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SOCIO-POLITICAL ANALYSIS OF SUBHASHITAS  
OF PANCHATANTRA AND HITOPADESHA

-V. H. Murthy (Bangaluru)\*

The Sanskrit prose is an important form of literature, not just from point of treatises but also from the point of literature. Sanskrit prose developed from certain non-metrical portions of the Yajurveda. Later, in the classical period, the style of prose sustained the more rampant use of versification of thought. The usage of non-metrical lines in the dialogues of dramas also sustained the prose style. The ethical and moral Nitikatha style of prose is a precursor to the more artistic Gadyas of later period like Kadambari and Dashakumara Charita.

The Panchatantra and Hitopadesha adopted the prose style for narration, along with verses in the middle for indoctrination. It is generally agreed upon by scholars that the Panchatantra of Vishnu Sharma is a prior work to Narayana Pandita's Hitopadesha. However, the Hitopadesha is more artistically perfect and well-formed than the Panchatantra.

The stories of the Hitopadesha are full of ethical and moral messages which even a general reader and children can understand. This was exactly the motive of authoring of Hitopadesha. The tales of Panchatantra and Hitopadesha not only has the prose-style narration, but also has many Subhashitas within it.

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\*(वि. हेच. मूर्ति महोदयः केरळराज्ये तिरुवनन्तपुरे स्थितस्य भारतीय-  
विचारकेन्द्रस्य ज्येष्ठसंशोधकानां डा. के. उन्निकृष्णन् महाभागानां मार्गदर्शनेन  
“पञ्चतन्त्र-हितोपदेशग्रन्थयोः तौलनिकम् अध्ययनम्” इत्यस्मिन् विषये  
तुमकूरुविश्वविद्यालये संशोधनकर्मणि रतः ।)



Some of these Subhashitas have earned their place in many Subhashita-Sangraha texts like Subhashita Ratnabhandagara, Subhashita Suradhrama and others. Some of the Subhashitas from the Hitopadesha and Panchatantra shall be critically examined in this Paper.

In the Hitopadesha, there is a well-known Shloka which speaks of how a wise man should treat others and others wealth. The Shloka is as follows:

**Matruvat paradareshu paradravyesu loshtravat |**

**Atmavat sarvabhuteshu yah pashyati sa panditah ||<sup>1</sup>**

The meaning of this Shloka is that a wise man should treat the wife of others as his own mother. Similarly, the wealth of others should be considered as lump of mud. But, while treating other living beings, one should treat them as if it is one's own self. There are certain important implications to be examined here. For the smooth functioning of the society, certain social norms are must. If not, there would be social chaos and anarchy in the society. Hence, other women-folk have to be treated as one's own mother i.e. without the feeling of lust. The reference to mother is symbolic of chastity of feeling. Similarly, one should not crave for the wealth of others. This will bring economic stability to the nation. Hence, it is compared to the lump of mud symbolically to show that it is of no use. The third illustration stress on universal well-being. It is the treatment of all beings as one's own self. When this objective is fulfilled, the entire world be at peace, because this exactly is the apt definition and guideline to all morality. As an extension to the former-named third factor of treatment to others, the question would be, how do we individually treat anyone who approaches us.

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1. Hitopadesha, page-28



As an answer to this question, the following Subhashita Shloka remarks:

**Uttamasyapi varnasya neechopi gruhamagatah |  
Pujaniyo yathayogyam sarvadevamayothithih ||<sup>2</sup>**

The verse is about the individual treatment of the guests to the house. It may be observed here that there was not discrimination on the basis of caste or creed. Anyone who comes as a guest to the house is entertained with equal respect. Infact, the guest is treated as equal to god in this Shloka without any discrimination.

<sup>3</sup> This is not only a corollary for the previous Shloka, but also a promoter of how even an outsider needs to be treated. The reference to god in this verse is to show highest respect.

