

Ayurvedic Concepts Reflected in the Panchatantra: A Literary and Medical Analysis

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Abstract- Sanskrit literature holds a special place in the Indian knowledge tradition. Along with the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas and epics, the Panchatantra is also an important treatise on policy, which was composed by Acharya Vishnu Sharma to impart statecraft, practical skills and worldly knowledge to princes. Through engaging stories of animals and birds, this book not only entertains but also guides the moral and social aspects of life. Although the Panchatantra is primarily a treatise on ethics, it also contains many subjects related to Ayurveda. The medicinal plants, diet, virtuous conduct and environmental awareness described in it are in harmony with the basic principles of Ayurveda. The mention of agarwood, castor, camphor, shimshapa (rosewood) and other substances also shows their therapeutic and practical importance in the society of that time. Studying these episodes in the light of the Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita and Ashtanga Hridayam illustrates the integrated vision of the Indian knowledge tradition. Today, as the need for health protection, natural medicine and the conservation of medicinal plants grows, the Ayurvedic subjects contained in the Panchatantra become all the more relevant. The book also conveys a message of physical, mental and social health through virtue, restraint, benevolence and a balanced lifestyle.

Keywords — Panchatantra, Ayurveda, Ethics, Sanskrit Fiction, Medicinal Plants, Virtuous Conduct.

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Introduction- The Panchatantra is a famous Sanskrit treatise on policy, in which life-lessons are conveyed through the stories of animals and birds. It was composed by Acharya Vishnu Sharma. Its main purpose was to teach Prince's politics, ethics and life skills - to educate the dull-witted princes of a former king, impart practical knowledge, and develop the ability to make the right decisions in life. The method of the Panchatantra is to explain profound principles through simple stories.

The Panchatantra was composed by Acharya Vishnu Sharma. Its composition is believed to date to around 200 BCE. Hertel considers the period of the

Panchatantra to be after 200 BCE. Keith places it at 200 BCE or laterⁱ

There are five tantras (parts) in the Panchatantra:

1. Mitra Bheda (The Separation of Friends)
2. Mitra Samprapti (The Gaining of Friends)
3. Kakolukiya (Of Crows and Owls)
4. Labdhapranasha (Loss of Gains)
5. Apariksitakaraka (Rash/Ill-Considered Action)

Mitrabheda - Mitrabheda is the story of the breaking of the friendship between a lion and a bull, and it contains 23 sub-stories. This tantra describes the quarrel between friends and its harmful effects. One should have faith in true friends.

वर्धमानो महान्स्नेहः सिंहगोवृषयोर्वने ।

पिशुनेनातिलुब्धेन जम्बुकेन विनाशितः ।।ⁱⁱ

Mitrasamprapti - In Mitrasamprapti there is a story of friendship between a tortoise, a deer and a mouse. This tantra contains 7 sub-stories describing the importance of friends, cooperation and the power of unity. True friendship helps even in difficult situations.

तनवोप्यायता नित्यं तन्तवो बहुलाः समाः ।

बहुन्बहुत्वादायासान्स हन्तीत्युपमा सताम् ।।ⁱⁱⁱ

Kakolukiya - The Kakoluki Tantra describes the story of the crow and the owl. It has 17 sub-stories and deals with politics and diplomacy. Caution and intelligence toward an enemy are essential.

न विश्वसेत्पूर्वविरोधितस्य शत्रोश्च मित्रत्वमुपागतस्य ।

दग्धा गुहां पश्य उलुकपूर्णा काकप्रणीतेन हुताशनेन ।।^{iv}

Labdhapranasha - There is a story of monkeys and a crocodile in the Labdhapranasha Tantra, containing 11 sub-stories. It describes the consequences of greed and carelessness. The wise prevail through intellect, while the fool loses even what is already in hand.

समुत्पन्नेषु कार्येषु बुद्धिर्यस्य न हीयते ।
स एव दुर्गं तरति जलस्थो वानरो यथा ॥^v

Apariksitakaraka -Apariksitakaraka tells the story of the Brahmin lady and the mongoose and describes 14 sub-stories. It relates the consequences of thoughtless action - one must think carefully before undertaking any task.

