



Contemporary Revisions of Indian Mythology and Folktales

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ABSTRACT

The phrase 'folk' defines as people belonging to various groups sharing common aspects like language, culture, religion and tradition. India, being rich in heroic ballads and epic poetry, has preserved numerous collections in oral tradition, Sanskrit and vernacular languages. This paper looks at how Panchatantra tales, considered as bed time stories, are now viewed as daytime constructs of knowledge and wisdom aiming at intellectual stimulation.

Key words: revisionist narratives, Indian mythology, folklore

Indian Folklore is a kind of narrative, speaking about the country's rich heritage. Folklore is very popular within an eclectic number of cultures emerging from all walks of life. The phrase 'folk' can be defined as people belonging to various groups sharing common aspects like language, culture, religion and tradition. India, being rich in heroic ballads and epic poetry, has preserved numerous collections in oral tradition, Sanskrit and vernacular languages. Folk tales are essentially stories with a moral told by word of mouth with the purpose of educating the society from generation to generation. They create a strong bond of traditional and moral values with the present day generation.

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata are the most widely read Indian epics. Another notable collection of tales often read even in modern society is Panchatantra, the traditional narratives by Vishnu Sharma believed to be written in the second century BC. The stories portrayed by animal characters exhibit human behavior. It's applicable to everyone irrespective of the age. The stories help in shaping the young minds for being an ethical being and grow as responsible adults.

The Panchatantra tales has its roots on various areas like psychology, philosophy, politics, music, astronomy, human relationship, decision making, managerial skills and so on. The tales guide to understand others, choosing trust worthy friends, overcoming difficulties and problems through wisdom. The tales preach of living in harmony by accommodating oneself to new environment amidst intrigues, selfishness, hypocrisy and other traps of life.

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*"Whoever learns the work by heart,
Or through the story-teller's art
Becomes acquainted,
His life by sad defeat - although
The king of heaven be his foe -
Is never tainted."*

The history of Panchatantra tales state the fact about a king, Amarashakti the King of Mahilaropya, who couldn't educate his unruly sons as they refuse to listen to any teacher. A pandit, Vishnu Sharma took up the responsibility of educating the three princes. The book, Panchatantra, is divided into (pancha) five 'tantra's (systems) of 'Nitishashtra' (Science of wise conduct). The stories narrated by the Pandit comprises of Sanskrit language, grammar, idea, "samvadana"(the dialogue) and philosophy. The five sections of the book are Mitra-bheda: The Separation of Friends, Mitra-samprapti: The Gaining of Friends, Kakolukiyam: War and Peace, Labdhaprasam: Loss of Gains, and Aparikitakaraka: Ill-Considered Action / Rash deeds. The tales are found in the abridged versions in more than 50 languages devoid of Sanskrit Slokas reducing it to mere fables or tales.

In the contemporary society, the tales of Panchatantra have their roles to be played befitting the modern society. The folk tales are not only entertaining but educative too. Further the tales teach to be very careful in everything that is done. Folktales help to understand the attitude and mentality of people by successfully supplying a glimpse into the world of realities. Moreover the folk tales help in developing reading skills, study and appreciate various cultures and traditions and explore new ways of seeing the world.

As a result of globalization, we, humans are getting closer in spite of boundaries with a decline in national identities; yet ancient folk tales have a dominant role in modern society. Folk tales are basically more utilitarian than being aesthetically involved. The stories are aimed at humans, to understand the parallel between their actions and characters in the story.

Folktales, celebrating diversity, inhibits valuable insights by broadening the view of life. The most challenging situation in individuals' life is 'decision making'. The more responsible decisions that are taken lead to positive outcomes and irresponsible decisions to negative outcomes. Effective decision making avoids conflicts.

The ancient story of Rabbit and Tortoise teaches the moral that 'slow and steady wins the race'. Besides the lesson, the story also makes one understand that being lazy and forgetting the goals lead to dangers and are forced to repent while watching others achieving and reaching the goals. The modern story of Rabbit and Tortoise resumes with the wish of rabbit to compete again and wins while the tortoise completes as usual. The rabbit here makes one to learn from previous mistakes and rectify them. The smart and intelligent people learn from the mistake of others; the possibilities to avoid mistakes. The tortoise, having lost the game, means to say that participation calls for a great courage than fear of defeat.

Attempting to win, the tortoise calls for a race again by choosing the place near a water body. The choice of spot by the tortoise is so apt as it can easily pass through the water in high speed when compared to land. The choice of the place suggests, to seek a supporting environment to succeed instead of being defeated and depressed. Victory is decided by one's own strategy of success. Moreover setting the track tuff for the opponents is also another strategy of success. The thought of confrontation continues that call them for devising strategies to fight against each other.

A new arrival, another rabbit, from nearby forest makes the native rabbit to seek the guidance of tortoise. Race between the native and alien rabbit takes place half on the land and half in water. The tortoise who has promised to help the native one, takes rabbit on his back and travels towards the land. Once reaching the land, the native rabbit carries tortoise on his back who helps to clear the bushes on the track with a stick and wins the race in understanding and cooperation. The lesson WIN-WIN Situation teaches cooperative working always yields success and happiness and the absence of coordination gives room for the alien powers to dominate.

The story still continues by fixing a date by alien rabbit for a race with a thirst to win with a declaration of securing the first place. The declaration creates suspicion in the mind of the tortoise. The race begins on the same track. The tortoise having reached 75%, moves out the rabbit from its back and so the alien rabbit wins the race. The native rabbit understands the conspiracy which would have broken the cooperative living. The loss calls for an understanding of searching for reasons for loss and rectifying the same. The preaching of Bhagwat Gita also states the state of not being affected either by loss or victory, sthithapragna is of yogic.

