
**STORYTELLING AS PEDAGOGY IN INDIAN KNOWLEDGE
SYSTEMS: EDUCATIONAL INSIGHTS FROM CLASSICAL
SANSKRIT NARRATIVES**

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ABSTRACT

Storytelling has been a foundational pedagogical method within the Indian knowledge systems. (IKS) serving as a powerful medium for transporting ethical values, philosophical insights and practical wisdom across generations. Classical Sanskrit literature abounds with narratives that function not merely as literary compositions, but also as effective tools of education, such as Ramayana, Mahabharatha, Bhagavatha Purana, Panchatantra, etc., employee storytelling to communicate complex, moral Social and spiritual teachings in a form that is accessible, engaging and memorable. This paper explores storytelling as a significant pedagogical approach embedded in classical Sanskrit narratives and examines its role in shaping traditional modes of learning in India. The study highlights how narrative structures, character development, and dialogue exchanges within these texts facilitate experiential learning, ethical reflection, and emotional engagement among learners in the traditional Guru-Shishya framework stories function as instruments for cultivating virtues, such as Dharma-righteousness, compassion, courage, and wisdom by presenting moral dilemma, exemplary conduct and consequences of actions. These narratives encouraged learners to internal values through reflection and interpretation rather than through direct instruction alone. Furthermore, the paper argues that the narrative pedagogy found in Sanskrit tax resonates with contemporary educational theory that emphasize learner-centered approaches, experiential learning and the role of storytelling in cognitive and moral development by analyzing selected narratives from classical Sanskrit sources. The study demonstrates how storytelling bridges, knowledge, ethics and cultural heritage within the broader framework of Indian knowledge systems. The paper concludes at integrating

traditional narrative pedagogy into modern educational context can enrich teaching practices, promote holistic learning and strengthen cultural continuity and contemporary academic discourse.

KEYWORDS: Story Telling, Pedagogy, Indian Scriptures, Indian Knowledge Systems, ethics.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Ancient Indian literature is a repository of cultural values, scientific aspects, administrative skills, wisdom and moral guidance of their times. These works often are intertwined with mythology, religion and historical narratives, which have been instrumental in shaping ethical and philosophical foundations of Indian society. Beyond literary significance, they serve as enduring sources of ethical reflections, offering insights into universal human dilemmas, the nature of justice, duty and the pursuit of a virtuous life. If the texts of Vedas describe the spiritual aspects of early Indian society, the epics and Puranas like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagawatam, Panchatantra, etc., offer insights into the myth narratives that have influenced cultural practices and also deal with the complex discussions on Dharma (righteousness), leadership, loyalty compassion, friendship, administration and many other such aspects.

OBJECTIVES

1. To identify ethical themes and key texts embedding the Ancient Indian literary texts like Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Panchatantra and such other texts.
2. To investigate the philosophical foundations of ethical teachings through story-telling in ancient Indian texts focussing on concepts like Dharma-Righteousness, Karma- Action and consequence, Moksha- Liberation.
3. To showcase ethical lessons from ancient Indian literature and their relevance in modern context such as leadership, decision making and interpersonal relationships.

3. Scope and Methodology:

This research paper explores the ethical teachings embedded in ancient Indian literature.

The methodology used for this research paper is a multidisciplinary approach incorporating textual analysis, philosophical inquiry and comparative study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

(Roy) in the study explores the holistic approach to the education system in India, emphasizing the inclusion of moral, ethical and spiritual development with academic learning. Ancient education system in India, where embedded deeply in nurturing the students in the spiritual traditions which was foundation of ethical and moral values. The study also connected the modern day value system and the highlighted on the ancient system's inclusion in the modern system to have a holistic development of an individual.

2. (Suyesh singh Isser) The study focused on the principle of Dharma that can be included in NEP and how this principle can be infused with contemporary education to promote moral and ethical development among students. The paper advocated a system that is grounded based on the principles of Dharma across all levels in the education system. The paper explores on how this advocacy can enhance the development of individual who are not only intellectually competent but also ethically and morally grounded.

3. (Srikanth) Writes how the ethics and human values play a fundamental role in shaping our behaviour, relationships and overall progression of the society. The chapter highlighted the timeless relevance and practicality of these principles in shaping human values and ethics. By understanding the ethical principles emphasised by the ancient literatures, the organisations can cultivate virtuous behaviour and contribute to build a more harmonious society.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Central to Ancient Indian ethics, Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha are the four main Purusharthas, which are to be followed by every individual for prosperity peace and harmony of an individual and of the society at large. The importance of four purusharthas, have great significance in all the ancient epics like Ramayana, Mahbharata, Bhagawad Gita, Bhagawatam and also in the literary works like Panchatantra, Hitopadesha etc., Dharma – righteousness, emphasizes adherence to moral duties which are often contextualized based on one's role in society which could be familial, professional or societal duties.