अपरीक्ष्य न कर्त्तव्यं कर्त्तव्यं सुपरीक्षितम् ।
पश्चाद्भवति सन्तापो ब्रह्मण्या नकुलार्थतः ॥^{vi}

Importance of the Panchatantra-

The Panchatantra is a unique treatise of Sanskrit literature, composed by Vishnu Sharma to teach statecraft, tact and life-management to princes. It is not merely a work of entertainment but a guide to practical living. Its teachings are as useful today as they were in ancient times.

Ethics and Conduct Education: - The Panchatantra teaches a person to make the right decisions in life, to judge situations wisely, and to act tactfully. It states that knowledge alone is not enough — its proper application at the right time is equally necessary.

असाधना अपि प्राज्ञा बुद्धिमन्तो बहुश्रुता : ।
साधयन्त्याशु कार्याणि काकाखुमृगकूर्मवत् ॥^{vii}

Development of Moral Values: The stories in this book cultivate moral virtues such as truthfulness, honesty, friendship, conscientiousness, patience, self-restraint and benevolence. Every story ends with a life lesson.

संक्षेपात् कथ्यते धर्मो जनाः ! किं विस्तरेण वः ।
परोपकारः पुण्याय पापाय परपीडनम् ॥^{viii}

Helpful in Personality Formation: The Panchatantra develops self-confidence, leadership, foresight, problem-solving ability and decision-making skills. It teaches a person to act wisely even in difficult circumstances.

अयं निजः परो वेति गणना लघुचेतसाम् ।
उदारचरितानान्तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् ॥^{ix}

An Effective Medium of Education: Stories told through animals and birds make even complex ideas simple, interesting and memorable. This is why the work is equally valuable for everyone, from children to scholars.

यथा बीजांकुरः सूक्ष्मः प्रयात्नेनाभिरक्षितः ।
फलप्रदो भवेत्काले तद्वल्लोकः सुरक्षितः ॥^x

Knowledge of Politics and Diplomacy: The Panchatantra contains many principles relating to statecraft, the choice of friends, dealing with enemies, treaties, conflict and administration. It is therefore regarded not merely as a literary work but also as an important treatise on policy and politics.

शपथैः संधितस्यापि न विश्वासं वज्रोद्रिपो : ।
श्रूयते शपथं कृत्वा वृत्रः शक्रेण सूदितः ॥^{xi}

Ayurveda-

Ayurveda is the foundation of the system of medicine, whose purpose is “the preservation of health in the healthy, and the alleviation of disorders in the diseased.”— स्वस्थस्य स्वाथ्यरक्षणमतुरास्य विकार^{xii}

Ayurveda has made an important contribution to the Indian way of life since the Vedic period. Its influence is naturally reflected in the daily life of Indians at every step — from waking in the morning to going to bed at night, all thoughts regarding daily routine, diet and other matters are guided by Ayurveda. The definition of Ayurveda, as given by the author of the Charaka Samhita, is:

हिताहितं सुखं दुःखमायूस्तस्य हिताहितम् ।
मानं च तच्च यात्रोक्तमायुर्वेदः स उच्यते ॥^{xiii}

When the outcome of the four aspects of life - benefit and harm, happiness and sorrow - and the union of body, senses, mind and soul are considered together, that science is called Ayurveda.

Ayurvedic Topics in the Panchatantra-

The Panchatantra is a book of ethics in which moral instruction is conveyed through animals and birds. It contains not only entertainment but also moral values, and it mentions Ayurvedic elements, medicines, trees and plants - such as agarwood, arka (madar), cardamom, castor, camphor, sandalwood and shimshapa (rosewood). Viewed from an Ayurvedic perspective, it becomes evident that this important work of fiction refers to many kinds of plants, even though it is neither an Ayurvedic text nor composed with that intent.

Agarwood/ Aga: - This is mentioned by Acharya Vishnusharma in the fifth story of the first tantra. The king used to honour the Kaulika (weaver), who had taken the form of a god, daily with fragrant substances.

