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VOLUME-XIV

UPAKATHĀVIŚEṢĀMKAḤ

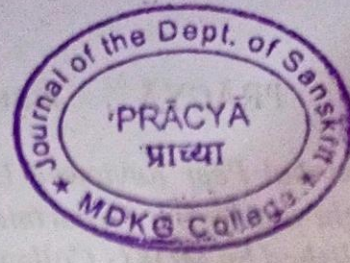
उपकथाविशेषांकः

धन्योऽयं भारतो देशः धन्येयं सुरभारती ।
उपासकाः वयं यत्र धन्या अहो परम्परा ॥



EDITOR
DR. MANASHI SHARMA

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Dr. Manashi Sharma

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The *Pañcatantra* stories: Elucidating the Socio-Political Facets in the Context of Modern Day Statecraft

Dr. Anita Sarma

The *Pañcatantra* (Five treatises) is the collection of ancient Indian 'Fables' originally written in Sanskrit verse and prose, arranged within to frame a story.¹ Literally, the *Pañcatantra* can be explained as interweaving of five skeins of traditions and teachings into a text. The book provides for stories conveying each- a lesson where the speaker is mostly an animal. These legends mostly carried through oral traditions via the medium of animals etc are known originally as '*dantakathā*' or fables in English. It is believed that though the surviving book of the *Pañcatantra* is dated to about 200 BCE, but the fables are much more ancient and are based on older oral traditions of Hinduism. Patrick Olivelle in the introductory paragraph of his translation of the book quotes Edgerton (1924) that the *Pañcatantra* is 'certainly the most frequently translated literary product of India'². The *Pañcatantra* stories are also very much popular across the world in different religions and cultures. There is an interesting fact associated with the internationalisation of the *Pañcatantra*. As the earliest translations of the *Pañcatantra* were in Pehlavi and Arabic and it was Borzury, the personal physician of Nushirvan, the Persian emperor, who came to India in the 6th century looking for *Mṛtasañjivani*, the mystical herb that could give life to the dead. However, he did not get the herb, instead was introduced to the *Pañcatantra* and after reading the work he realised that the magical herb was knowledge and the corpse was ignorance.³

The *Pañcatantra* is the oldest collection of fables originated in India and is basically treated as archaic but it is considered as the most important contribution in the sphere of children's literature in India. However, the *Pañcatantra* offers much more than only being a guiding classic in the realm of children's literature. It does not only

enrich human life with its message of wisdom and knowledge but also immensely contribute in the realm of societal progression by working as an instruction or guiding manual for shaping the conduct of human behaviour. Noted Indologist from Oxford University, Patrick Olivelle in his work the *Pañcatantra: The Book of India's Folk Wisdom* states that the classic is a treatise of 'Nīti' roughly translated as 'wise conduct or statecraft, narrated through allegorical stories of animals⁴. The Pañcatantra is a Nīti śāstra, or a text book of nīti. There is no precise equivalent of the term nīti in English, French, Latin or Greek.⁵ Nīti presupposes that one has considered, and rejected, the possibility of living as a saint. It can be practised only by a social being and represents an admirable attempt to answer the inconsistent question how to win the utmost possible joy from life in the world of men.⁶ Thus the Pañcatantra as a literature of Nītiśāstra prescribes for all the qualifications required for building a social life founded on civil society norms and a political community having a niche with rational and sound principles. The treasure of the Pañcatantra was so written by Pandit Vishnu Sharma that it was alternatively taken as 'Sañjīvanī', the miracle medicine to be found in India. It can be certainly categorised as one of the greatest books of all times as it contains such thoughtful insights on which human mind of different ages can work differently only to gain understanding, wisdom and academic pleasure of different frequency and level.

