

## **Status of Children's Literature in Malayalam Literary History**

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### **Abstract**

Way back in 1867 Sri. Kerala Varma formed a Text Book Committee. In 1868, when he became its president, the very first endeavor he embarked upon was to scientifically design and develop books for children, based on their age and knowledge. This paper presents a short history of Children's Literature in Malayalam and discusses the current status of creative writing relating to children's literature in Malayalam. While other sections of literature were given in-depth coverage in standard books of literary history written by eminent scholars and writers, children's literature was given very nominal importance, no more than 5-10 pages. This clearly indicates how much importance was given to Children's Literature by those authors in Malayalam.

**Key words:** Malayalam literature, children's literature, themes of children literature.

### **Children's Literature - Sri. Kerala Varma in 1868**

Today literary history recognizes and marks new trends and themes in literature day by day. However, there is one field in Malayalam Literature that barely receives any recognition or attention – the Children's Literature. Way back in 1867 Sri. Kerala Varma formed a Text Book Committee. In 1868, when he became its president, the very first endeavor he embarked upon was to scientifically design and develop books for children, based on their age and knowledge. Apart from Malayala Padavali, he prepared other books on subjects like Mathematics, History, Geography, Health Science, Economics, and Moral Studies, etc. Among the Moral Studies books, 'Sanmarga Samgraham', 'Sanmarga Pradeepam', and 'Mahacharitha Samgraham' are prominent ones.

Thereafter, a few books like 'Bala Bhooshanam' by Vaikath Pachu Moothathu (1868) and 'Aesop Stories' by T.C. Kalyani Amma (1897) also appeared exclusively for children. It is unquestionable that these authors were clearly aware of the importance of Children's

Literature. Initial publications in the history of Malayalam children's literature like 'Anchadi' by Kannipparambathu, 'Panchathanthram Kilippattu' by Kunjan Nambiar, 'Cherupaithangalkku Upakarartham' (1824, Kottayam), 'Padaarambham', Paadamala by Dr. Herman Gundert, etc., also had the unique object of children's literature.

### **Value-Oriented Literature**

The fundamental aim of all these publications was to inculcate values like honesty, morality, justice, kindness, love and affection, care, compassion, etc. among the kids. Books like 'Balaramayanam' and 'Deepavali' were the results of the realization about the value of kids felt by poets like Kumaranasan and Ulloor S Parameswarayyar. This list grows as we include contributions like 'Kunnimanik'al by Vailoppillil Sreedharamenon, 'Balamritham' by P. Kunjiraman Nair, 'Olappeeppi' by G. Snakarakkurup, 'Oru Kula Munthiringa' by Akkitham Achuthan Namboothiri, 'Omanappaithal' by Pala Narayanan Nair, Poems by Kunjunni, 'Valappottkal' by O.N.V. Kurup, etc.

However, while comparing these very same authors' contribution to other sections of literature, their contribution to children's literature is found to be very minimal. Writers like Sippi Pallipuram, Muhamma Ramanan, G. Sankarakurup, Sumangala, Mali, Uroob, Kunjunni, and Narendranath made noteworthy contributions to this section. G. Sankarakurup is a notable author in children's drama writing. Besides them, writers like Thikkodiyam, Kainikkara Kumarapillai, Thayattu Shankaran, and Akkitham Achuthan Namboothiri have also contributed considerably.

### **Science Literature**

Science Literature is the only one section that has been relatively well developed in the Children's Literature. Some authors have really provided necessary information in areas like History, Biography, Science, Mathematics, Language, Grammar, Thesaurus, etc. Authors like K. Paramu Pillai, Nandyarveetil Parameswaran Pillai, C.P. Govinda Pillai, R. Narayana Panikker, Joseph Immatty Mathew, Moorkothu Kumaran, O.M. Cheriyan, S. Sivadas, Velayudan Panikkassery, and Pala K.M. Mathew have enriched this area. Balakairali Vinjanakosahm published by Kerala Bala Sahithya Institute is a unique publication in this regard.