Again, a race is called where the alien rabbit hires a dog to make the native rabbit and tortoise run helter-skelter. Aware of it, they too hire a dog. During the race, the native dog protects the native contestants and helps them to win. The intrigue makes one understand that the competitors rely on others' strength than theirs. Watching the activities of the aliens is needed so as to protect oneself.

Having lost the game, the alien now seeks the assistance of the lion of his own jungle. Knowing this, the natives approach their king. At the start of the race, both the lions being in love start attacking the animals. In the course of attack the alien rabbit dies. Having asked for protection, the rabbit is left free out of sympathy whereas tortoise curls into his own shell. Later the natives move to a new forest befriending a deer. The act of the lions teaches the dangers to be encountered by befriending the superiors with an aim to win.

Entering the new forest, the natives turn to be aliens now. To become friendly with native animals, the rabbit starts giving advice at troublesome situations. The situation calls to adopt oneself to the new environment as people are usually afraid of getting accustomed to new atmosphere. The principle of the survival of the fittest guides one to sustain in new environments.

One of the native rabbits who is envious of these two animals, suffers from inferiority complex and so keeps creating number of problems by making fun of them and complaining to the elders. The alien rabbit takes everything in a positive tone so as to understand the intricacies of problems and strategies to solve the same. The native rabbit, to trouble more, calls the aliens to compete with him in a race. Hearing this the tortoise feels very happy, but the alien rabbit refuses

to compete. The reason behind the decision is the belief in the state of victory is to adjust to the local conditions and not to satisfy ego by just taking part in the race. The decision invites one to learn to shun the unnecessary quarrels with the natives. Great personalities like Arthur Cotton, Charles Phillips Brown and Caldwell were respected by the natives for their valuable service. They deserve the respect as they respected the culture and traditions of the natives.

As years pass by, the members of both the family – rabbit and tortoise increase in numbers. The rabbit, in the view of strengthening the relationships, starts concentrating on matrimonial affairs. The tortoise possessing lack of interest moves to another forest whereas the respect of the rabbit keeps increasing. Happy and contented with the services of rabbit, the king makes him the Minister. The message one gets here is matrimonial relationships helps to survive in peace. The respect a person deserves also depends on the good terms a person has with many.

Having gained the confidence of the king, in the death vacancy of him, the rabbit requests the king to appoint tortoise as the minister. King agrees and appoints the tortoise as minister. The old age problems makes the rabbit to give priority to health as Health is Wealth. All the friends and relatives visit the rabbit who is in the death bed. They are so eager to listen to the last words of the rabbit. The very gift of life is service to the dependents without expectations. If the materialistic comforts do not satisfy the human, then the earned comforts have no values. Life of simplicity is better always. The acquainted power needs to be used only if needed. A person who aims at unconditional happiness, stays happy in spite of the troubles. Further, every trouble is viewed as an opportunity to learn and explore the new world of possibilities. With these words, the rabbit passes away. Few days later, the tortoise too passes away. But the lessons being taught by the rabbit do not fade away from the memories of the people.

Decision making, the most challenging aspect in all walks of life is handled with ease while making a reference to the Panchatantra tale, the retold version of Rabbit and Tortoise. The tales based on Panchatantra, these days evolve with new adaptations as a tool to the managers and employees with its management effective practices and strategies. Irrespective of being a new or seasoned employee, problems occur at work. Fitting In, Making Mistakes, Time Management, Slackers, Disagreeable Coworkers, Office Bullies, Whiners and Complainers, Trouble Makers, Getting Along with Your Boss are the major challenges that are faced by many in the contemporary world.

Many other tales from Panchatantra give manifold lessons to the society. The tale ‘The Brahmin and His dream’ suggests to set realistic goals. ‘Blue Jackal’ advises to ‘be yourself’. ‘The Brahmin and the goat’ advises to believe in yourself. ‘The Monkey and the crocodile’ preaches ‘Don’t panic’; face the situation and find out a solution. ‘The Fox and the grapes’ preaches the most valuable lesson ‘don’t blame others’. ‘The rabbit and the lion’ passes on the message to apply your intelligence, the size of the enemy doesn’t matter much.

Director Rebecca Spurgeon who has directed many tales of Panchatantra, says, “There are so many elements to the stories and the production that there is something for all, regardless of age. The only takeaway for children that we want is that they ask why the story is taking whatever shape it does.”

The children of the current generation are so sensitive to the world where we live in. She tries to make the children understand the world in terms of global issues and today's politics without taking off the classic of the soul. In her words, "One of the original stories talks about a Monkey who isn't supposed to touch something but does it anyway. In the retold version we talk about why he doesn't listen, for example. An understanding of the why is important but we've also tried very hard to still keep the Panchatantra flavor and do justice to that."

The Panchatantra tales, considered as bed time stories, is now viewed as daytime constructs of knowledge and wisdom aiming at intellectual stimulation. The tales are personified as a coach and mentor to people irrespective of the age. Panchatantra, the Neeti-Shaastra, having animals as characters are often mistaken as tales for children. The stories are to be viewed as the guidelines that change our perspectives of the challenges in the day to day life. They attempt to relate to the situations of daily life that leads to moral and realistic approach to a successful life being wise, understanding frauds and cheating, making friends and live a meaningful life making use of the bestowed wisdom.

The author, Vishnu Sharma, emphasized that:

"A man who has studied this Neetishastra or listened to its precepts will never be defeated not even by Indra, the lord of the Heaven".

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