राजा नित्यमेव विशेषतः कर्पूराडगुरु-कस्तूरिकादिपरिमल विशेषान् । ^{xiv}

Usefulness of agarwood in Ayurveda - It is useful in rheumatic diseases. It is applied to cold sores, ulcers, dermatitis and painful conditions. It is chewed to remove bad breath, and it is also beneficial for physical weakness and cold-type fevers.

Acharya Charaka has described agarwood in the chapter on Yajjapurushiya of the Sutrasthana. Regarding its usefulness, Acharya Charaka states that it counters cold, greenish-coloured coatings/discharges; it is bitter in taste and hot in potency.

रास्नागुरुणी शीतापनयन प्रलेपनानाम् । ^{xv}

Aak / Madar /Arka: A description of this plant occurs in the first tantra of the Panchatantra, in the context of an ignorant servant — just as the purpose of wood is not served even by collecting plenty of castor, bhindi (mallow), arka and reeds.

**एरण्डभिण्डार्कनलैः प्रभूतैरपि संचितैः ।
दारुकृत्ये यथानास्ति तथैवाज्ञैः प्रयोजनम् ॥** ^{xvi}

Usefulness of Arka in Ayurveda - Although the author of the Panchatantra has not explained its use, its value has not gone unnoticed by the keen vision of the Ayurvedic masters.

Acharya Sushruta expresses the following view: the flowers of the red-flowered tree, neem, mushkaka and arka, as well as kutaja, destroy kapha and pitta and cure skin diseases (kushtha).

**रक्त वृक्षस्य निम्बस्य मुष्ककार्कसिनस्य च ।
कफपित्तहरं पुष्पं कुष्ठग्रं कुटजस्य च ॥** ^{xvii}

Pandit Bhava Mishra considers both varieties (white and red) to be destroyers of dosha-related disorders, vata, leprosy, itching, poison, ulcers, haemorrhoids, kapha and stomach ailments.

**अर्कद्वयः सर वात कुष्ठकण्ड विष प्रणान् ।
निहन्तिप्लीह गुल्मार्शः श्लेष्मोदर शकृत् कृमिन् ॥** ^{xviii}

Castor-In the first tantra of the Panchatantra, Acharya Vishnu Sharma also mentions castor in the context of the unlearned servant.

**एरण्डभिण्डार्कनलैः प्रभूतैरपि सञ्चितैः ।
दारुकृत्यं यथा नास्ति तथैवाज्ञैः प्रयोजनम् ॥** ^{xix}

Usefulness of castor in Ayurveda - According to Acharya Sushruta, castor oil is sweet, hot, sharp, kindles the digestive fire, pungent, astringent as an aftertaste, subtle, purifies the body's channels, is good for the skin, acts as an aphrodisiac, is sweet upon digestion, preserves youthfulness, purifies the vagina and semen, and promotes health, intellect, complexion, memory and strength; it alleviates vata and phlegm-related disorders and removes defects of the intellect.

**एरण्डतैलं मधुरमुष्णं तीक्ष्णं दीपनं कटु, कषायानुरसं सूक्ष्मं स्रोतोविशोधनं त्वच्यं वृष्यं मधुर-
विपाकं वयः स्थापनं योनिशुक्रविशोधनमारोग्यमेधाकान्तिस्मृतिबलकरं
वातकफहरमेधाभागदोषहरं च ॥** ^{xx}

Camphor-Acharya Vishnusharma describes camphor in the story of the Kaulika, in the context of the daily honours (satkara) offered by the king to the one who had taken the form of Narayana as his son-in-law. In the story of the

Brahmin and the crab in the Panchatantra, there is a description of the Brahmin's son setting off on a journey after his mother gives him a crab as a companion, placed in a box filled with camphor.

"स चाम्यन्तरगता कर्पूरपुर्तिकामतिलौल्या दभक्षयत्" ^{xxi}

Usefulness of camphor in Ayurveda - Camphor is used in Ayurveda for disorders caused by all three doshas -vata, pitta and kapha. Mixed with oil, it is used for rheumatoid conditions, cough and pneumonia, among others. It is used in eye diseases, and as an ingredient in dental and oral preparations.