### **Children's Literature in the History of Literature**

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In the history of Malayalam Literature, the very first reference of children's literature is seen in N. Krishna Pillai's 'Kairaliyude Katha' (1958). While thinking about the absence of children's literature in the history of literature, his comment appears notable. He said, "when thinking of absence of something, the first point comes to mind is the absence of children's literature. What, don't we have children's literature? Yes, we have. One list of 125 books published by Balan Publications, and another list of 400 books rest on my table, while I am writing this. Some of them are truly praiseworthy. But, we haven't scientifically devised our efforts based on the educational principles derived out of children's nature. Based on the subtle knowledge of kid's tastes and a clear understanding of comprehending capacity, imagination level, and creativeness expressed by kids at different ages, comprehensive plans need to be prepared by educationists and authors, if we are to produce sufficient books for the requirements of lakhs and lakhs children." Though he was bothered about such a scenario, it is difficult to digest the fact that he has included nothing new about Children's Literature when he published the revised edition of 'Kairaliyude Katha' in 1975.

Some indications about the actual status of children's literature are seen in books like 'Malayala Sahithya Charithram – Kalagattanalilloode' by Erumeli Parameswaran Pillai (1996), 'Adhunika Malayala Sahithya Charithram – Prasthanangalilloode' Gen. Edi. by Dr. K. M. George (1998), and 'Sampoornna Malayala Sahithyacharithram' by Prof. Panmana Ramachandran Nair (2008). Among them, this issue was properly handled only in Dr. K. M. George's work. It is also to be noted that there is no specific reference about Children's Poetry in Dr. M. Leelavathi's 'Kavitha Sahithya Charithram'.

While other sections of literature were given in-depth coverage in those previously referred to books of literary history, children's literature was given very nominal importance, no more than 5-10 pages. This clearly indicates how much importance was given to Children's Literature by those authors.

### **Seminars on Children's Literature**

It is doubtful whether any seminars or symposia or debates or workshops were organized on this theme. The Kerala Balasahithya Institute published two books, one in Malayalam titled 'Enthanu Kuttikalude Sahithyam' and the second one in English titled 'What is Children's Literature,' after compiling the papers presented in Seminars organized in Thiruvananthapuram in the year 1981, in Pala in 1982 and again in Thiruvananthapuram

in 1993. ‘Balasahithaym: Thathavum Charithravum’ which was published in 1995 as a book, is a paper presented in the seminar at Thiruvananthapuram in 1993. As these were only papers presented in seminars on diverse subjects, these publications do not throw much light on the history of Children’s Literature. Added to this limitation, we have to agree with the fact that Children’s Literature does not have a book-length literary history of its own.

Some information about the history of Children’s Literature is available in K.V. Ramanathan’s ‘Balasahithyam – Ulbhavavum Valarchyum Malayalthail’, which was published by Kerala Sahithya Academy in 1997. However, this book merely gives brief introduction of each work. Anyhow, works like ‘Balasahithaythinte Udayavikasangal’ by Gopi Puthukkod (2010) and ‘Balasahithyam Malayalathil’ by Prabhakaran Pazhassi (2013) provide relatively sound information in this regard and partially reduces the ignorance in this area.

### **Lack of Research**

No notable seminar or symposium was organized on this topic after 1993. Similar picture is visible in the area of research also. The total number of research theses related to this topic available in all the universities of Kerala would be less than ten. This is also indicative of how our academicians and writers take this subject.

Accordingly, though our Children’s Literature has a history of one and a half century, there are very few Children’s libraries. There is neither Children’s’ Literature book index; nor Children’s’ Literature directory, nor a complete history of Children’s’ Literature is available. Similarly we hardly have any children’s cinema or scientifically designed children’s encyclopedia. We neither do have style books nor have any permanent arrangements for training of genius kids. Amidst these limitations, our Children’s Literature is expected to grow and develop.

Presenting the following suggestions for the hopeful growth of Children’s Literature, I conclude this paper.

### **Suggestions:**

1. Similar to other streams of literature, new trends need to be developed in Children’s Literature. For this, seminars, symposia, etc., should be organized in this area.

2. While writing itself becomes a problem of concern for life, its value will be subjected to questioning. Hence, it is necessary to acknowledge the needs of children.
3. Writing literature according to the aptitudes of children is not widely practiced. Such works must be nurtured in relation to the growth of science and technology.
4. Works meant for knowledge and information dissemination should be prepared in such a way children enjoy reading literature meant for them. The books should carry the information in a simple way to kids.
5. It is necessary to avoid treating Children's Literature as inferior literature.
6. It is also required to encourage research in this area and bring about new discoveries and promote significance of Children's Literature.
7. Income and fame are two basic factors in any area. In order to attract new writers, more emphasis should be given to these factors when dealing with Children's Literature.

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