



Insights into Childhood from a Tamil Tradition

Selected Verses from Periazhwar Thiru Mozhi

Lakshmi Gopal

Edited by : Indu Balagopal

Illustrations : K. Muralidharan

Bala Mandir Research Foundation

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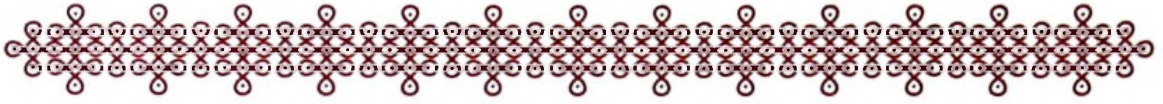
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Foreword

The author has travelled several centuries back in time to find this appealing Tamil classic, which is a veritable paean to infancy and early childhood. It is the poet *Periazhwar's* visualisation of the divine child, Krishna. The song of devotion, *Periazhwar Thiru Mozhi* is a literary treasure chest, from which a few selected verses have been presented here. The poems are steeped in religious fervour. Adoration forms the thread of the entire text. When divinity comes in the form of a child, the poet becomes a doting parent.

It is noteworthy that the early stages in the child's life are depicted with a fine sense of detail. The various stages of development and the child's interactions in the community have been observed and documented meticulously. The oil massage and the warm bath, the feeding of the baby, as he is carried on the mother's hip, the birds in the village as companions to the growing child, the lullaby sung at nightfall and the stories of heroism told to the child – all these are a part of the child's experiences. Some of these practices seem to have been handed down through the generations in an unbroken tradition, right to the present.

The eminent scholar, poet and linguist A.K. Ramanujan once said that no one in India hears the Ramayana for the first time! One could say the same about the stories of the mischief, the feats and the miracles of Krishna, which are woven into music, dance and legend all over the country. The episodes are not new, but the telling is different each time.

Bala Mandir Research Foundation is happy to launch the first of the "Culture Series" with this compilation of Tamil religious poetry, by Lakshmi Gopal, who has shown an admirable literary initiative in the selection and translation of the verses. Credit for the designing of this book goes to Indu Balagopal. The preliminary suggestions for the illustrations in this publication were made by Ghovi, a well known artist in Chennai. Muralidharan took on the execution of the drawings and their exquisite colouring.

We are proud to present this work to a discerning public.

S. Anandalakshmy

President, Bala Mandir Research Foundation
Chennai - 2010







Periazhwar Thiru Mozhi

This study presents an eighth century work in Tamil known as *Divya Prabandam*, written by *Vishnu Chithan*, also known as Periazhwar. This book refers to *Periazhwar Thiru Mozhi*, which forms part of the larger work, *Divya Prabandam*.

In his intense devotion to Lord Krishna, Periazhwar imagined himself to be the caring mother. In the nine forms of *Bhakthi*, *Vatsalyam* (parental feeling) is one, and this work typifies that form of *Bhakthi* or devotion.

Nurturing was done with deep concern, care and love. The saint poet realised the importance of the various stages of growth, and highlighted the inputs required at each stage of infancy, to ensure a happy and healthy childhood. Periazhwar has divided the early childhood years into different stages based on the developmental characteristics of each stage.

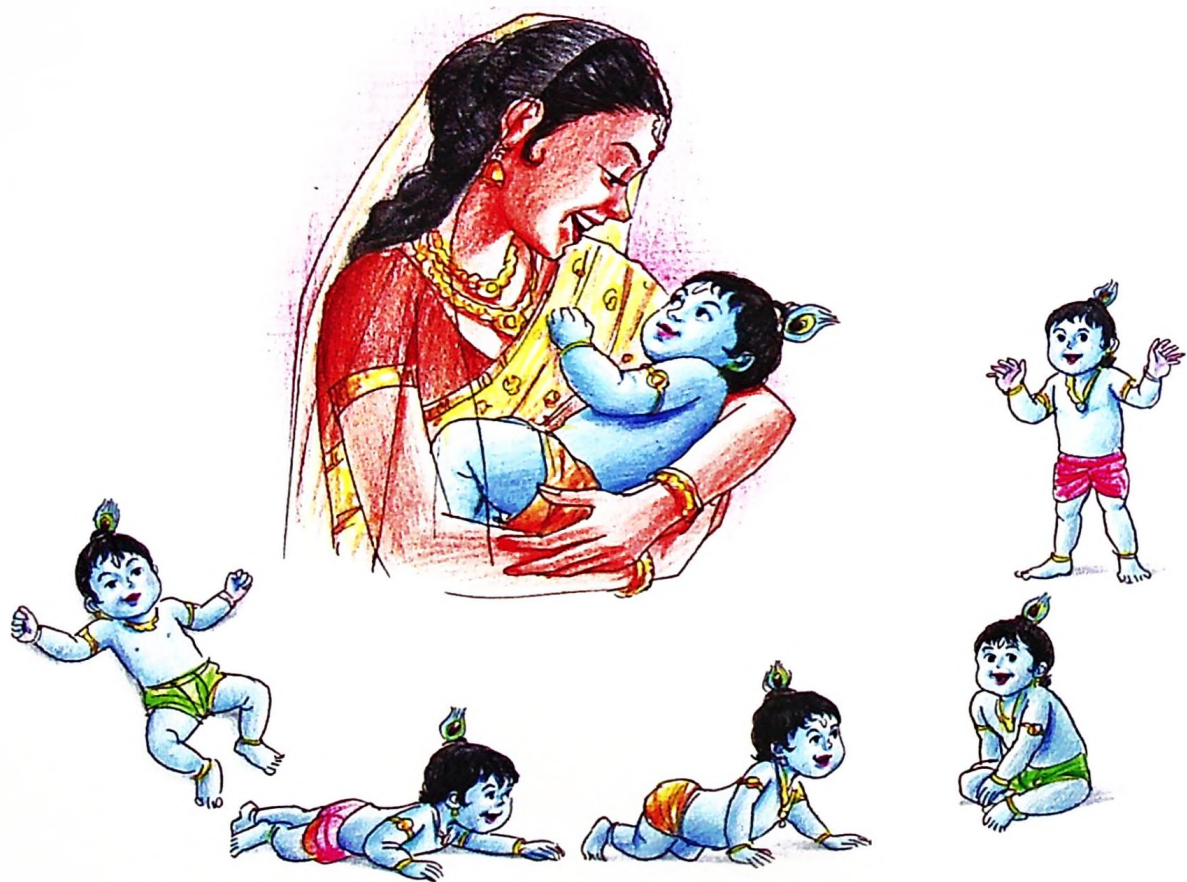
These stages were later elaborated by Tamil scholars and led to the development of the genre of literature, known as *Pillai Tamizh* which is a rich cultural legacy of South India, dating back to the 12th century. *Vishnu Chithan* was the forerunner of *Pillai Thamizh*. He was an ardent devotee, who, with the vision of God, sang "*Pallandu Pallandu*" in ecstasy. Learned *Vaishnavites* conferred the title of "Periazhwar" on him. He prayed that the grace of Lord Vishnu should be with future generations for thousands of years.