Acharya Sushruta expresses the following view: camphor is bitter and coolingly fragrant; it is beneficial for dryness and loss of taste in the mouth.

सतिक्तः सुरभिः शीतः कर्पूरो लघु लेखनः।
तृष्णायां च मुखशोषे च वैरस्ये चापि पूजितः ॥ ^{xxii}

Shimshapa/ Rosewood/Sheesham-The episode of the shimshapa (rosewood) tree appears in the story of the ill-considered agent in the Panchatantra. A

weaver named Mantharaka, while searching for wood to make his tools, goes to the forest and sees a shimshapa tree. Rosewood is very strong timber and also has many uses from an Ayurvedic point of view. The tree is found across all the regions of India. The rosewood tree grows to fifty or sixty feet in height. Its trunk is thick and rounded, and its bark is cracked. The wood within is hard and dark in colour. Its branches are soft and drooping. Its leaves are long and curved, and its flowers are small, yellow and white.

स च समुद्रतटे यावद् भ्रमन् प्रयातः ,
तावत्तत्र शिंशपापादपस्तेन दृष्टः । ^{xxiii}

Usefulness of rosewood in Ayurveda- It is used for cough and vata-related disorders. Rosewood oil is used for worm infestations, leprosy and skin diseases. The juice of its leaves is used for eye diseases and toothache. Its leaves are given in the treatment of indigestion, colic, diarrhoea, haemorrhoids and vomiting, and the powder of its wood is given for intestinal worm diseases.

Pandit Bhavamishra's view in this regard is as follows: it is bitter, astringent in taste and hot in potency, and reduces swelling; it destroys abortive tendencies, leprosy, white leprosy (vitiligo), worms, urinary-tract disorders, inflammation, blood disorders and phlegm.

शिंशपा कटुका तिक्ता कषाया शोफहारिणी।
उष्णवीर्या हरेन्मेदः कुष्ठश्चित्रवमीकृमीन् ॥ ^{xxiv}

Virtuous Conduct- By following good conduct, a person attains a respected place in society. One should constantly practise dharma (righteousness), artha (prosperity) and karma (action/duty). Acharya Charaka states that all human beings who wish for their own welfare should follow the code of good conduct (sadvritta). By observing it, one attains both health and mastery over the senses at the same time.

तस्मादात्महितं चिकीर्षता सर्वेण सर्वे सर्वथा स्मृतिमास्थाय सद्वृत्तमनुष्ठेयम् ॥

तद्भ्यनुतिष्ठन् युगपत्सम्पादयत्यर्थद्वयमारोग्यमिन्द्रियविजयं चेति ॥ ^{xxv}

Acharya Charaka has expounded the code of good conduct (sadvritta) as follows: one should worship God, the cow, Brahmins, the guru, the elderly, the accomplished, and Acharya Agni. One should take good medicines, bathe morning and evening, keep the body and feet constantly clean, trim hair, beard and nails, and wear clean, untorn clothes daily. If someone comes to meet you, you should speak to them first. One should keep a cheerful countenance, be kind to others in distress, perform havan and yajna, and give charity according to one's ability. One should entertain guests, offer pindas to ancestors, speak beneficial words that are timely, brief and sweet in meaning, and remain self-controlled and virtuous. One should be envious of the causes of another's advancement, but not of the fruits thereof. The Ashtanga Hridayam likewise states that one should serve the gods, cows, Brahmins, elders, physicians, kings and guests, and should never turn away a beggar who comes to one's home. One should not act in ways that fail to fulfil the three aims of life.

अर्चयेद्देव गोविप्रवृद्धवैद्यनृपातिथीन्।
विमुखान्नार्थिनः कुर्यान्नावमन्येत नाक्षिपेत् ॥ ^{xxvi}
त्रिवर्गशून्यं नारम्भं भजेत चाविरोधयन्।
अनुयायात् प्रतिपदं सर्वधर्मेषु मध्यमाम् ॥ ^{xxvii}

In the concluding portion of the Charaka Samhita, Maharishi Charaka states that one should devote oneself to celibacy, knowledge, charity, friendship, compassion, joy, equanimity and tranquillity

ब्रह्मचर्यज्ञानदानमैत्रीकारुण्यहर्षप्रेक्षाप्रशमपरश्च स्यादीति । xxviii

According to Acharya Vishnu sharma, there is no virtuous act on earth equal to charity. The Panchatantra states that a person who behaves well toward those who have done good to him -what particular virtue is there in his good conduct? The truly virtuous, say the wise, are those who remain well-behaved even toward those who have wronged them.

