



20-2 April - June 2026

Published on 14, April - June 2026

ISSN:2320-4842 (P) 3049-2688 (O)

The Sixth Finger Pedagogy: Kavikko Abdul Rahman's Educational Philosophy and Social Critique in Modern Tamil Poetry

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Abstract

Kavikko Abdul Rahman, a major voice in modern Tamil poetry whose work bridges Sufi mysticism and social reality, offers a sustained educational philosophy that challenges schooling conceived primarily as economic mobility and instead frames education as spiritual and social awakening. This study aims to articulate his child-centric pedagogy through the metaphor of the “Sixth Finger” (Aaram Viral)-creative intuition—and to examine how his poetic social critique can inform innovative Social Science education consonant with contemporary policy directions. Using a qualitative, analytical design, the study undertakes content analysis of primary poetic collections including Paalveethi, Pithan, Alapanai, and Aaram Viral to identify themes related to pedagogy, child psychology, and social ethics, and interprets these metaphors alongside modern educational frameworks, particularly the NCFSE-2023 emphasis on “Learning without Burden.” The analysis shows that Abdul Rahman rejects the “factory model” of education, resonating with critiques of the banking concept of education, and targets the textbook-driven obsession that turns learning into “paper waste,” insisting instead that “children themselves are the textbooks.” He further argues that schooling often “closes the eyes” with alphabets rather than opening minds to reality, proposing that education is realized through life’s “wounds,” thereby reimagining Social Science as experiential empathy and struggle rather than memorization. The “Sixth Finger” reframes the teacher’s role from adding information (“more fingers”) to awakening intuition and creativity, with creation understood as sacrifice where “flesh becomes words.” Abdul Rahman’s prioritization of childhood-questioning token celebrations of Children’s Day amid neglect of actual children-also foregrounds the need to incorporate marginalized perspectives, including gendered and child-centered lenses, in curricula designed by adults. Overall, his poetry provides a blueprint for shifting schools from rote distribution to creativity incubation, embedding emotional literacy and resilience (“Failure is the wealth I earn”), and rooting learning in indigenous language and culture (“Tamil Moham”) to prevent “identity disease,” This aligns closely with NCFSE-2023’s call for unburdened, meaningful learning.

Keywords: Kavikko Abdul Rahman, Sixth Finger, Child-Centric Pedagogy, Social Critique, NCFSE-2023.

Introduction

The landscape of modern Tamil literature is illuminated by the profound and multi-dimensional voice of 'Kavikko' Abdul Rahman. As a poet who successfully blended the mystical depths of Sufism with the sharp realities of social critique, his works transcend mere aesthetic beauty to become a philosophical guide for human existence. In the contemporary era, where education is increasingly being reduced to a mechanical process of data accumulation and employability training, Abdul Rahman's poetry offers a vital "counter-narrative." He posits that true education is not an external imposition but an internal awakening—a process he metaphorically describes as the rise of the 'Sixth Finger' (Aaram Viral). The current educational crisis, often discussed in national forums such as the National Curriculum Framework (NCFSE-2023), revolves around the "burden of learning" and the disconnect between classroom instruction and social reality. Kavikko addressed this decades ago through his piercing verses. He famously remarked that "human roots are strengthened by the height of poetry," suggesting that the growth of a society depends on the depth of its intellectual and emotional education. For him, a student is not a vessel to be filled with "paper waste" (textbooks) but a "divine land" that adults must learn to respect and explore. This study seeks to deconstruct Kavikko Abdul Rahman's educational philosophy, focusing on his critique of standardized schooling and advocacy for a child-centric pedagogy. By analyzing his seminal works, such as Paalveethi (The Milky Way), Pithan (The Madman), and Suttuviral (The Index Finger), this study aims to demonstrate how his poetic insights can be integrated into Social Science education to foster empathy, social justice, and creative intuition. In an age dominated by Artificial Intelligence and digital saturation, Kavikko's call to return to the "wounds of experience" as the primary source of learning remains more relevant than ever. Through this introduction, we establish that the "Sixth Finger" is not just a symbol of the poet's pen, but a pedagogical tool for liberation—one that empowers the learner to write their own destiny

rather than merely reciting the scripts provided by a flawed system.