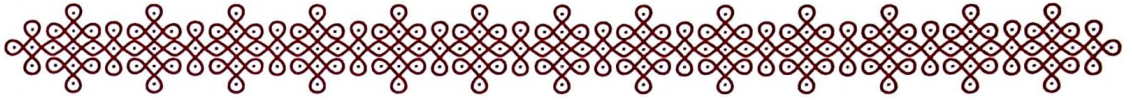
In his own life, he was chosen for special grace by the Lord, when he found a baby girl in his *thulasi* garden. He brought up the girl, as his daughter, called her Kothai, and she grew up as an ardent devotee of Lord Ranganatha. Kothai, also known as Andal, composed the verses known as *Thiruppavai*.

Periazhwar imagined the Lord to be a little child, to be adored and nurtured. He describes in great detail, the various stages of the life of the child: listening to lullabies, crawling, clapping hands, playing hide and seek, seeing the moon, being breast-fed and getting groomed. Its relevance in our time has been hidden due to its treatment as a religious document of praise and adoration to the Lord. However, a study of the *Periazhwar Thiru Mozhi* helps us to understand its practical significance. We find many parallels between Periazhwar's ideas and current scientific material pertaining to stages in child development.

However, since the verses spring from faith and inspiration, the poet does not adhere to a chronological tracing of the infant's development.







Given below are the stages described by Periazhwar in his *Thiru Mozhi*.

<i>Thala paruvam</i>	: Listening to lullabies
<i>Chenkeerai paruvam</i>	: Crawling
<i>Chappani</i>	: Clapping of hands
<i>Thalarnadai</i>	: Walking
<i>Achoparuvam</i>	: Pretend games
<i>Ambuli paruvam</i>	: Seeing and calling the moon
<i>Puram pulgal</i>	: Hugging from behind
<i>Mulaiunna Azhaitthal</i>	: Being called to feed at the breast

Periazhwar deals with the various aspects of growth and development of the child through his beloved Lord Krishna. Child rearing was shared by the father, others in the family and the community. The importance of the father's role is seen in a number of verses. Everyone in the community is depicted in participating in providing abundant love and warmth, and teaching the child activities to enhance his physical and mental as well as psychosocial development. Values are taught by elders. The verses are written as if they are spoken to Yashoda, the foster mother of the Divine Child, thus bringing out the aspect of parenting by anyone in the child's environment.

In this study, the focus has been on the works of Periazhwar dealing with the growth of the child in the early years. His age-wise delineation of childhood was centuries ahead of the formal discipline of Child Development in the twentieth century. Given here are the stages where Periazhwar portrays Yashoda enjoying the parenting of baby Krishna. We can see how the play activities and the child's antics are depicted appropriately for each stage.

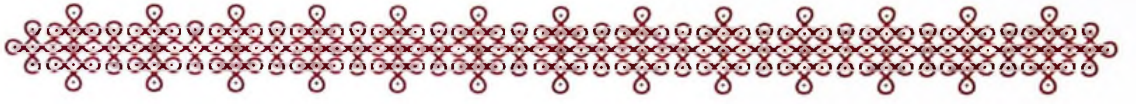
The parallels between modern day parenting with reference to the '**Hincks-Dellcrest Learning Through Play**' calendar, and traditional child rearing, have been drawn.

I am grateful to Prof. Jagannadhachariar, who gave of his valuable time to this study.

Lakshmi Gopal







Selected Verses from Periazhwar Thiru Mozhi of Periazhwar

The verses from the text “Periazhwar Thiru Moozhi” are known as “Pasurams”
Comparison of the present day scientific methods are given in a box for each stage

9







Protection - Kappu - Pasuram 1-12

Birth of Baby Krishna

The first stage is an invocation to safeguard and protect the baby.

பாசுரம் - 1

பல்லாண்டு பல்லாண்டு பல்லாயிரத்தாண்டு

பலகோடி நூறாயிரம்

மல்லாண்ட திண்டோள் மணிவண்ணா உன்

சேவடி செவ்விதிருக் காப்பு

Periazhwar blesses Krishna that He should live for thousands of years. Such is the intensity of his devotion towards the Lord. This deep affection resulted in creating a concern for the baby's safety. Just as the mother is always worried about her child's safety, so also Azhwar is afraid and prays for His safety. Yashodha and Nandagopa, the parents of Krishna wanted the infant to have a secure and safe future and hence a prayer is offered to God to ward off any harm that may come upon the infant.

On the eleventh day after the birth of the baby, the “Kappu” ceremony is celebrated. A bangle made of gold, brass, copper and iron wire is put on the baby's wrist. A black string is also tied to the wrist of the baby to ward off evil, and a prayer is offered (It is interesting that the word “Kappu” means both the jewel worn at the wrist and protection).



In all cultures and through the ages, to the present, the newborn's safety and protection are given prime attention. In the Heads Up stage of the LTP Calendar importance is given to the safety and security of the baby through bonding with love and trust.