Having analyzed some of the Subhashitas on positive note, the Subhashitas that shun negative feelings and thoughts also need to be analyzed. The following Subhashitas serve the purpose:

**Aviditvaatmanah Shaktim Parasya Ca Samutsukah |  
Gacchannabhimukho Naasham yaati vahnau patangavat ||<sup>4</sup>**

In this Subhashita, there is a psychological note that a person should know two things. Firstly, the efficiency and power of one's own self and secondly, the power of others. Both have to be known and not any one of them. If the knowledge of any one of them is missing, it would bring the disaster of the person. It is compared metaphorically to the bee which mistakes the fire to be flower and gets burnt by it.

2. Hitopadesha, page-90

3. "Athitidevo Bhava"

4. Pancatantra, page-197



Both have to be known and not any one of them. If the knowledge of any one of them is missing, it would bring the disaster of the person. It is compared metaphorically to the bee which mistakes the fire to be flower and gets burnt by it. It must be analyzed here that the bee is the ignorant person and fire is the enemy or adversary situation. The bee is ignorant of its capacity to tackle the adversary. Secondly, it is unaware of the nature of the fire to scorch it. Thus, the illustration is most suitable for both the factors of psychological ignorance.

The query on this would be; is it not safe for the bee or the person to stay out of the dangerous situation and thereby avoid being destroyed by it.

The Panchatantra answers this question by the following Shloka with the remark that even this move is dangerous because negligence costs much at times:

**Sookshmenapi randrena pravishatyantaram ripuh |  
Nashayetcca shanaih pashcaatplavam salilapooravat ||<sup>5</sup>**

In this Subhashita, it is conveyed that one should not neglect an adversary from the beginning itself, because his enmity slowly grows and takes a heavy toll later. Slowly and silently, the impending danger becomes mounted and the person is destroyed. To prove this with an example, the Panchatantra akin it a small hole in a big ship. The ship may not sink immediately, but it shall surely sink as the water is filled through the small hole as the time goes. Hence, even a small adversary should not be neglected.

There may be question on this Shloka too. The enemy adversary is not only small but also silent and peaceful. Hence, may be neglected.



Harm may occur by a small adversary but may not occur a silent one. The following Subhashita answers this question as:

**Vane prajvalito vahnirdahanmoolaani rakshati |**

**Samoolonmoolanam kuryaadvaayuryo mrudusheetalah ||** <sup>6</sup>

A fire in the forest rages and rages with sound and fur. However, inspite of its destructive rage, it is unable to destroy the roots of plants. It is only the grown up trees, plants and animals that are destroyed. The roots within the earth is immaculate. The raging fire is compared to a furious adversary. However, the wind which does not rage like the fire uproots the plants and trees from the roots. This is compared to a calm and silent, and yet a powerful adversary. A calm and collect adversary is more dangerous and should not be overlooked at any cost. There is a verse spoken by Vidura in the Mahabharata with similar sense as:

**“Na vairamuddhipayati Prashantam...”**

**(“one should not provoke a calm person...”)** <sup>7</sup>

Finally, the question would be, what do we do with an adversary who is making *advancements* slowly. The following Shloka answers this question:

**Ya upeksheta shatrum svam prasantam yadrucchayaa |**

**Rogaancaalasyasamyuktah sa shanaistena hanyate ||** <sup>8</sup>

If the slowly advancing adversary is neglected, it is like neglecting a disease which is slowly advancing in the body.

6. Pancatantra, page-525

7. Mahabharata Viduraniti

8. Pancatantra, page-400



It is suggestively (by Dhvani<sup>9</sup>) conveyed here that there would come a stage when the adversary is irrefutable like the disease becoming incurable.

Finally, it may be concluded that the Subhashitas of Panchatantra has valuable aspects of social well-being and political acumen as well. The concept of social wellness here contributes to strengthening of political order and economic stability as well. The political aspects as to how the adversary is to be tackled, also is for the protection of oneself and society as well. Hence, both these aspects are mutually complimentary. The Panchatantra and Hitopadesha have Subhashitas of deeper insight from socio-political perspective.

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