *Sillappathikaram* which is an epic poem. This text is examined because *sillappathikaram* is a narrative text with moralistic undertones. This study is based on written sources that are already published. Hermeneutics is the theory of text interpretation. Here we take a look at the interpretation of classic literature. This research is more towards qualitative research, in aim of gathering an in-depth understanding of moral values in classical literature and how it affects student's behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior. This study is suitable for observational studies and questionnaire content. As a literary work, *Sillappathikaram* is held high in regards to literary innovations. Researchers should investigate and make every effort to carry out the purpose and spirit of *Sillappathikaram* (Jeganaathan, 1998:3).

The first method involves the researcher to identify valuable information by referring to a character or event from the classical literature text. Then, researchers should decide which moral values are compatible with the curriculum in Moral Education. In this case at hand, researchers can choose a value such as responsibility which relates to Self Development. Next, researchers can identify the value of a character or event and they must be able to highlight the values derived from the character.

Through analyst a researcher can see that *Sillappathikaram* is compatible with the first area we discussed earlier which is self development. By analyzing a researcher will see three other areas of learning and it can be documented as materials for research purpose. Next a researcher should detail out the values or events in each character. After collecting relevant data a researcher should analyze and interpret the moral values for further reporting. Next, the researcher should table his findings on how moral values in *Sillappathikaram* is compatible with Moral Education and the necessary recommendations on how to incorporate classical literature to fit the curriculums in schools especially Moral Education.

Findings

Literature teaches us to be positive and have visions in life to succeed in our undertakings (Ee Ah Meng, 1998:35). To be truly educated and a worldly person, you also must gain an appreciation and a sense of culture. Therefore, reading classic literature can help you to achieve this status and to be a person who is open-minded,

positive and optimistic to any approaches. Classical literature truly has great advantages and offers you a more inquiring mind and these qualities will enable one to overcome obstacles especially if one is willing to work hard and be responsible.

Literature teaches us to understand ourselves better, about our background and roots. It is important to discover oneself by looking back at the past so that we will be more equipped for the future (Keith, AK: 1925:571). Life is a journey and it is important to identify ourselves from the society we come from. Literature clearly depicts custom and traditions which are close to hearts. When students “engage” in classical literature they are challenged they are inspired and they learn important lessons about the world and their place in it and most importantly they learn about humanity, custom and cultural practices through their forefathers. Understanding the past does, we hope, prevent us from repeating the mistake of our predecessors but, more than that, it helps us appreciate how attitudes change over time. This in turn promotes a deeper understanding of why we are and who we are today. It broadens our minds.

In another perspective literature teaches us to deal with situations rationally and with great understanding (Naryana Velu Pillai, 1999:213-214). We have to face reality in life. Literature teaches one to be confident for life is full of ups and down. There are times we climb mountains and there are times when the pasture is green that in reality is life. Thus it is important to be realistic and practical. We need to be matured and head strong to face every challenge in life.

Literature also teaches students to uphold and appreciate rich traditions and cultures of a society (Dikshtiar, VRR. 1936:26). Cultural practices is generally regarded as traditional and customary practices of a particular ethnic or cultural group. These cultures have been practiced since ancient times and one should not be judgmental about the differences in other cultures. We live in a multicultural society. Cultural practices of Malaysians and people around the world can be distinguished from one to another (Subramaniam, R. 2007: 28). Malaysia is diversified with cultural practice because of that we can visit various cultures through classical literature which is impossible to experience by ourselves. Here we are able to enjoy the sense of heritage gained from classical literature.

We are also able to learn the value of family through literature. Families play an important role in preserving traditions and inculcating positive values. Parents play an important role of shaping an individual to be a member of a society.

We can learn values and virtues through literature. Values such as doing what is right, generosity, tolerance, empathy, responsibility, humble, honest, trustworthy, independent and self-reliant are important in life for these values and virtues shapes one in becoming better individuals.

Laws of Karma and Rebirth are one of the important things discussed in *Sillapathikaram*. Understanding what karma is and what is rebirth can help students make better decisions to solve problems in their lives. One of the essences in this text is that one should not be jealous, discouraged and envious of others. This is because all the sufferings or happiness is a result of our own karma (Rajantharan, M. 2001:50). By understanding spiritual values and how it relates to karma, an individual will be more tolerant, have perseverance and will be a goal orientated person. Karma will make one able to see reasons of failure. What we call “bad luck” is a form of

"debt" in karma. If we can comprehend the concept of karma, life will become more meaningful and easy.

Moral values is causal to spirituality (Anastasi, A.1958:197-208). Empathy on the other hand, is the capability and action to understand and be sensitive to peoples feelings, thoughts and experiences. In a way, empathy is what makes us human and able to have social interactions. Lack of empathy is often equal of being cruel. Integration of classic literature through Moral Education helps students emulate compassion and tolerance.

Malaysia is a multi-racial society therefore it is extremely important that cultural values be centered on positive values and beliefs. Any form of teaching which involves behavior changes or formation of values and beliefs is actually the meaning of education itself (Robert S. Lynd, 1939:229-230). This is consistent with the teachings of classic literature which emphasizes on the cultivation and appreciation of values.

In the past, when the subject of attitude is raised its not associated with psychology even though extensive research has be done on it. Prominent psychologist Gordon Allport once described attitudes "the most distinctive and indispensable concept in contemporary social psychology". Attitude can be formed by a person past or present. Attitude is also measurable an influences a person behavior.