Celebrating the Birth - *Kuzhandai Pirappai Kondadudal* *Pasuram 13-17*

Celebrating the birth of baby Krishna

பாகுரம் - 14

ஓடுவார்விழுவார் உகந்தாலிப்பார்
நாடுவார்நம்பிரான் எங்குத்தானென்பார்
பாடுவார்களும் பல்பறைகொட்டிநின்று
ஆடுவார்களும் ஆயிற்றாய்ப்பாடியே

The birth of the baby brings bliss to the parents and much joy to the entire community. When Lord Krishna was born, the people were overjoyed and celebrated with song and dance. They sprayed colour powder, and squirted oil on each other. They ran to see the baby and even slipped happily in the amalgam of powder and oil. They sang to the rhythmic beat of musical instruments.



Welcoming the baby is of prime importance as this tender care has a long lasting effect on the wellbeing of the infant. The baby feels wanted and secure in the knowledge that he is special. The LTPC emphasises on communicating with the baby to comfort and reassure him.







Massage and Bath - *Neerattal - Pasuram 18*

The birth of the baby Krishna brings bliss to the parents and much joy to the entire community.

பாகரம் - 18

கையங் காலும் நிமிர்த்துக் கடாரநீர்

யையவாட்டிப் பசுஞ்சிறுமஞ்சளால்

ஐயநாவழித்தாளுக்கு அங்காந்திட

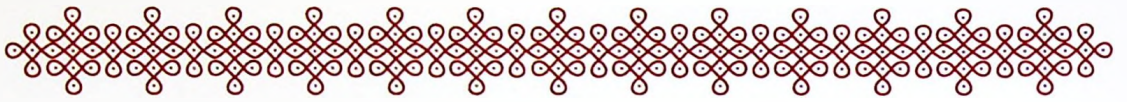
வையமேழுங்கண்டாள் பிள்ளை வாயுளே

The bath of the infant is described in this Pasuram. Massaging the baby's body with fragrant oil is the first stage of the bath. Yashoda, the loving mother gently massages Krishna with ghee (clarified butter). Then she gently exercises the arms and legs, moving them up and down. Water boiled with fragrant herbs and cooled is poured over him. She cleanses his tongue gently with pure turmeric powder which is traditionally known for its purifying qualities.



Experts today also advise that massaging the baby is beneficial for the baby's sense of well being and health. In the "Birth-2 Months" of the LTP Calendar too we find that massaging is recommended. This enables closeness and warmth between the caregiver and the baby.





Naming Ceremony - *Namakaranam* - *Pasuram* 20

பாசுரம் - 20

பத்துநாளாங்கடந்த இரண்டாநாள்

எத்திசையும் சயமரங்கோடித்து

மத்தமாமலை தாங்கிய மைந்தனை

உத்தானஞ்செய்து உகந்தனராயரே

On the twelfth day after the baby's birth, the *Namakaranam*, the naming ceremony is held. It is also called *Uthanam*, which means, holding the baby in one's arms.

The house is beautifully decorated. There are festooned pillars on all four sides of the cradle. The entire community of cowherds is invited to meet the baby and share in the parents' joy.

The rejoicing community blesses the baby. People hold the baby, admiringly by turns. Eye contact is established. They join in ecstatic singing and dancing. They spray oil and turmeric powder playfully on each other.

Naming of the baby takes place as early as the 12th day and people start calling the baby by his name.

The LTPC suggests that you need to hold the baby in your arms and that cuddling doesn't necessarily spoil the baby. Babies need to be cuddled to feel happy, healthy and safe. Slowly babies learn to recognise the faces of people who care for them. In the calendar we find that by 2 - 5 months babies begin to understand that they are separate entities, and calling them by their name from early infancy, helps them to develop a sense of self and connect their names to themselves.





Description of the Baby – *Kuzhandayin Anga Varnanai* *Pasuram 23-43*

பாசுரம் - 23

சீதக் கடலுள் ளமுதன்ன தேவகி
கோதைக்குழலாள் அசோதைக்குப் போத்தந்த
பேதைக்குழவி பிடித்துச்சுவைத்துண்ணும்,
பாதக்கமலங்கள் காணீரே பவளவாயிர்வந்து காணீரே

Around the time of 5-6 months, the infant is able to bend his leg and suck his big toe. He discovers various parts of the body and the things he can do with them. He explores everything through his mouth.

Periazhwar has devoted twenty verses describing the baby's body parts.

Here Krishna's mother is admiring the baby and reveling in his health and well being. She invites other women in the neighbourhood to share her joy and appreciation. This reflects the mother's observation of the infant and the participation of the community in child rearing.



Discovering and sucking the big toe by the baby is part of the exploration of the body and the baby feels comforted. Babies learn by exploring themselves and their toys.

This spontaneous activity of the infant is a developmental milestone, which helps the community to make sure that everything is normal. This has a parallel in the 5-8 months stage in the LTPC.







Lullaby – *Thalattu* – *Pasuram* 44-53

In Tamil, *thalattu* is the word for cradle songs. 'Thal', meaning tongue, 'attu' to shake or rotate the tongue. In Periazhwar's *Divya Prabandam*, Yasoda sings to Krishna, describing the cradle, made with gold and set with rubies and diamonds. Singing a lullaby to the baby was an important activity that had emotional content in building a beautiful relationship between mother and child, as well as language and cultural content.

The themes of the lullabies are a reiteration of the mother's love and protection.