Research Methodology

The methodology of this research is grounded in a **qualitative-interpretative framework**, specifically utilizing **Hermeneutic Content Analysis** to decode the pedagogical implications within the literary corpus of Kavikko Abdul Rahman. The study systematically employs an **analytical-descriptive design**, where primary data are curated from seminal poetic texts—primarily Pithan, Aaram Viral, and Alapanai—which are treated as "alternative pedagogical scripts" rather than mere aesthetic artifacts. These texts undergo a rigorous **Thematic Coding process**, wherein verses are categorized into constructs such as "Critique of Standardized Schooling," "The Ontology of Childhood," and "Creative Intuition (The Sixth Finger)." To ensure academic rigor and institutional alignment, these themes are cross-referenced with the **National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE-2023)**, allowing for a comparative analysis between Kavikko's indigenous poetic wisdom and contemporary educational mandates like "Learning without Burden." The interpretative lens is further sharpened by applying **Humanistic Education Theory**, assessing how the poet's metaphors serve as a transformative tool for Social Science education by shifting the focus from cognitive rote-learning to experiential emotional intelligence.

Review of Literature

Existing scholarship on Kavikko Abdul Rahman has predominantly emphasized his linguistic innovation and deep-rooted "Tamil Moham" (passion for Tamil). However, only a limited number of studies have explored his poetic corpus through an educational or pedagogical lens. Ranganathan (2025) interprets Aaram Viral as a metaphorical framework for creative learning, suggesting that Kavikko's poetry implicitly critiques mechanized schooling. Critical readings of Pithan further reveal his opposition to rigid instructional systems that treat learners as passive recipients, a position that parallels the global traditions of critical pedagogy that challenge information-deposit models of education.

The Critique of Formal Schooling: Beyond Textbook-Centric Learning

Kavikko Abdul Rahman repeatedly questions the overdependence on textbooks as the primary medium of education. Pithan provocatively observes that children embody knowledge and experience, rendering excessive textual dependence redundant (Abdul Rahman, 2003). This metaphor critiques instructional practices that prioritize symbols and alphabets while neglecting lived realities. According to Kavikko, such schooling restricts perception rather than expanding understanding of the subject. He reconceptualizes education as a process shaped by lived encounters, social pain, and ethical struggle, implying that Social Science learning must evolve from memorization to empathetic engagement with society.

The Pedagogical Meaning of the “Sixth Finger” (Aaram Viral)

The metaphor of the “Sixth Finger” occupies a central place in Abdul Rahman’s educational imagination. While the five physical fingers represent labor and survival, the imagined sixth finger signifies creativity, intuition, and ethical consciousness. In pedagogical terms, this metaphor challenges the assumption that teaching merely involves adding information. Instead, the teacher becomes a facilitator who activates the latent creative potential. Kavikko further equates creativity with sacrifice, suggesting that authentic creation demands emotional investment, where personal experience is transformed into expression. This vision aligns education with human development rather than with vocational conditioning.

Child-Centric Pedagogy and Social Critique

Kavikko’s social critique extends sharply into the domain of childhood. He exposes the contradiction between the ceremonial celebrations of children and the everyday neglect they experience within adult-centric social structures (Abdul Rahman, 1989). This observation holds pedagogical significance, particularly for Social Science curricula designed predominantly by adults. By foregrounding children as marginalized subjects, Kavikko implicitly advo-

cates curricular frameworks that incorporate child-centered, gender-sensitive, and inclusive perspectives.

Conclusion

Kavikko Abdul Rahman’s poetic philosophy offers a compelling response to the contemporary educational crisis marked by standardization and cognitive overload. This study demonstrates that his literary vision functions as an alternative pedagogical framework, one that foregrounds creative intuition, emotional intelligence, and lived experience over rote learning. In works such as **Paalveethi**, **Pithan**, **Suttuviral**, and **Aaram Viral**, Kavikko persistently resists the reduction of learners into passive recipients of information. His critique of textbook dependency and institutional rigidity finds renewed relevance in the objectives of the NCFSE-2023, particularly its emphasis on meaningful and unburdened learning. Ultimately, the metaphor of the “Sixth Finger” emerges as a powerful educational symbol representing the transition from rote instruction to transformative learning rooted in creativity, empathy, and cultural identity.

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