As a rapid reading to an incurious or non-critical reader, the Pañcatantra fables offer many life lessons like the ill-consequences of keeping a fool as friend, why and how unity becomes strength, hard sides of believing on strangers, consequences of ignoring wisdom over physical qualities, using both fair and foul means to save one's interest, ignoring unnecessary advice, using intelligence to solve problems, importance of self faith, not to believe in strangers, avoid bad mediator to avoid misunderstandings among friends, punishing a cunning friend, using intelligence to enrich the quality of life, use of faith to turn impossible situation conducive, importance of assertion, loyalty, qualities to be friends, importance of peace of mind, doing within one's capacity, mother as real god and so on and so forth. These lessons are very important to lead a balanced and dignified life. In fact these can be treated as the core to 'a living'. These are moulding curves that can shape the life and prepare the young children to build up their strong personality based on an ethical and rational ground. However, a critical and comprehensive study of the Pañcatantra tales would offer insight into human behaviour through the characters of animal world. As each part of the

story or the frame story contains many embedded stories to carry a message, it is very much engaging for a reader to go through a sea of knowledge and wisdom. The *Pañcatantra* is divided into five volumes:

1. **Mitra-Lābha (Gaining Friends):** This category of fables are related to winning friends and prescribes the ways and methods to earn friends and alliances.
2. **Mitra- Bheda (Losing Friends):** It has a collection of stories that are related to losing friends. This category of stories are also referred as 'shirobheda' or 'Shurobheda' i.e. causing discord amongst friends and weakening the power of the opposition.
3. **Kākolīkiyam (War and Peace):** These fables narrated through the stories of Crows and owls, talk about war and peace i.e. Vighraha and Sandhi
4. **Labdhapraṇāsam (Loss of Gains):** This category of stories is the narration of apprehensions and warnings against losing whatever is gained due to one's short sightedness and ignorance.
5. **Aparīkṣitakāram (Acting without thinking):** This category of fables warn against hasty actions or taking actions without thinking much and considering the consequences. These stories prescribe for considered actions and warns against rush deals.

What is fascinating about the above categorisation of the *Pañcatantra* is that though it apparently deals with 'human' and 'animals' as its preliminary objects, in the core of each story a message for public life, is inherently carried. The divisions made through the five tantras, offer narrations on different aspects of personal and public life consequently contributing to the art of administration and management of the state. As an original contribution covering all the facets of individual, social and political life, the masterpiece can be treated as the oldest book of statecraft offered by the east only preceded by Aristotle's verses on Statecraft that were contributed around 300 BC. Though the contents and narration of the *Pañcatantra* are mostly observed and interpreted in the backdrop of ancient India's ethical tradition and value system, yet its teachings are equally relevant, productive and applicable in the contemporary times in all the levels of societal and political process.

Much before the western world offers on statecraft like Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Art of War* (1521) and *The Prince* (1532), Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651),

Montesquieu's *The Spirit of Laws* (1748) etc, the *Pañcatantra* has discussed multiple aspects and issues associated with human behaviour in the context of socio-economic life which in turn deeply and intrinsically delves into statecraft and governance. In fact the book acts as a critique of different aspects of socio-political life where people are expected to shape one's own conduct in a fair and rational way, inculcate balanced traits in their behaviour impacting both private and public life and demonstrate or rather contribute positively in the sphere of individual and community life. It is worth to mention here that socio-political criticism being a branch of academic discourse mainly targets on socio-political issues with respect to perceived injustices and power relations of society in general. The *Pañcatantra* can also be considered as a book of socio-political criticism as the main objective of the book is to build-up a harmonious social order treating the injustices of society by shaping the conduct of individual and social life. However, in doing so, the teachings of the *Pañcatantra* distinctly acknowledge the connection and proximity of human behaviour, the role and significance of positive moral and rational human conduct in establishing and maintaining a value-based and pragmatic socio-political environment with the art of statecraft and governance.