பாசுரம் - 44

மாணிக்கங்கட்டி வயிரமிடைகட்டி
ஆணிப்பொன்னாற்செய்த வண்ணச்சிறு தொட்டில்
பேணியுனக்குப் பிரமன் விடுநந்தான்
மாணிக்குறளனே தாலேலோ,

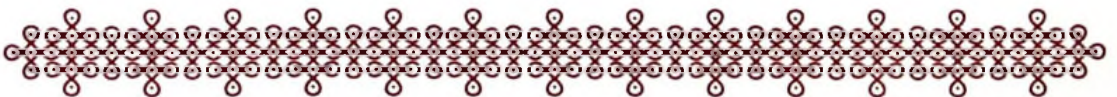
பாசுரம் - 46

எந்தம்பிரானார் எழில்திருமார்வாக்கு
சந்தமழகிய தாமரைத்தாளர்க்கு
இந்திரன்றானும் எழிலுடைக்கிண்கிணி
தந்துவளாய்நின்றான் தாலேலோ தாமரைக்கண்ணனே தாலேலோ

Yashoda sings lullabies for Krishna describing the gifts he receives from relatives. Lord Indira's gift to the baby is the beautiful pair of anklets. This verse describes the beautiful anklet with bells that sound melodious and every time the baby moves the bells are heard. Baby's movement is watched by the mother.



Research suggests that when the caregiver sings and repeats rhymes, babies get familiar with the words and sounds and this is the first step in communication. The themes of the lullabies are a reiteration of the mother's love and protection in the 8-13 months stage in the LTPC.



Calling the Moon - *Ambuliparuvam* – *Pasuram* 54-63

பாசுரம் - 55

என் சிறுக்குட்டன் எனக்கோரின்னமுதெம்பிரான்
தன்சிறுக் கைகளால் காட்டிக் காட்டியழைக்கிறான்
அஞ்சனவண்ணனோடு ஆடலாடவறுதியேல்
மஞ்சில் மறையாதே மாமதீமகிழ்ந்தோடிவா

While carrying baby Krishna in her arms Yashoda pleads with the moon to come, saying that the baby is showing the moon with his little hands and calling out. Yashoda is questioning the moon whether it is serious about playing with the little baby. If so then it should not hide behind the clouds but come out and play happily with baby Krishna immediately. She wants to satisfy the child's need to look at the moon and play. She responds by coaxing the moon to make an appearance for the sake of the loving baby.

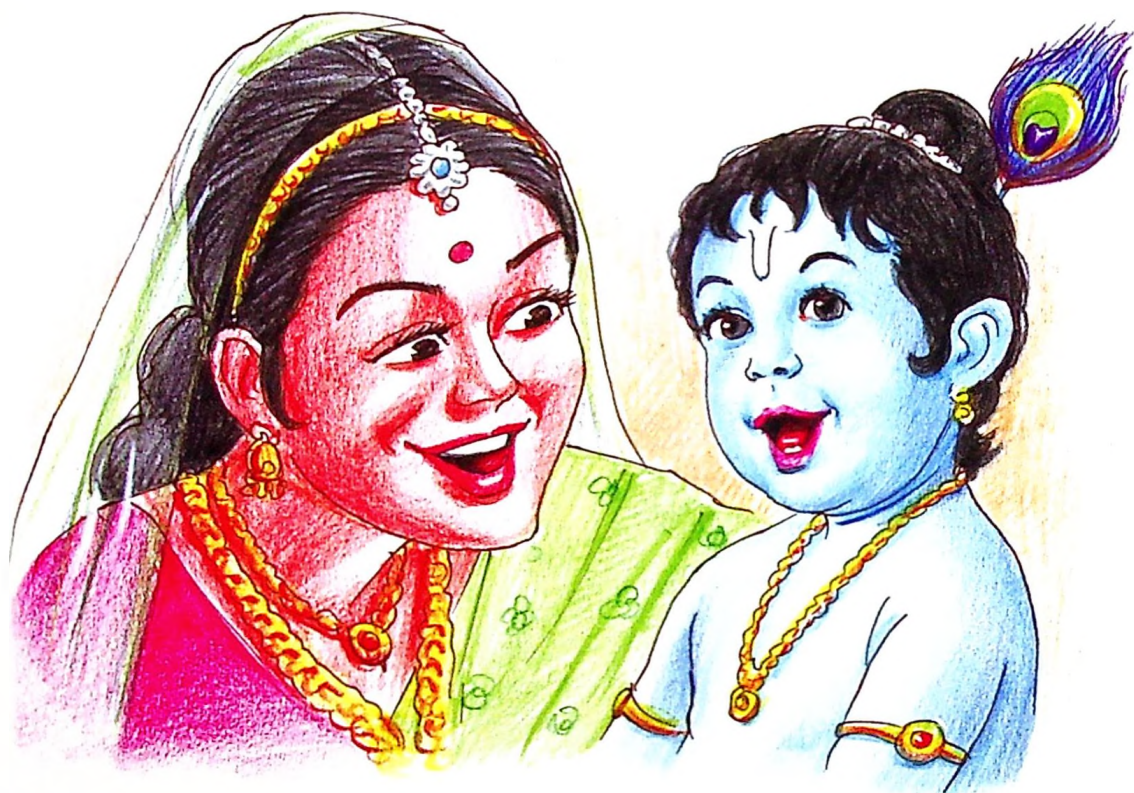
பாசுரம் - 56

“கைத்தலம் நோவாமே அம்புலி கடிதோடிவா”

In Periazhwar's depiction, Yasoda beckons to the moon to come down to earth to make an early appearance lest the child tires of calling out and waving to the moon. The child associates the moon with bedtime. In *Ambuliparuvam* the author has used various tactics (methods used to train a child) to cajole the moon to appear.

Seeing the moon is an activity for the child at this stage. The silver moon is an attractive object in the black sky. Across the length and breadth of India, there are lullabies about the moon as playmate and friend to the young child. Distant vision, following moving objects and eye hand coordination develop at this stage.

This applies to the 8-13 months stage in the LTPC.





Calling the Moon - *Ambuliparuvam* – *Pasuram* 54-63

பாகரம் - 58

அழகிய வாயில் அமுதவூறல்தெளிவுறா
மழலை முற்றாத இளஞ்சொல்லாலுன் னைக்கவுகின்றான்
குழகன் சிரீதரன் கூவக்கவ நீபோதியேல்
புழையிலவாகாதே நின்செவி புகர்மாமதீ

Here Periazhwar refers to the baby's gurgling and cooing. He refers to it as மழலை முற்றா இளஞ்சொல், a stage where baby cannot speak but baby's gurgling or prattle is beautiful to hear. This is the stage when the baby starts calling out to the moon by making various sounds. This is music to Yashodha's ears. Baby Krishna, with saliva drooling from his mouth, is making cooing sounds. One whole verse is used to describe the mother's joy in listening to the prattle of her baby. Every act and every movement of the baby is watched and enjoyed by the parents.