उपकारिषु यः साधुः साधुत्वे तस्य को गुणः?

अपकारिषु यः साधुः स साधुः सद्भिरुच्यते ।। xxix

Pandit Vishnu Sharma states that when a beggar comes to one's home, one should satisfy him by any means possible. In this context, in the story of the pigeon, the pigeon casts itself into the fire to satisfy the hunger of the hunter - a perfect example of selfless generosity.

तत् तथा साधयाम्येतच्छरीरं दुःखजीवितम् ।

यथा भूयो न वक्ष्यामि नास्तीत्यर्थिसमागमे ।। xxx

Acharya Vishnu Sharma states, regarding sin, that the one who commits sin certainly does not love his own soul, because he alone must bear the suffering caused by that sin. Indeed, the fruit of sin is always sorrow; and if a person truly loves his own soul and does not wish to suffer, why should he still commit sinful deeds that will cause him suffering?

यः करोति नरः पापं न तस्यात्मा ध्रुवं प्रियः ।

आत्मना हि कृतं पापमात्मनैव हि भुज्यते ।। xxxi

Regarding service, the Panchatantra states that true service is that which benefits one's master.

सा सेवा या प्रभुहिता ग्राह्या वाक्यविशेषतः ।

आश्रयेत्पार्थिवं विद्वांस्तद्वारेणैव नान्यथा ।। xxxii

Acharya Vishnu Sharma, in Mitrasamprapti, speaks of the glory of charity, stating that there is no treasure equal to charity, no ornament equal to good character, and no wealth equal to contentment.

दानेन तुल्यो निधिरस्ति नान्यो

लोभाच्च नान्योऽस्ति रिपुः पृथिव्याम् ।

विभूषणं शीलसमं न चान्यत्

सन्तोषतुल्यं धनमस्ति नान्यत् ।। xxxiii

In view of the above, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the Panchatantra offers adequate teaching on virtuous conduct, for its very foundation is truth and auspicious, beautiful behaviour. The Panchatantra places special emphasis on purity of conduct. In short, it can be said that good conduct is directly related to mental health. By following these virtues, one gains mastery over the senses; as a result, a person always avoids under-indulgence, over-indulgence and wrongful indulgence (ayoga, atiyoga and mithya yoga), and need not fear disease. In this way, every human being can live happily by following virtuous conduct, while also striving to make others happy — for a person who follows virtue is free from manifold suffering.

Discussion-The present study makes clear that the Panchatantra is not merely a book of ethics and fiction, but that it also contains many subjects related to Ayurveda. Although it is not written as a medical text, many elements related to medicinal plants, good conduct, mental health and an ideal way of life are mentioned within the context of its stories. This demonstrates that the concepts of statecraft, ethics and health were closely interconnected in contemporary Indian society. The descriptions of plants such as agarwood, arka, castor, camphor and shimshapa

discussed in this study serve not merely to enhance narrative beauty but also to convey their medicinal value. Ayurvedic texts such as the Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita and Ashtanga Hridayam provide detailed descriptions of the properties, actions and therapeutic uses of these plants. This makes it clear that the plants mentioned in the Panchatantra were connected to the Ayurvedic knowledge tradition of that time.

Similarly, the principles of good conduct, charity, restraint, purity, friendship, patience and prudent judgment propounded in the Panchatantra

align with the concept of the healthy code of conduct and mental well-being described in Ayurveda. According to Ayurveda, health is not merely the absence of disease but a state of physical, mental, social and moral equilibrium. From this perspective, the teachings of the Panchatantra indirectly support the Ayurvedic philosophy of life. The present study therefore establishes that the Ayurvedic themes contained in the Panchatantra are not limited to the mention of medicinal plants but also express a wide range of dimensions, such as health protection, virtuous conduct, mental balance and social well-being. In this way, the Panchatantra presents an important example of the integrated form of literature, ethics and Ayurveda within the Indian knowledge tradition.