The theory of human behavior stress state that behavior is a result of learning because people are treated like machines and human minds are empty. We must be aware that it is the result of human brain that one develops behavior. Theories are formed to examine how a human mind plays a role? Following this, the study of human brains and behavior is conducted. According to Armstrong 1993, schools can play an important role in the development of mathematical thinking of a higher level. Therefore teacher should have the knowledge of moral reasoning in advance before they prepare their lessons for an effective learning among students.

According to Piaget, J, 1961, the domain of cognitive and intellectual development of students impacts student's emotion through perception, learning and memory (275-281). Ethics and cognitive development theory by Perry (1970) found that student's emotions are influenced by personal values and commitment. Kohlberg explains that cognitive development can lead to progress in problem solving and moral choice. He goes on to say ,that moral reasoning are not the only factors that drive moral behavior but its important to note that, it's the most important factor that was investigated, and it has proven ability to improve moral behavior. Kohlberg goes on to say, how individuals can behave morally if he or she does not understand why he should do so?

Kohlberg recognizes that moral education has no basis in stimulating active thinking when a human makes a decision related to moral issues. The technique used in this approach is that stories contain moral dilemmas. Moral dilemmas that are discussed are social, cultural, community and it commands authority in classic literature (Kohlberg, L, 1975:670-675).

According to Zielar, 1990 a teacher who submitted moral dilemma is to find reasons instead of finding answers. When we look at various studies by Rest 1974, Nisan & Kohlberg 1982, Walker & Thomas, 1991) it can be concluded that an effective discussion of moral dilemmas can broaden student's ability to form moral reasoning in classrooms.

Lastly, theory on development can be a guiding stone for teachers measuring the progress of students experienced at various stages. Cognitive development on the other hand, is influenced by many factors such as heredity, environmental, food, intelligence and so on. It is vital that students in secondary schools learn classical literature through moral education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, teaching and learning environment will bring out fundamental moral values especially through classic literature. With extensive research, we must find ways to appropriately integrate our findings in school curriculums, especially in Moral Education. It is undeniable that moral values can shape an individual. If we lay the basis an understanding of fundamental values in schools, students hopefully will bring this virtues with them and contribute to a better society built on justice, responsibility, generosity, tolerance, empathy, solidarity, all humans are equal value , critical thinking and democracy. Therefore the values in literature should be incorporated in the National Education system because a good education is nothing without strong moral values.

Bibliography

- Abd. Rahim Abd. Rashid. 1993. *Pendidikan Nilai Merentasi Kurikulum*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Anastasi, A. (1958). *Heredity, Environment and The Question "how"?* *Psychological Review*, 65.
- Curriculum Development Centre, Ministry of Education, Malaysia. 1988. *School Syllabus: Moral Education*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Dikshitar, V.R.R. 1936. *Studies in Tamil Literature and History*. Madras: University of Madras.
- Ee Ah Meng, 1988. *Moral Education for Teachers*. Petaling Jaya: Longman Sdn. Bhd.
- Frankeana, W. K. (1973). *Ethics*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Grassian, V. (1981). *Moral Reasoning: Ethical Theory and Some Contemporary Moral Problems*. Englewood. Cliffs, N. J: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Kamarudin Hj. Husin & Kamarul Azhar. 1994. "Asas Pendidikan II", *Perkembangan Dan Pelaksanaan Kurikulum*. Selangor: Longman Malaysia Sdn. Bhd.
- Keth, A. K. 1925. *The Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Kohlberg, L. (1975). *The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education*. *Phil Delta Kappan* LVI (10): 670 677.
- Kohlberg, L. (1975). *The Just Community Approach to Corrections: A Theory Journal of Moral Education*, 4(3), 243-260.
- Kupperman, J. L. (1983). *The Fundamentals of Morality*. London: George Allen and Unwin.

- Lovell, K. (1968). *An Introduction to Human Development*. Glenview: Foresman and Company.
- Mukherjee, G. H. (1981). *Moral Values: Some Theoretical and Practical Issues Within the Context of Malaysian Education, Negara*, June. Vol. 5. No.1.
- Mukherjee, H. et.al. (1992). *Moral Teaching Strategies*. Petaling Jaya: Penerbit Fajar Bakti Sdn. Bhd.
- Narayana Velu Pillai, M. 1999. *The Five Classics Of Tamil*. Chennai: Paari Putaka Pannai.
- Nyanasambanthan, A. S. 1999. *Ilakkiyak Kalai*. Chennai: Thirunelveli, Tenninthy Saiva Sitthantha Nurpathippuk Kalakam Ltd.
- Rajantheran, M. Disember 2001. *Amalan Kultus Devaraja Di Asia Tenggara: Jati Jurnal Jabatan Pengajian Asia Tenggara*, Vol 6 (50).
- Rest, J. et al. (1974). *Judging The Important Issues in Moral Dilemmas - An Objective Measure Of Development*. *Developmental Psychology*, 10(4), 491-501.
- Robert S. Lynd. (1939). *Knowledge for What?* New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Rokeach, M. (1973). *The Nature Of Human Values*. New York: The Free Press.
- Vishalache, B. (2011). *Real-Life Dilemmas in Moral Education*. Kuala Lumpur: University Malaya.
- Walker, L. J. & Thomas, J. (1991). *Moral Reasoning in a Communist Chinese Society*. *Journal of Moral Education*, 20(2),139-155.