Parenting, to be effective, has to be an enjoyable experience for both parents and children. Babies can communicate even without words, through looks, sounds and body language. The child is now able to show gestures by waving and learn the meaning of words as objects are named over and over again.

This stage emphasizes the importance of communication.





Crawling - Chenkeerai Paruvam - Pasuram 64-74

பாசுரம் - 71

உன்னையுமொக்கலையிற்கொண்டு தமிழ்மருவி
உன்னோடு தங்கள் கருத்தாயின செய்து வரும்
கன்னியரும் மகிழக்கண்டவர் கண் குளிரக்
கற்றவர் தெற்றிவரப் பெற்றவெனக்கருளி

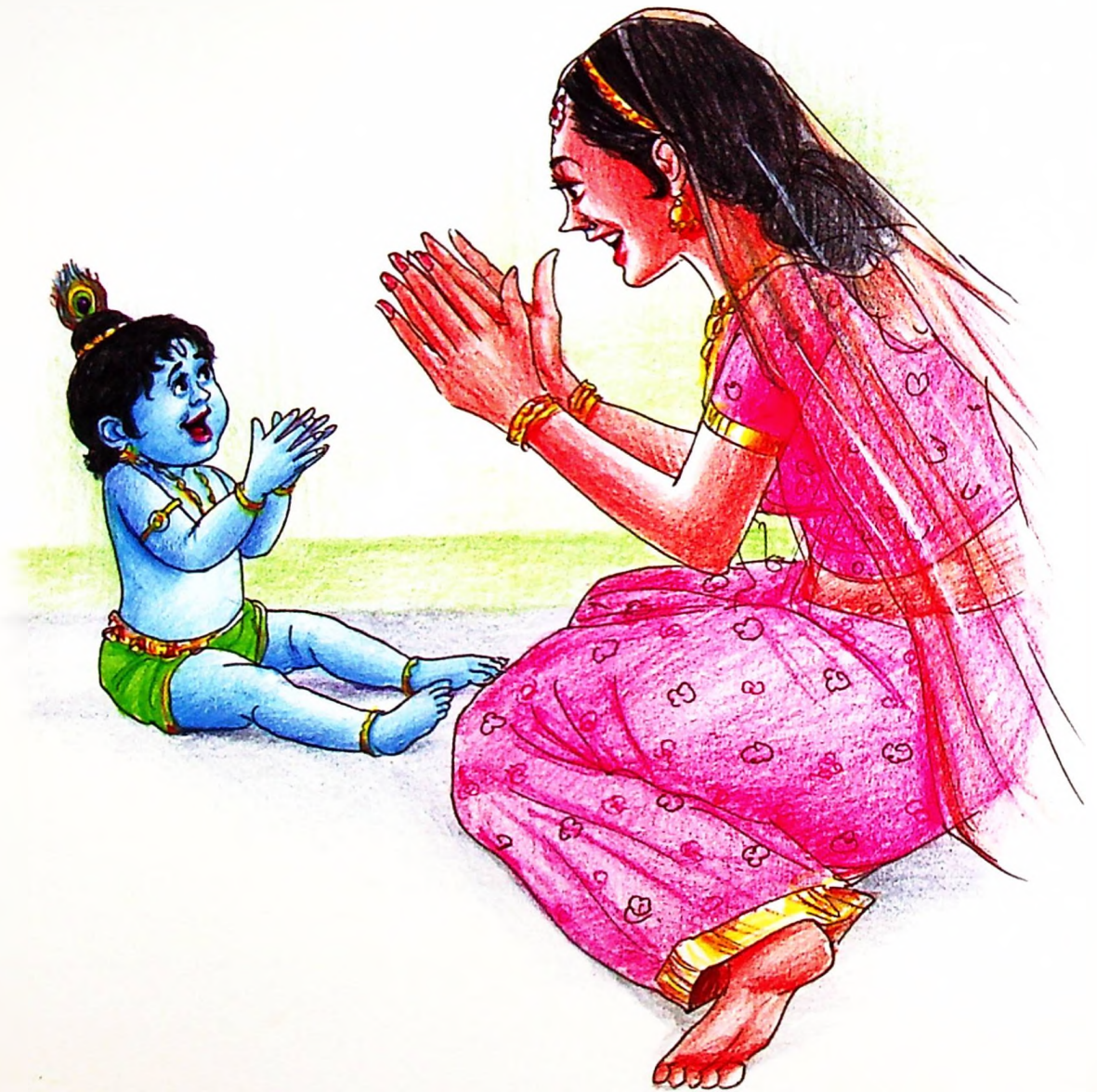
Here the young girls of the neighbourhood whisk the baby away on their hips to their homes and play with the baby. In this stanza Periazhwar exclaims that the endearing moments of a crawling infant should inspire learned men to compose songs on babies. Perhaps this comment made by Periazhwar was the inspiration for the origin of *Pillai Tamizh*.

பாசுரம் - 72

பாலொடுநெய்தயிரொண்சாந்தொடுசெண்பகமும்
பங்கயநல்லகருப்பூரமுநாறிவர
கோலநறும்பவளச்செந்துவர்வாயினிடைக்
கோமளவெள்ளிமுளைப்போல் சிலப்பல்லிலக

This verse translates as – “When baby Krishna crawls, the air around smells sweet because of the sandal paste and the petals of the *Chenbaga* flower that are applied on his body. In addition to this the baby smells of milk and curds. When he smiles, his tiny teeth also sparkle.”

Every child growing up in a village has the privilege of multiple mothering and multiple parenting in a joint family, or in a close-knit community depicted throughout the LTPC.