It is important to note here that social and political criticisms are most of the time interwoven as both the disciplines represent two different but important facets of human life. Moreover, socio-political criticism very much contributes in shaping, strengthening and continuing the art of Statecraft. The *Pañcatantra* thus can be said as a text offering both socio-political criticism through the form of literature mainly aiming to develop certain canons and policies of statecraft. The classic *Pañcatantra* can also be rightly said as the literature of political consciousness.

Elaborating the concept of Statecraft: The dictionary meaning of the term 'statecraft' is the art of conducting state affairs. The online Cambridge dictionary (dictionary.cambridge.org) defines 'Statecraft' as the skill of governing a country. Morton Kaplan's article, 'An Introduction to the Strategy of Statecraft' states "the term 'statecraft' is used in a sense which is stronger than that of 'diplomacy' as used, for example, by Harold Nicolson.⁷ In its present meaning it includes the construction of strategies for securing the national interest in the international arena, as well as the execution of these strategies by diplomats.⁸ The successful or unsuccessful conduct of statecraft may settle the fate of our way of life"⁹. The concept of statecraft provides an approach in political science to understand politics, policy making and change and the means, methods and the nature of political leadership.

The concept of statecraft was first developed as an element of academic discourse by British academician Jim Bulpit.¹⁰ Though, the concept of 'Statecraft' is essentially associated with 'political elites' in various research writings but in this context the term is used to mean basically the ways and strategies of conducting state affairs in a way that is most productive and fulfilling to the needs of the citizenry. The term can be used to mean more than the 'diplomatic' practices adopted by a nation state and to include each and every policy that has an impact on the socio-political, economic, cultural and other aspects of human life. The art of statecraft thus embraces everything that has a direct or indirect link with the grievances and aspirations of human life as a socio-political entity. 'Statecraft is the use of many instruments of national power for the purpose of defending our life and national power lubricating in national relations and automatically for the cause of peace of the world.'¹¹

Consequently, the concept claims for a better standard of the rational, intellectual and moral capabilities of those who govern and who are being governed. The art of statecraft would thus only sustain and succeed if all the egalitarian and fair principles like justice, equality, fairness, liberty, accessibility, rational decision making alternatives etc., are pre-dominantly present in a society. Here comes the relevance of the *Pañcatantra* as a treatise on statecraft grounded on socio-political criticism as it offers everything starting from shaping human conduct to participating in the affairs of community life or becoming the stake holders of the policy making process.

So, it can be fairly said that the book *Pancatantra* specifically offers a rendition of folk tales immersed in the expertise of political science. To quote G.L Chandiramani, 'the *Pañcatantra* is essentially connected with one of the branches of science known by the Indians as the 'Nītiśāstra' which in Sanskrit means 'A book of wise conduct of life.'¹² It attempts to teach us, how to understand people, to choose reliable and trust worthy friends, how to meet difficulties and solve problems through tact and wisdom and how to live in peace and harmony in the face of hypocrisy, deceit and many pitfalls in life.' All these principles constitutes the background of strong political conviction and moulds the way and nature of political decision making process. A social choice aiming for the interest of the majority or a political decision taken by an authority or regime also should have strong and rational grounds facilitating the aspirations and interest of the people and community. This has been later reiterated by Machiavelli in his 'Prince', a 16th century political treatise as an instruction guide for new princes and royals. The 'Prince' focuses on pragmatic and effective behaviour to be demonstrated

by the kings when dealing with the affairs of public life, identifying friends and foes, to take realistic and corrective action and also elaborately deals with the ways and means to organise, preserve and use supreme political power. The *Pañcatantra*, thus preceded the 'Prince' in dealing with the art of statecraft and governance long before the 'Prince' or such other western classic. Interestingly, the former has not directly jumped into making political agenda, but beforehand sought to establish a social order and community life based on strong, rational and pragmatic grounds where the interest and aspirations of everyone gets protected and reflected. From this perspective, the *Pañcatantra* somehow resembles Locke's idea of a balanced social life before engaging into a political life and power relations.