Srimad Bhagawatam presents profound spiritual teachings through vivid narratives among which the stories of Dhruva, Puranjaya and Gajendra stand out as timeless illustrations of devotion, human entanglement and ultimate surrender.

The story of Dhruva in the fourth Skandha exemplifies unwavering determination and pure devotion. As a young prne, Dhruva was deeply hurt by the harsh words of his stepmother and resolved to seek a position greater than any earthly kingdom. Under the guidance of the sage

Narada, he undertook intense penance and meditated upon Lord Vishnu with extraordinary focus. His tapas was so powerful that it shook the cosmic order, compelling the Lord to appear before him. In his celebrated prayer, Dhruva acknowledges the indwelling presence of the Divine:

योऽन्तः प्रविश्य मम वाचमिमां प्रसुप्तां
संजीवयत्यखिलशक्तिधरः स्वधाम्ना ।
अन्यांश्च हस्तचरणश्रवणत्वगादीन्
प्राणान्नमो भगवते पुरुषाय तुभ्यम् ॥(4.9.6)

“I bow to the Supreme Person who enters within me and awakens my speech and senses with His divine power”

Another instructive is the allegorical narrative of Puranjana, narrated by Narada to King Pracinabarthi in the same fourth skandha. The story symbolises the condition of the human soul bound within the physical body, metaphorically described as a “city of nine gates” Puranjaya represents the Jiva(individual self) who becomes absorbed in sensory pleasures, forgetting its true nature. The present verse encapsulates this idea:

नवद्वारे पुरे देही हंसो लेलायते बहिः ।
वशी सर्वस्य लोकस्य स्थावरस्य चरस्य च ॥(4.25.10)

“Within the city of nine gates, the soul wanders outward engaging with the external world ”

Through this allegory, the Bhagawataam reveals how attachment to the body and worldly enjoyments leads to bondage and emphasises the necessity of self-awareness and detachment for spiritual progress.

The narrative of Gajendra in the eight skandha, popularly known as Gajendra Moksham, powerfully illustrates the principles of total surrender. Gajendra, the king of elephants, was caught in the grip of a crocodile and struggled helplessly for years. When all the physical strength failed, he turned inward and remembered the Supreme Lord, offering heartfelt prayers. As described, in the following shloka, he concentrated his mind and invoked the Divine.

श्रीशुक उवाच
एवम् व्यवसितो बुद्ध्या समाधाय मनो हृदि ।
जजाप परमं जाप्यं प्राञ्जन्मानुस्मरन् हरिम् ॥ (8.3.1)

“ With firm resolve and concentrated mind, Gajendra began to chant the supreme prayer, Remembering Hari from his previous birth.”

Moved by his sincere devotion, Lord Vishnu swiftly arrived and liberated him This episode highlights that when ego and self-reliance give way to complete surrender, divine grace becomes immediate and transformative.

Together, these three narratives form a spiritual progression within the Bhagawatam's teachings:

Dhruva represents determined devotion born of personal aspiration.

Puranjaya symbolizes the delusion and bondage of worldly life and

Gajendra exemplifies the liberating power of surrender.

They collectively guide the seeker from desire-driven action to self-awareness and ultimately to complete surrender which leads to liberation.

The Panchatantra emphasizes the importance of foresight and careful planning, as seen in the story of the monkeys who burned themselves by mishandling fireflies.

"प्रारम्भेकृतविचारं कर्मसिध्यति बुद्धिमताम्।

अविचारितमूलं हि कुर्वन्ति विनिपातकम्।" (Kakolukiya - War and Peace)

Meaning: "An action initiated with thoughtful planning succeeds, while one started without deliberation leads to disaster."

Think carefully about the consequences of your actions before taking them.

The Dangers of Blind Trust: The Panchatantra repeatedly warns against trusting others blindly. In the tale of the foolish turtle who trusted his talkative friends, the turtle's lack of caution led to its downfall.

"न विश्वासं विना मित्रं न विश्वासं विपर्यये।

विश्वासाद्भयमुत्पन्नं मूलान्यपि निकृन्तति।" (Mitralabha - Gaining Friends)

Meaning: "Friendship without trust is meaningless, but misplaced trust can lead to fear and harm, cutting even the strongest roots."

Trust is essential in relationships but should be placed wisely.