Clapping - Chappani - Pasuram 75-85

These ten verses deal with the baby's skill of clapping. The baby has learnt to bring both palms together and clap. He feels happy that he has mastered this skill. The mother feels happy and wants to share her joy with others. Yasoda and the father Nandagopa watch as baby Krishna claps his hands.

பாகரம் - 75

மாணிக்கக் கிண்கிணியார்ப்ப மருங்கின்மேல்,
ஆணிப்பொன்னாற் செய்த ஆய்பொன்னுடைமணி
பேணிப்பவளவாய் முத்திலங்கப் பண்டு
காணிகொண்ட கைகளால் சப்பாணி

Both the mother and father participate in the child's play and they enjoy every moment of it. With the melodious sound of the bells in the waist belts and the beautiful pearl white teeth glistening the baby makes a perfect picture. Clapping hands comes naturally to a child which he does with love – *Peni* – and enthusiasm.

The mother coaxes her baby to clap his hands because she wants the baby to enjoy doing this. Hence the word *Peni* - doing it with love.



Clapping of hands is a joyous activity and is a developmental stage. Achieving this coordination makes the baby feel confident and happy. There is lively participation of parents.







Clapping - Chappani - Pasuram 75-85

பாகரம் - 76

பொன்னரைநாணோடு மாணிக்கக் கிண்கிணி

தன்னரையாடத் தனிச்சுட்டி தாழ்ந்தாட

என்னரைமேல்நின்றிழிந்து உங்களாயர்தம்

மன்னரை மேற் கொட்டாய் சப்பாணி மாயவனே கொட்டாய் சப்பாணி

In this verse she coaxes the baby to crawl from her lap and sit on his father's lap (*Man Arai Mel*) and then clap his hands as it will be a pleasure to watch the baby sitting in his father's lap. Moreover she can have a better view of her baby. This is a tender situation where there is absolute participation by the father and mother. We find that the father and the mother enjoy every moment of the baby's play.

பாகரம் - 77

பன் மணிமுத்தின் பவளம்பதித்தன்ன

என்மணிவண்ணன் இலங்கு பொற்றோட்டின் மேல்

நின்மணி வாய்முத்திலங்க நின்னம்மைதன்

அம்மணிமேற் கொட்டாய் சப்பாணிஆழியங்கையனே சப்பாணி

Now once again Yasoda wants the baby to come and sit on her lap and clap his hands so that baby's father can enjoy looking at the baby.

The people in the community enjoy watching the child play. To please the father, the baby is asked to clap his hands and is coaxed to crawl between the father and mother. Everybody appreciates the baby's actions.

பாகரம் - 79

புட்டியிற்சேறும் புழுதியும் கொண்டுவந்து

When the baby crawls he is covered with dirt and he passes this dirt and grime on to the mother when he sits on her lap.



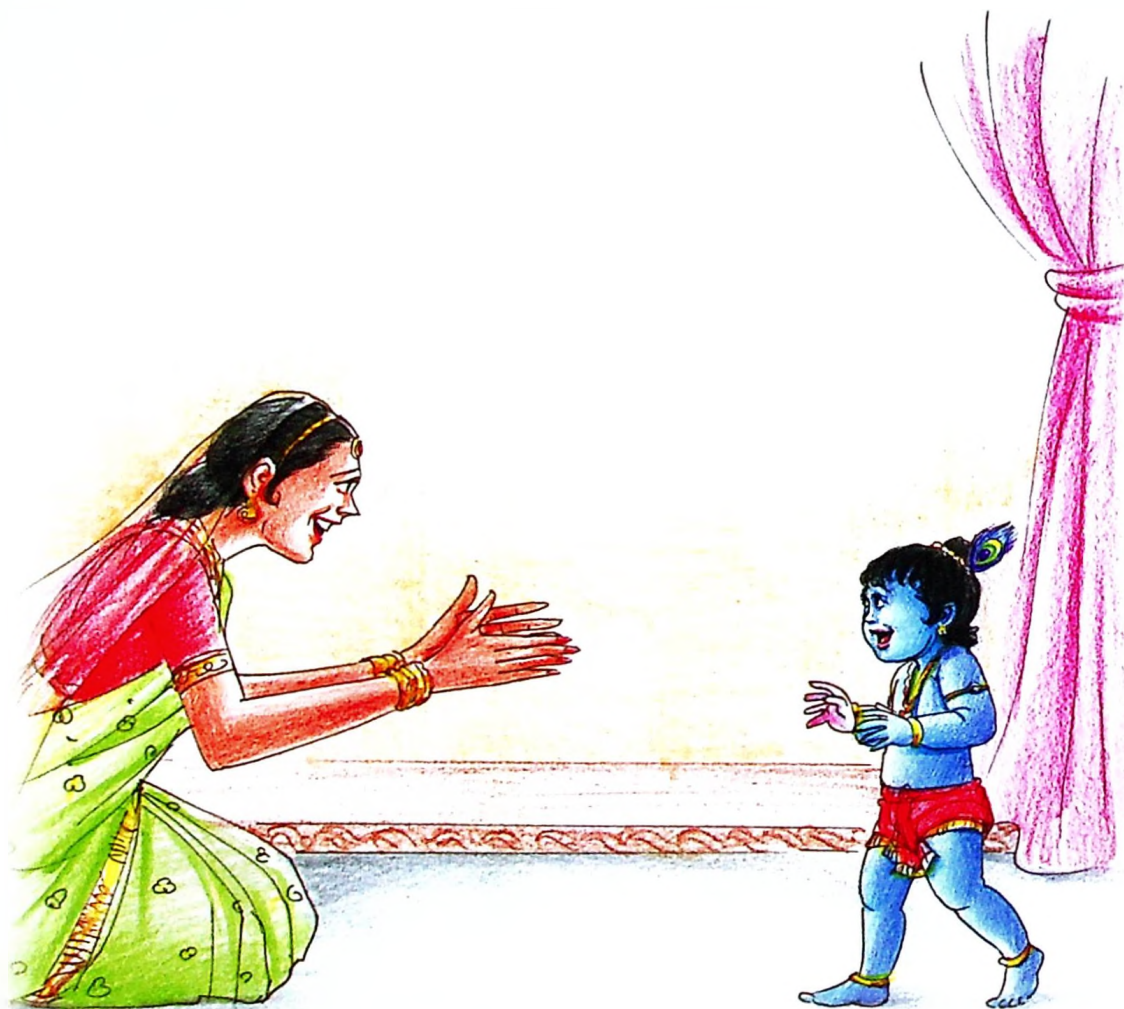
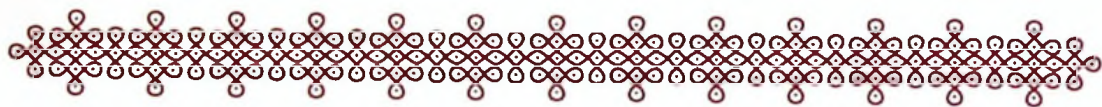
This is characteristic of this stage where the child wants to touch everything and feel the different textures, unmindful of hygiene. Babies learn by exploring objects in their home, elaborated in the Doer Stage, 18-24 months in the LTPC.