Conclusion- It may be concluded that although the Panchatantra is fundamentally a book of ethics and fiction, it also mentions many important subjects related to Ayurveda. The medicinal plants, diet, virtuous conduct, health protection and indications of disease described in the book are consistent with the basic principles of Ayurveda.

The teachings regarding medicinal trees and virtuous conduct described in the Panchatantra represent not only the heritage of the ancient Indian knowledge tradition but remain equally relevant and inspiring today for environmental protection, the establishment of moral values and the cultivation of an ideal way of life. A person who follows virtue is happy in himself and also contributes significantly to the welfare of society, as this study also demonstrates. Many of the medicinal substances and plants described in the

Panchatantra correspond to the properties and uses described in the Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita and AshtangaHridaya. This proves that Ayurvedic knowledge was an integral part of the folk life and Sanskrit fiction of that period's society.

Therefore, the Panchatantra is highly significant not only from an ethical and literary point of view but also from an Ayurvedic and cultural perspective. The present study also provides a useful foundation for future research in this field by illuminating the interrelationship between Sanskrit fiction and Ayurveda.

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ⁱ Panchatantra, Vishnu Sharma, ed. Sudhakar Malaviya, p. 11.

ⁱⁱ Panchatantra, Vishnu Sharma, Mitrabhedha 1/1.

ⁱⁱⁱ Panchatantra, Vishnu Sharma, Mitrasamprapti 8.

^{iv} Panchatantra, Vishnu Sharma, Kakolukiya 1/1.

^v Panchatantra, Vishnu Sharma, Labdhapranasha 1/1.

^{vi} Panchatantra, Vishnu Sharma, Apariksitakaraka 1/18.

^{vii} Panchatantra, Vishnu Sharma, Mitrasamprapti 1/1.

^{viii} Panchatantra, Vishnu Sharma, Kakolukiya 3/491

^{ix} Panchatantra, Vishnu Sharma, Apariksitakaraka 3/38.

^x Panchatantra, Vishnu Sharma, Mitrabhedha 15/379.

^{xi} Panchatantra, Vishnu Sharma, Mitrasamprapti 40.

^{xii} Charaka Samhita, Sutrashtana 30/12.

^{xiii} Charaka Samhita, Chikitsasthana 1/41.

^{xiv} Panchatantra, Vishnusharma, p. 142.

^{xv} Charaka Samhita, Sutrashtana 25/40.

^{xvi} Panchatantra, Vishnusharma, Mitrabhedha 1/105.

^{xvii} Sushruta Samhita, Sutrashtana 46/284.

^{xviii} Bhava Prakasha, Purva Khanda, p. 303.

^{xix} Panchatantra, Vishnusharma, Mitrabhedha 1/105.

^{xx} Sushruta Samhita, Sutrashtana 45/114.

^{xxi} Apariksitakaraka, story of the Brahmin and the crab.

^{xxii} Sushruta Samhita, Sutrashtana 46/203.

^{xxiii} Panchatantra, Vishnusharma, Apariksitakaraka.

^{xxiv} Bhavaprakasha, Vatadi Varga 25.

^{xxv} Charaka Samhita, Sutrashtana 8/17.

- ^{xxvi} Ashtanga Hridayam, Sutrasthana 2/24.
^{xxvii} Ashtanga Hridayam, Sutrasthana 2/30.
^{xxviii} Charaka Samhita, Sutrasthana 8/29.
^{xxix} Panchatantra, Mitrabheda 8/270.
^{xxx} Panchatantra, Kakolukiya 8/166.
^{xxxi} Panchatantra, Kakolukiya 8/170.
^{xxxii} Panchatantra, Mitrabheda 1/47.
^{xxxiii} Panchatantra, Vishnusharma, Mitrasamprapti 5/163.