The Origin of *Pañcatantra*

The *Pañcatantra* is one of the most famous works of Indian literature, both in India and all over the world. The popularity which lead to so many translations resulted also in countless 'editions' in India itself in its original Sanskrit language. Consequently find several different recensions of the text, embodying attempts at improvements and enlargements by various editors.  

The dizzying travels of the stories in the *Pañcatantra* exemplify the circuitous routes taken by narrative materials in the middle ages. According to J.A.B. Van Buitenen, "Two hundred different versions are known in some sixty odd languages". Probably composed without their frame story centuries before they were compiled, these popular beast fables persist in a myriad of versions. Short narratives about talking the animals

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emanate from rural cultures; as the cultures that produce them become more sophisticated, they repackage these simple tales to serve more complex social situations. Aesop, a slave in pre-democratic fifth century Greece, is said by Herodotus to have told animal fables for satirical purposes; such fables were adapted in the Jātaka to teach Buddhist ideals; and in the Pañcatantra they were used to promote "the wise conduct of life", as the translator Arthur W. Ryder renders the term nīti. Of the distillation of the moral content of the Pañcatantra in elegant epigrams, Ryder remarks, "It is as if the animals in some English beast fable were to justify their actions by quotations from Shakespeare and the Bible".  

The date and the authorship of this work are no doubt uncertain but it is generally assigned to the third century BC. Hertal, who has done a monumental work on Pañcatantra, is in favour of assigning the first composition of the Pañcatantra to the second century BC. According to Winternitz it is one of the oldest works of Indian ornate poetry. He thinks that the date of

writing of the *Pañcatantra* can be approximately between 300 and 400 AD, but he agrees that the age of the primary constituent of the *Pañcatantra* has to be placed earlier than that.

The prefatory invocation is addressed to Sarasvati and all authors on ethics, Manu, Vācaspati, Uśanas, Parāśara, Vyāsa, and Cāṇakya. The use of the word *dhīnāra*, it is said, points to its date as somewhere after the Christian era, and therefore, says Keith, "It is not sufficient to assign it to the second century AD, at the earliest".

The Vākāṭaka rules of Mahārāṣṭra (Vidarbh and adjacent countries), who supplanted the Ābhīras and others from the middle of the 3rd century A.D and the built up an extensive empire in the Decan, patronised a considerable flowering of the arts, including for example the finest paintings at Ajanṭā. It has been suggested that the *Vaidarbha* style, named after Vidarbha, flourished and became well known through their encouragement. The founder of the Vākāṭaka Empire, Vindhyaśakti (AD 250- 280),

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was a brāhmin and he and his successors seem to have wished to further a revival of Brāhmaṇical civilization, including the Vedic rituals, though they were evidently tolerant of Buddhism. The purāṇas, whose lists of kings and at the beginning of the 4th century A.D, appear to view the Vākāṭakas in a relatively favourable light, after so many dynasties of upstart helots and vicious barbarians, and even as the main hope for the future of civilization. It is worthy of remarks that the king in the frame work of the Pañcatantra, and his three sons who are instructed by Viṣṇuśarman, all have names ending in śakti. This is not a very common ending and helps to confirm the impression that the work was written in the Vākāṭaka Empire unless the date is before A.D 250.32

The authorship and the original name which the first text of the (so-called) Pañcatantra bore is also uncertain. The narrator appearing in the text itself is called Viṣṇuśarman and no other author of the Pañcatantra seems any where to be mentioned.

The original name of *Pañcatantra* was impossible to say but it may not improbably have been called after the two jackals Karaṭaka and Damanaka, who play a prominent part in the first book; for the title of the old Syriac version is *Kalilag* and *Damnag*, and that of the Arabic translation *Kalīlah* and *Dimnah*. Sometimes, its origin was the form of *Prākrit*. If not actually a Buddhistic work, the *Pañcatantra* must derived from Buddhistic sources. This follows from the fact that a number of its fables can be traced to Buddhistic writings, and from the internal evidence of the book itself. Apologues and fables were current among the Buddhists from the earliest times. They were ascribed to Buddha, and their sanctity increased by identifying the best character in any story with Buddha himself in a previous birth. Hence such tales were called *Jātakas*, or "Birth stories". ³³

At first the *Jātaka* stories probably handed down orally, some of the birth stories are evidently Buddhistic and entirely depend for their point on some custom or idea peculiar to