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Walking - *Thalar Nadai - Pasuram 86-87*

பாசுரம் - 86

தொடர் சங்கிலிகை சலார் பிலாரென்னத் தூங்கு பொன்மணியொலிப்ப
படு மும்மதப் புனல் சோர வாரணம்பைய நின்றூர்வது போல்
உடன்கூடிக் கிண்கிணியாரவாரிப்பஉடை மணி பறைகறங்க
தடந்தாளிணை கொண்டு சார்ங்கபாணிதளர்நடை நடவானோ

The mother enjoys her child's first steps, and admires and encourages the child. Here the description is given beautifully by Periazhwar. When the baby starts taking those tentative steps his walk is compared to that of an elephant, with the clangour of chains and the chime of hanging bells. Yasoda is beseeching the baby to come forward.

படு மும்மத புனல் சோரா

பாசுரம் - 87

நக்க செந் துவர் வாய்

Nakka cen thuvar vai

The baby is smiling (*nakka*) showing pearly white teeth and pink lips, and is coaxed to take the first steps. Pulling of the toy chariot is a traditional activity.

In the present day the caregivers are asked to be supportive and encourage the babies to take those first steps. Babies are made to try again and again to complete the task to give them a sense of achievement. Children who start to walk are given "push and pull" toys depicted in 8-24 months in the LTPC.





Kissing - Mutham - Pasuram 89

The picture here is that of a happy baby, full of laughter, reaching the mother after a few steps and planting a kiss on his mother's cheeks.

பாகுரம் - 89

கன்னற்குடந்திறந்தாலொத்தூறிக்

கணகண சிரித்துவந்து

முன்வந்து நின்றுமுத்தந்தரும்என்

முகில் வண்ணன் திருமார்வன்

தன்னைப்பெற்றோற்குத் தன் வாயமுதம் தந்து

என்னைத் தளிர்ப்பிக்கின்றான்

The baby comes forward laughing loudly with the spittle flowing from his mouth and happily plants a kiss on his mother's cheeks. The mother is very happy at this gesture, and feels that she is blessed to have such a child who brings joy in her life.

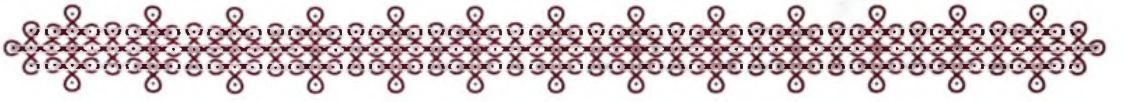


Every developmental activity performed by the baby and the way the baby responds with happiness and laughter to encouragement from her, brings joy to the mother.

At this stage babies become expressive and are able to show their emotions of joy, appropriately expressed in the LTPC.







Exclamation - *Acchoparuvam* - *Pasuram* 97-107

பாசுரம் - 97

பொன்னியற்கிண்கிணீ சுட்டி புறங்கட்டி

தன்னியலோசை சலன்சலனென்றிட

மின்னியல்மேகம் விரைந்தெதிர் வந்தாற்போல்

என்னிடைக்கோட்டராவச்சோ வச்சோ எம்பெருமான் வாராவச்சோவச்சோ

'Acho' means "Come and hug me" The other interpretation is that 'Acho' is an exclamation of happiness. When the child walks, reaches the mother and gives her a hug, she feels happy and proud.

Wearing beautiful anklets and other bright gold ornaments Krishna comes running to hug his mother wanting to climb on to her hips. This scene reminds one of the clouds rushing in along with the lightening. This whole act is exhilarating to the mother when she pictures it.

The parent-child interaction is endearing to watch. At every stage we find Yashoda is doing things which make the child happy and enthusiastic. The baby exhibits his affection by coming forward to hug the caregiver.



When there is closeness and connection between the caregiver and the baby, bonding develops automatically. Loving response from the caregiver helps the baby to feel protected and confident.

Imitating adults helps children begin to understand relationships. Well depicted in the LTPC relationship domains.







Hugging from Behind - *Puram Pulgal - Pasuram 108-117*

பாசுரம் - 109

கிண்கிணிகட்டிக்கிறிகட்டி கையினிற்
கங்கணமிட்டுக் கழுத்தில் தொடர்கட்டி
தங்கணத்தாலே சதிரா நடந்துவந்து
என் கண்ணென்னைப் புறம்புல்குவான்
எம்பிரான் என்னைப் புறம்புல்குவான்

Baby Krishna is wearing beautiful jewels. Krishna walks behind Yashoda stealthily without her knowledge and hugs her from behind.

Yashoda is overwhelmed with the child's expression of affection.