An examination of the available literatures in the oriental background dealing with statecraft and governance, Chanakya's '*Arthaśāstra*' of 3rd century B.C is the most prominent work. But like the Machiavelli's 'Prince', Kautilya's work also stresses on use of extreme power for political interest. Since their time, both Kautilya and Machiavelli are identified with the exercise of cold political power in its extreme ruthlessness.¹³ A close observations of Kautilya and Machiavelli's narrations will reveal that both the writers belonging to the school of realism¹⁴ were basically concerned with the problems of statecraft, concept of power and operations of various levels of government and public conduct of individuals to be demonstrated in a particular political regime and for this they focused on their respective historical context and options. The *Pañcatantra*, on the other hand emphasised on developing and grooming a rational, intelligent yet a balanced and respectful and healthy individual and social behaviour before entering the socio-political milieu and dealing with political decision making process.

The literary masterpiece of the *Pañcatantra* is 'shrewdly gleaning worldly wisdom and its inner meaning in delightful stories was intended to entertain. It captured the imagination of the people, both the rulers and the ruled alike. The prologue and backdrop of the *Pañcatantra* definitely sustains the argument that it is essentially a book of statecraft and governance as the King entrusts his three 'dud' sons to a learned man, a Brahmin, called Paṇḍit Viṣṇuśarmā, to enlighten their minds within six months'.¹⁶ As narrated by G.L. Chandiramani, the *Pañcatantra* is a rare book where one finds philosophy, psychology, politics, music, astronomy, human relationship etc all discussed together in a simple and yet elegant way.¹⁷ These requisites of a matured human personality would certainly help in making strong political personalities and decision

makers having expertise in the art of statecraft and governance, as expected by the king and the teacher Viṣṇuśarmā who perhaps were eagerly waiting for the coronation of the 'three duds' in politics.

The teachings of *Pañcatantra* are highlighted through its five basic parts and each part of the verse lays down a foundation of political consciousness for an academician engaged with the discourse of political analysis. The five basic principles elucidated as Mitrabheda, Mitralābha, Aparikṣitakārakam, Labdhapraṇāśam and Kākolūkiyam makes us to wonder how the concepts of diplomacy, alliance making, protection of national interest and retention of national power, ideas of war and peace etc were developed and discussed as important ideas associated with the machinery of governance in 200 BCE India. These preliminary ideas of the *Pañcatantra* can be treated as the founding pillars of political consciousness. Political thought and theories that were developed in different political discourses across the world and in different civilisations owe to a great extent to the original masterpiece of the *Pañcatantra*. The ideas enshrined in the great literaray- academic work are equally applicable in the realm of international relations, international law, comparative political analysis and other domains of political understanding in the present times.

The first guiding principle of the *Pañcatantra*, i.e., Estrangement Between Friends (Mitrabheda) narrated through 34 fables and figured in a dialogue between two jackals named *Karataka* and *Damanaka* makes an attempt to highlight the reasons that cause conflict among friends and results in their estrangement. *The first tantra starts as "A great friendship had developed in the Jungle, between the lion and the bullock, but it was destroyed, by an avaricious jackal."* These fables describing the different facets of conflict can be treated as guiding principles to avert and manage the possible conflicts among friends in personal life to create a congenial society based on mutual and harmonious relationship. In the public front, the message carried in these stories can be extended to apply to the art of governance and statecraft like that of building, managing and retaining a healthy and mutually respectful relationship to avert loss of friends. The first principle warns people and decision makers about the presence and role of fake mediators or intermediaries or a avaricious neighbour who can misuse or exploit friendships or alliances for personal or vested interest. The message can also enrich the understanding of diplomatic practices in international relations and can be elaborated to establish reasons for respecting the unity and integrity of modern day sovereign nation states by not encroaching in internal matters. It also throws light on the do's and don'ts to keep friendship or alliances .