Buddhism; but many are pieces of folklore which have floated about the world for ages as the stray waifs of literature and are liable every where to be appropriated by any casual claimant. The same stories may thus produced in the course of their long wanderings.\textsuperscript{34} There is not necessarily a strict connection between any particular story and the verses which may be quoted as its moral; but in most cases an opposite stanza would of course soon asserts a prescriptive right to any narrative which seemed specially to illustrate. The language of the \textit{gāthās} is much more archaic than that of the stories; the verses generally unintelligible without the story, but such is continually the case with proverbial sayings.\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Jātaka} stories contain embedded with it an unrivalled connection of folklore. They are also full of interest as giving a vivid picture of the social life and customs of ancient India. Like that some of the \textit{Pañcatantra} stories are represent the folk culture, and also seen it, the tools of folk literature like proverbs adages, folk tales, myths, and the like. But at the same

\textsuperscript{34} Prof. E.B. Cowell, \textit{The Jātaka Stories}, Vol. I & II, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1\textsuperscript{st} Ed., 1990, p.xxiii.

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid.}, p.xxiv.
time the incidental stories are strictly to the point and seem to have been created, or at least recreated for the occasions. But these collections of stories are very interesting and also give the picture of the social and political aspects of that time.

It is a collection of wise and witty stories in which most of the characters are animals, which think, talk and behave like human beings, because the stories of it are connected with the nature and truly represent the popular culture.

Relation between Folk Culture and the Stories of Pañcatantra

Pañcatantra is closely connected with folk culture. In that tradition, the valid knowledge and moral ideas are transmitted spontaneously through word of mouth from one generation to the next. So the folk culture and oral tradition is complementary to each other; one cannot be fully understood in the absence of the other.36

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Folk Culture and Oral Tradition

A folk culture may be thought of as a common way of life, which characterizes some or all of the people of many villages, towns and cities within a given area. It is not autonomous. It is an aspect or dimension of the civilization of which it is a part. Oral tradition is a socially sanctioned and reported statement or a hearsay account of a testimony of the past but also of contemporary life. Tradition has depth of generations, and is delimited to the social system and the era of its existence.

In order to understand the role of oral tradition in man’s life, one must have sufficient knowledge of the culture and cultural behavior of the people. Oral tradition includes portrayals of the details of ceremonies, institutions and technology as well as expressions of beliefs and attitudes. In addition to depicting the life of a group of people, it also reveals much about their aspirations, values and goals.37

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The study of folk culture and oral tradition may contribute to our understanding of culture and its functioning in human societies. It may be of some help in understanding human psychology and the adjustment of the individual to his culturally constituted world. The study of various aspects of folk culture and oral tradition, such as manners, customs, traditions, folksongs, folktales and myths may eventually solve many difficult problems of ethnology. And also it can help in understanding acculturation, patterning of the relations between culture and the environment, as also between culture and personality.\(^{38}\)

Oral tradition has an indispensable place in folklore. It has the power to expose folk life and folk culture. In folk culture, oral tradition not only shows the thought and feelings, but also gives meanings and imaginary ideas to them. Codification and storage of ideas in the form of written material is foreign to oral culture. Memory is the pivot in it. It is through memorisation that human beings reach the acme of knowledge.

Oral folklore has distinctive functions. It can impart socio-
logical, educational and psychological functions. In an illiterate
society, verbal art can do a lot in the educational field. Folk tales,
myths and epics have that power. We get answers to the
religious and social problems in oral folklore. Its psychological
function is also worth-noticing. Verbal art gives a psychological
release from the controls imparted by the society as individuals.
They provide clues to successful life through symbols. ‘Verbal art’
helps ‘purgation of feelings’.

Myths, legends and folk tales help those who are mentally
depressed and desperate people. Oral folklore can provide better
chances for the protection and preservation of cultural values.
Most of them have the quality of social criticism and hence
controls the people and guides those who violate the rules to real
paths. Verbal art is the product of a mobile society and an
organized, straight forward and pivoted culture.39

Kerala Sahitya Akademy, Trissur, p. 25.
In the oral tradition, the obvious messages and valid information are passed from the mouth to mouth and from one generation to the next. In the easy purpose of the transaction, they use songs, tales, proverbs, legends, etc. These tools of folk literature help to store the data as a computer. In *Panñatana*, we can see that these types of folk tools like proverbs, adages, myths, moral lessons and the like.

**Folk Literature**

Folk literature is the traditional literature of the unlettered mass living in one integrated social group. It is orally transmitted and can be claimed to be 'of the people, by the people, for the people'. It is, therefore, popular literature in the real sense of the term. Before writing was invented, it was the only form of literature that existed in society. It grows and develops with the formation and development of society, and as such it is integrated into it, as it were. It declines when any particular social function with which it linked ceases to operate.\(^{40}\)

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Tools of folk literature.