The Power of Intelligence Over Strength: The story of the hare and the lion demonstrates how intelligence and strategy can triumph over brute force.

"बलं बुद्ध्या परिभ्रष्टं बलमेव हि नश्यति।

बुद्धिर्यस्य बलं तस्य निर्बुद्धिर्बलहीनता।" (Labhapranasha - Loss of Gains)

Meaning: "Strength devoid of intelligence gets destroyed, while one with intelligence possesses true power."

Wisdom and strategy are more valuable than physical strength.

Avoid Greed: Greed often leads to one's downfall, as illustrated in the story of the greedy crane and the crab. The crane's deceitful nature and greed result in its death.

"लोभो हि विष्यसन्नं कृष्णं लोभो हि दुरतिक्रमः।

लोभो नरकस्य द्वारं लोभान्मूलं समुत्थितम्।" (Labhapranasha - Loss of Gains)*

Meaning: "Greed is a deep vice, difficult to overcome. It is the doorway to destruction and the root of all evils."

Avoid greed; it blinds judgment and leads to loss.

Learn From Past Experiences: The story of the crow and the serpent teaches the importance of using past experiences to make better decisions in the future.

"सत्त्वं च नाशयत्याशु यो नरोऽनुभवे स्थितः।

यथा चौरः प्रमादेन गृहमेधिसुचेतति।" (Kakolukiya - War and Peace)

Meaning: "One who does not learn from experience loses their potential quickly, like a thief who becomes careless with householders."

Learning from past mistakes and experiences is essential for growth and success.

Beware of False Friends: The Panchatantra warns against trusting individuals with malicious intentions, as illustrated in the story of the monkey and the crocodile. The crocodile's deception almost costs the monkey his life.

"असतां सतां चैव मित्रं मित्रेण लभ्यते।

अपरीक्षितसङ्गेन मित्रं मित्रं न लभ्यते।" (Mitrabha - Gaining Friends)

Meaning: "Friendship with good or bad people can lead to unexpected outcomes; hence, friendship should not be formed without testing."

Always test someone's character before placing your trust in them.

Adaptability and Resourcefulness: The Panchatantra teaches the importance of adaptability, as seen in the story of the mice saving themselves by gnawing through the hunter's net.

"कालंप्रत्युपकारंचदेशंचबलमेवच।

उपायंचतथाज्ञात्वाकार्यसिद्धिर्निवार्यते।"(Kakolukiyam - War and Peace)

*Meaning: "Understanding time, reciprocity, place, strength, and strategy helps in the accomplishment of tasks."

Adaptability and resourcefulness are essential for survival and success.

Speak Carefully: The Panchatantra often stresses the importance of speaking with caution and avoiding unnecessary or harmful words, as illustrated in the story of the talkative tortoise.

"नहिक्दाचिद्व्यर्थंवदन्तिबुद्धिमतो जनाः।

वाक्पारुष्यविनाशायकीर्तिचापिहिनस्ति तत्।"(Mitrabha - Gaining Friends)

Meaning: "Wise people never speak in vain. Harsh or unnecessary words lead to destruction and tarnish one's reputation."

Lesson: Think before you speak; words can build or destroy.

Avoid Overconfidence

Overconfidence is a recurring theme in the Panchatantra. The story of the foolish lion who underestimated the cleverness of a rabbit is a prime example.

"विनाशकालेविपरीतबुद्धिः।"(Labhapranasha - Loss of Gains)

Meaning: "When doom is near, a person's intellect becomes clouded, leading to their destruction."

Overconfidence and arrogance blind one's judgment and lead to failure.

Panchatantra remains relevant for its practical wisdom and ethical teachings, presented through engaging stories and timeless shlokas. Each tale is interwoven with shlokas that summarize the moral of the story. By following its guidance, one can navigate life with greater clarity, prudence, and morality.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of ethical lessons in ancient Indian literature reveals a profound and timeless repository of moral wisdom, intricately woven into narratives, dialogues, and philosophical discourses. Texts such as the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, and works like the *Panchatantra* and *Jataka Tales* illuminate fundamental principles of righteousness (*dharma*), accountability (*karma*), truth (*satya*), and compassion (*ahimsa*). These ethical teachings not only address the complexities of individual and societal conduct but also emphasize the interconnectedness of spiritual and moral aspirations. In conclusion, the ethical lessons of ancient Indian literature serve as a bridge between the past and the present, offering timeless guidance for individuals and societies alike. By revisiting and reinterpreting these teachings, we can draw valuable insights to navigate the moral complexities of our modern world while preserving and honouring the wisdom of an ancient tradition.

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