The second category of the *Pañcatantra* stories explaining the ways and means of *Mitralābha/ Mitrasamprāpti* or winning of Friends, starts with the verse "Clever People and those well versed in *Nītiśāstra*, Even when they are without means, achieve success very quickly, just like the Crow, the Mouse, the Turtle and the Stag". The formula of making new friends or gaining friendship is narrated through 10 fables stressing basically on the 'Principle of Unity' and the importance of 'Trust and mutual confidence' in combating the attack of the enemy and how even the physically weak can chase the powerful enemy in their aggregate capacity to win the final battle. This message can be elaborated to apply the power of alliance or union that can be very effectively used to prevent the aggression and attack of the enemy. It also lays down the fundamentals of the basics of the phrase 'united we stand; divided we fall' that is one of the basic requisites of national integration, national power and national security. More elaboration of the second principle of the *Pañcatantra* will encompass divergent facets and aspects of governance and statecraft involving the concepts of 'divide and rule policy' advantages and disadvantages of the principle of 'separation of power', importance of intelligence, shrewdness and ability to make prompt and good decisions in emergency or applying those in diplomatic practices and so on and so forth.

The third category of the stories is known as *Kākolūkiyam* or Art of War and Peace. These fables narrated through Crows and Owls talk about War and Peace i.e. *Vigraha* and *Sandhi*. Narrated through 18 fables, it starts as "Never trust a man, Who has always been your enemy and suddenly turns friendly towards you, this was the mistake the owls made". These fables in the third category illustrate the different means and methods of warfare and diplomatic practices and reach the conclusion of taking timely and pragmatic strategies to defeat the opponents. The narrations of the third *Tantra* addresses the basic concept of international relations 'war and peace'. The question of 'war and peace' is a broad one and, as one might expect for a topic that has engaged scholars from many disciplines since the times of Sun Tzu and Thucydides.¹⁸ Like Sun Tzu in 500 BC who asserted that 'the best way to conquer the enemy is to attack his strategy' and Thucydides in his book 'The History of Peloponnesian War' in 413 BC who emphasised the academic importance of a systematic and scientific study of war from a historical perspective, *Viṣṇuśarmā* in his volume also deals with different art and techniques of warfare through '*Kākolūkiyam*'.

The details of being engaging in a war with meagre assets and preparedness

chase a powerful but cunning opponent are narrated through the stories of the Crow and the Owls. This category of the *Pañcatantra* stories also deals in details with the then prevalent methods of diplomatic practices i.e., peace, war, retreat, entrenchment, seeking the help of allies or intrigue/secret plan. The guiding principle of this category of fables also warn against believing a person without ascertaining his/her actual credentials. In the present day context of political discourse also, the concept of war and peace acquire immediate and the most important space. Methods and means are designed to mitigate war and establish peace in all the spheres of political activity. More particularly in the realm of international relations, a continuous and serious research is being done to curb the potentials of war and establish peace. The ways prescribed to establish peace, thousands of years ago through the *Pañcatantra* tales thus claim much credits and hugely ascertain the glorious and predominant academic tradition associated with society and statecraft of ancient India.

The fourth category of the tales is termed as *Labdhapraṇāsaṁ* i.e. Loss of Gains or the Forfeit of Profits. These stories are narration of apprehensions and warnings against losing whatever is gained due to one's short sightedness and ignorance, greed or too much curiosity. The beginning of the fourth Tantra states "*A man who does not lose his head, in the face of calamities, shall overcome them, just like the Monkey in the midst of the Sea*". This category of Tantra contains the narration of a total number of 13 fables. These fables explain the reasons of forfeiting the gains that is already possessed by one due to the ill traits of one's nature or due to succumbing to peer pressure and cunning intent in the disguise of soothing words or friendly face. The fourth category of the *Pañcatantra*, though mainly exhibits moral teachings aiming at individualistic perfection of human behaviour, an investigation of these fables in the context of socio-political issues helps in identifying the important intellectual and physical assets of private and public domain, understanding their value and worth and adopting means and methods for retaining the 'valuables' without falling prey to one's illicit intentions. This connotation can also be applied to the possessions of the state like that of the ingredients of national power, preserving and securing the elements of national security, retention of status quo or balancing power equations in politics etc. These categories of fables also help in identifying the reasons for which one can lose the assets already under possession due to own follies.