The content of songs, folk tales, proverbs etc, are the significant aspects of the folk literature.

**Folk song:** A folk song is a lyrical, short, simple, less artistic, rhythmic song of a folk community. It generally reflects the social heritage, the environment and the life of the folk living in a particular territory. It is usually created by the folk for their own entertainment, enjoyment, or emotional outlet. It is easily sung, understood and learnt on occasions. It is transmitted, circulated and perpetuated spontaneously through oral tradition from person to person or from generation to generation.

**Myths:** Myths are the orally transmitted and comparatively long, sacred prose narratives usually related to theology and ritual, cosmic events, accounts of 'creation' and the activities of gods and deities or of super human beings. The folk people believe them to be true.
Legends:- legends are the orally transmitted long and more often secular prose narratives supposedly based on historical facts related to persons, events and localities.  

Proverb:- Proverbs are the terse, didactic and sometimes metaphorical statements containing concise homely truth and traditional knowledge relating to various aspects of life. Like other aspects of oral tradition proverbs are also learnt and transmitted spontaneously through oral tradition from person to person. Proverbs are short and witty traditional expressions that arise as part of everyday discourse as well as in the more highly structured situation of education and judicial proceedings.

Each proverb is a full statement of an approach to a recurrent problem. Many of the most widely known and interesting proverbs tell a condensed story: these items often function metaphorically when used in a conventional context.

Folk tale:- Folktales and other fairy tales are among the oldest works of man. Every people adapted the tales to their own life
shifting the details to fit local customs. Oral smooth by ages of telling the stories acquired that distinctive conciseness of form and rapidity of movement, which are among their principal charms.

Folk tales were not especially intended for children. Their audience was the young and old alike. The tales were of all kinds: Myths, legends, sagas, fables, cosmic stories and allegories.44

Folk tales are all those prose narratives, which are simple, entertaining, with or without moral, less systematic, less specialized, easy to understand and memorize with some scope of addition, subtraction and modification by almost all the members of a folk group. Folk tales, while dealing with situations familiar to listeners, are not usually based on historical facts, but are mostly of fictitious nature and have predominance of fanciful ideas of the folk. Telling of folktales includes not only the texts but also the fanciful expression, gesture, acting, repetition and other recurrent patterns of the story tellers. Like folk songs, folk tales

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also have no known originator and are transmitted spontaneously through oral tradition from person to person or from generation to generation.

The folk tales are expressed the social and cultural aspects of a society, and also expressed as unrighteous acts and deficiency of every category of people.\textsuperscript{45}

These types of stories are the best way to transfer the culture for the next generation. Most of the part of folk tales are the animal fables.

The animal tale is as a rule, a short narrative contains the adventures of the animal that is its principal character. While almost all of the actors are animals, they act as human beings and their world is analogous to the human world.\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Pañcatantra} is the best example of it. Animal fables are the part of folk tale. It represents the culture of that time. So the stories of \textit{Pañcatantra} are derived from folk culture.

\textsuperscript{45} Raghavan Payyanad, \textit{Folklore}, Kerala Bhaṣa Institute, Thiruvananthapuram, 1\textsuperscript{st} Ed., 1986, p. 96.

\textsuperscript{46} Richard M. Dorson, \textit{Folklore and Folk Life}, The University of Chicago Press, London, 1\textsuperscript{st} Ed., 1972, p. 68.
Folk literature in India

Folk literature existed in India from a very early period. The existence of folk literature as such was recognized for the first time in India more than two thousand years ago in the oldest available Tamil grammar entitled *Tolkāppiyam* composed by Tolkāppiyar. The author defined and classified some of the elements of folk literature more or less elaborately, giving examples from oral sources, and it seems that its tradition had already been well established. Literacy has not spread in India among the masses even today as widely as it should have. Therefore, folk literature is the only vehicle of thought for the vast majority of the Indian people even to this day. Life throughout rural India is more or less uniform. It still depends mainly on agricultural work, which has also a uniform character. Therefore, the way of life throughout the sub continent is more or less identical and the social functions performed are also not very different in various regions in spite of the fact that there are different languages and apparently different cultures. When we analyze the elements of folk literature, we find that they are
basically the same throughout India. Because the creative faculty of each individual living at the folk level is fundamentally the same, and as the way of life is almost identical everywhere, the themes on which folk literature is based are also mostly not very different from one another. ⁴⁷

Therefore, in every language spoken in India we come across oral literature of about the same character. They are in the form of dogged verses, folk songs, riddles, proverbs, myths, legends, ballads, folk tales etc. Even tribal societies have their own literature but they are seldom developed as folk literature. In almost every country, folk literature has been the basis of higher literature. But in India, the natural way of development from folk literature to modern literature was interrupted since the beginning of the nineteenth century owing to the introduction of English education and the adoption of western ideas and thoughts. During the period of the Renaissance in Europe, the folk literature of almost all the countries, except Russia and a few smaller

In early India, fairy tales, fables and allied literature were primarily concerned with the entertainment and edification of the young and, as such, served the part played by children’s literature of modern times. To an Indian, these works were also deductive; each fable was directed to practical ethics calculated to illustrate some worldly truth or inculcate some precept for human conduct.