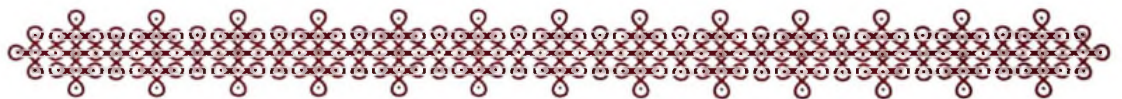
பாசுரம் - 114

பொத்தவரலைக் கவிழ்த்துஅதன் மேலேறி
தித்தித்த பாலும் தடாவினில் வெண்ணையும்
மெத்தத் திருவயிறார விழுங்கிய
அத்தன் வந்தென்னைப் புறம்புல்குவான்

Krishna climbs on to an old mortar by overturning it and reaches on to the hanging pots of sweet milk and butter and relishes the butter and milk. After this escapade Krishna comes and quietly hugs Yashodha. We can see that Krishna's mischief is indulged.



The child at this stage takes the initiative to do everything by himself and feels a sense of achievement after completing an activity. The child is able to perfect his balancing abilities, clearly expressed at age 3 in the LTPC.







Playing Games - *Apoochi Kattudal - Pasuram 118-126*

This verse describes the game. *Apoochi* - a kind of “Peek-a-boo” played between the child and parent. Krishna covering his face with his long hair playacts to frighten Yashodha and the mother in turn responds by pretending to be frightened. He feels a sense of victory.

பாகரம் - 124

தத்துக்காண்டாள் கொலோ தானே பெற்றாள் கொலோ

சித்தமனையாள் அசோதையிளஞ் சிங்கம்

கொத்தார்கருங்குழல் கோபால கோளரி

அத்தன் வந்தப்பூச்சி காட்டுகின்றான் அம்மனையப்பூச்சி காட்டுகின்றான்

This is an interesting verse where Periazhwar is wondering whether the baby is really Yashodh's, as Krishna, the baby is like a brave lion among the cowherd folk who are proud of him and his antics.

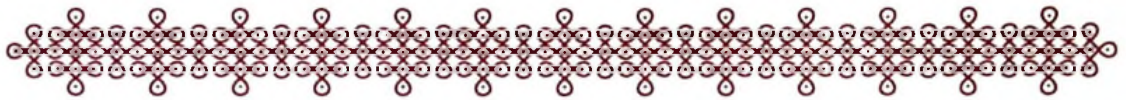
Krishna playfully frightens others by *Apoochi* ie peek-a-boo. This is an interesting verse where “Chiththamaniyal” Yashodha brings up the baby knowing his likes and dislikes.



This game, of Peek-a-boo/hide and seek continues to be played even today. Babies learn that things are still there though they cannot see them. Playing this game helps babies understand the concept of “object permanence”. This is a simple yet exciting game which children enjoy from 5-8 months as shown in the LTTC and continue to enjoy as older children.







Breastfeeding - *Mulai Unnal - Pasuram 128-138*

The mother asks the baby to come and have breast milk. Here Yashodha continues to breast-feed the baby over a much longer period than is common today. Ten verses are devoted to the mother's beseeching the baby to come and have breast milk.

பாசுரம் - 132

தாயர் வாய் சொல் கருமங் கண்டாய்

The poet Periazhwar states that mother's words must always be heeded. The mother is pleading with the baby not to go out and play but to come to her and have breast milk as it is already delayed.

பாசுரம் - 133

உன்னைக் கண்டார்

என்னேநோன்புநோற்றாள் கொலோ

இவனைப்பெற்ற வயிறுஉடையாள்

என்னும் வார்த்தை எய்துவித்த

இருடிகேசா

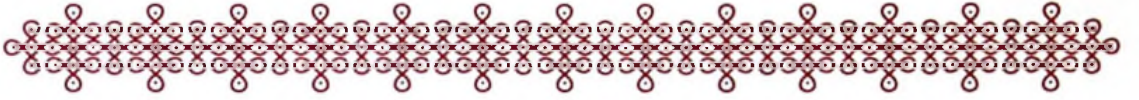
The people around have high praise for Yasoda as a wonderful mother of Krishna. The baby has earned the admiration of the neighbours, and the mother is rightfully proud. The mother's talk makes the others feel that she is most fortunate in having such a lovely child.



The mother talks to the baby while breastfeeding. This enhances bonding. Breast milk is essential for babies as it provides immunity, and contains all the essential nutrients needed for normal growth. Exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months is recommended today and parents are encouraged to continue breastfeeding as long as possible.







Combing - *Kuzhal Varal - Pasuram 162-171*

பாசுரம் - 169

உந்தியெழுந்த உருவமலர்தன்னில்
சந்தச்சதுமுகன்றன்னைப் படைத்தவன்
கொந்தக்குழலைக் குறந்துபுளியட்டி
தந்தத்தின் சீப்பால் குழல்வாராயக்காக்காய்

The crow is called to distract the baby.

Yashoda has just given an oil massage to the baby from head to foot and given him a bath. She is ready with an ivory comb to comb his hair and remove the knots. Krishna needs to be distracted.



Noticing birds and animals in the immediate environment was part of the play with young children. Distracting children with patience is necessary when they need to be groomed, as this is an activity that they do not enjoy.





A healthy relationship between mother and child in bringing up a child was known as early as 8th century by Periazhwar when aspects of good parenting were highlighted in *Periazhwar Thiru Mozhi*. Various play activities, interactions, encouragements and experiences that were enjoyed by the child were mirrored in the versus of Periazhwar. The Hincks-Dellcrest "Learning through Play Calendar" likewise emphasises the importance of age-appropriate activities, parent child interactions, involvement of father and the other care givers in the family.

One strong emotion that is expressed by Periazhwar in every verse is the unconditional love for the child. This is relevant even today, and cannot be over emphasised.





Delving into traditional Tamil text, Lakshmi Gopal discovers that the 8th century saint poet Periazhwar, had made detailed observations of infancy and early childhood. He was a devotee of Krishna, and visualised the various activities of the Divine Child through myth and metaphor. It is interesting to see how his depictions correspond to contemporary views of child development.

Lakshmi Gopal is a volunteer in Bala Mandir, and is an active member of the Bala Mandir Research Foundation.

She is a versatile writer whose poems and songs have enriched the messages on parenting, and have added to the value of the resource material in Bala Mandir.



Bala Mandir Research Foundation

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