The fifth Tantra of the book *Aparīkṣitakāraṇaṁ* i.e., 'Acting without thinking' or 'action without due consideration' is another powerful message for individual and public

life. This category of fables warn against hasty actions or taking actions without thinking much and considering the consequences. These stories prescribe considered actions and warn against rash deals. The first verse states "No wise man should follow the barber's example, pursuing what he has neither accurately observed, nor properly understood; neither correctly heard, nor sufficiently considered". The fifth book contains a total of 12 fables offering examples of ill-consequences of hasty and un-examined actions mainly taken by a human being in the urge of immediate decision making. Like the fourth category of the classic, the fifth categorisation of the fables also subscribes to a negative approach where warnings and cautions are given to the decision maker before jumping into a process of decision making.

This category of fables direct one to ponder, re-think and henceforth make a rational choice by evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of a consequent decision. Thus, the fifth Tantra can be considered as a basis for rational decision making practice more than only illustrating as a requisite of rational human behaviour. Decision making is an important element of statecraft deeply associated with the aspect of public administration, governance and public policy. Good decisions can positively contribute in public policy making, fulfilling the aspirations of the people and bringing about fruits of development and thereby contributing in the overall success of the regime and bad decision can do the reverse in the lives of the people and society. The ancient book, the *Pañcatantra*, by providing important supplements on 'decision making process' successfully adapts to this field of community life through treating the basics of the issue of public policy making.

The *Pañcatantra* tales provide everything needed to lead a humble, dignified and balanced human life. These elements of human conduct essentially contribute in making a qualified and efficient citizenry which is undoubtedly the main element of a powerful statecraft. The stories presented through fables are so open ended that they can be elaborated and applied to every aspect and phase of individual and community life starting from developing a wise human conduct based on moral-ethical ground to adopting a pragmatic and rational behaviour while taking decision in the context of public life as citizens or rulers. Besides, this value laden yet pragmatic literature can be explored and expanded to analyse the fundamentals of socio-political life that eventually has a link with the concept of statecraft. In fact, it is such a rich literary asset possessed by ancient India and gifted to the world fraternity that has equally enriched the domestic socio-political life of and strengthened the arena of international politics. Its contents

and themes propagate all the do's and don'ts that are needed to be observed in the realm of personal and public life being a social and political animal or stakeholder.

The proliferation of knowledge across the world, through the *Pañcatantra* is so genuine and binding that it is considered as a gift to the world community along with the great literature of 'Arthaśāstra'. If treated as a book on 'statecraft', the *Pañcatantra* contains different concepts or guiding principles in all its five Tantras that constitute the ground rules of modern day statecraft and theory building of international politics and law. Internal balancing, alliances and asymmetric approaches are as old as statecraft. They are not the inventions of modern European strategic thought, but date back to the era of Kauṭilya and Viṣṇu śarmā.¹⁹ The *Pañcatantra* thus can be safely cited as a treatise of socio-political understanding and treatment that a civilised society is expected to follow in various levels of its operation and activity. It aims to understand and analyse the guiding principles of governance, attitudes to be adopted by a ruler in a polity, the nature and means of public conduct and so on and so forth. The teachings of the *Pañcatantra* can be expanded and interpreted to analyse every element of modern day civilisation that has a direct or indirect link with society and politics. Unequivocally, these teachings are important for both the ruled and the rulers and thus as an empirical text dealing extensively with all the components of statecraft, it certainly acquires the credentials of a great text.

End Notes

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