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Children of all ages produce and act in plays illustrating the moral maxims of Saint Tiruvalluvar

Madhuri Shekar, 13, Chennai

In July 29, 2000, youth from all three Padma Seshadri Bala Bhavan schools in Chennai, India, celebrated the 43rd anniversary of their school's opening with a huge performance. Over 500 students of all ages participated in the event, performing and producing around 20 plays, both modern and ancient, Indian and international. Each play explored the wisdom of a verse from the Tirukural, the 2,200-year-old Tamil scripture by Saint Tiruvalluvar.

For example, verse 786, "A smiling face is no sure sign of friendship. Friendship is found deep within a smiling heart," was dramatized in a few scenes from the play "Karna" portraying the way Prince Duryodhana trusted his bosom friend Karna. Another example is the play "Pandora's Box," a Greek myth illustrating verse 505, "A touchstone that discloses a man's greatness or smallness is simply this: his deeds."

Behind the scenes, teachers, students and technicians worked for weeks to produce this mega affair, shortening school days--even abandoning classes to make last-minute

preparations. The result was the most spectacular shows the school has ever produced. The two days prior to the final event were dress rehearsals, which the students attended, as there wasn't room for students, parents and guests at the main performance.

The opening items included musical dramatizations by the elementary students of the stories of "Vamana," "Manu Needhi Cholan" and "King Solomon," to name a few. Other plays included "Socrates," "Bima and Baksura" and the English musical, "Annie." All ages participated in the finale, which was met with thunderous applause as the students danced their last step.

The chief guest, renowned Tamil film director K. Balachander, was amazed with the performance, "I must congratulate the school on choosing this beautiful theme," he said. "The choice of the verses was excellent. They've gone into the deep sea and chosen the pearls." Suhasini Maniratnam, the famed Tamil film artist and director, said, "I am absolutely overwhelmed when I see such unadulterated art."

"The Tirukural," said Dr. Rajalakshmi Parthasarathy, the schools' dean, "is one of the most succinct documentaries on values in the world today, with crisp, brief and yet in-depth meaning. It is a universal guide to life, and should be learned and appreciated by everyone." Charlotte Pushparajan, age 13, said in an interview, "I feel that nowadays Indian youth have been losing sight of their roots and have been blindly aping the West. These events are very much necessary. They encourage us to learn about ourselves. It's clinging to our roots, keeping

our faith alive and stating that we're Hindus and proud of it that counts."