The Sanskrit fables and fairy tales, that were generally called *Kathā*, have close affinity with the Sanskrit prose romances as also with didactic and gnomic poetry as regards style and import. As professor Macdonell has rightly observed, “the fairy tales and fables are the abundant introduction of ethical reflections and proverbial philosophy is characteristic, the

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apologue with its moral is peculiarly subject to this method of
treatment'.

This literature was couched generally in simple narrative
prose, often interspersed with edificatory verses. More often than
a number of secondary stories were emboxed in the framework
of the main story; sometimes even the secondary stories had
emboxed stories in them. This practice of narrating tales with a
view to teaching some ethical, philosophical or practical lesson is
traceable in the Mahāvaipulyasūtras of Buddhistic literature and
the Avadāna, which can also be linked with their somewhat
archaic parallels in the Brāhmaṇas. In the Ṛgveda there is a frog
song in which Brāhmaṇas singing at a sacrifice are compared to
croaking frogs. Besides, this throws light on the fact that the
attitude of seeing kinship between men and animals belonged to
the early Aryan. In the Upaniṣads also such allegories are not
rare. The Chāndogya Upaniṣad goes one step further and
introduces a satirical account of dogs moving in a procession and

49 Dr. Ezhumattoor Raja Raja Varma, Aitihiangalum Sāhitya Vimarśanangalum, Kerala Bhaṣa Institute,
howling for food, the object of this idea being that it might serve
as a standard of comparison with the Brāhmaṇas engaged in the
performance of sacrifices and the chanting of hymns. In the same
Upaniṣad the young Satyakāma is instructed first by a bull, then
by a flamingo, and subsequently by an aquatic bird. These
examples show that the early Indian was able to quite easily to
transfer the habits and behavior of men to his neighbors, the
animals; the teachings of the Upaniṣads helped to a considerable
extent in the formation of this attitude.51

Even in the various philosophical systems, such fables
(akhyāyikas) were made use of by renowned teachers with a view
to clarifying abstruse points, as can be easily gathered from
references in Kapila's Sāmkhya aphorisms and their exegesis-
the Sāmkhya-pravacana-bhāṣya by Vijñāna Bhikṣu. Not only
Brāhmaṇical teachers, but also those belonging to other schools
like the Jaina, the Baudhha, etc. followed this custom in
propagating their doctrines.52

51 Dr. K. M. George, Bhāratīya Sahitya Caritram, Kerala Sahitya Akademy, Thrissur, 1st Ed., 1982, pp. 127-128.
52 Amore R. C., and Shinn L. D., Buddhist and Hindu Stories of Life, Oxford University Press, New York,
In the *Mahābhārata*, the fable leaves its embryonic stage and becomes more full-bodied. Thus we hear of the naughty cat who deceived the little mice by appearing so virtuous, and they ultimately delivered themselves into her power. Then there is the crafty jackal who cheated his allies and enjoyed alone the booty won previously with their aid. This developed form of the fable is found even more in the literature of the Buddhists who believed in the doctrine of transmigration in an animal as well as human forms, and in the *Jātaka* tales they took recourse to beast stories in order to demonstrate the greatness of Buddha. Besides these, there are the stories which constitute the *avadānas*, stories depicting those pious deeds by which one becomes a Buddha. Sanskrit poetics does not draw a distinction between a *Jātaka* and an *avadhāna*, but both are ignored possibly because of their religious objectives. The curious reader misses most is an attempt to discriminate between the fable and the tale. A rigid differentiation between the two is possibly not practicable, however, since the characteristics of one can not entirely excluded from the other. While the fable becomes enriched by
the folk tale or spicy stories of human adventure, the tale becomes more complex by assimilating the features of beast stories and also their didactic motive.\footnote{Gaurinath Sastri, \textit{A Concise History of Classical Sanskrit Literature}, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 2nd Ed., 1960, pp. 136-137.}

In early India, tales of all sorts passed current among the people, however useless it may be to discriminate them as fairy tales, myths or fables in the earlier stages of their development. It was, however, a distinct and important step when the mere story became used for a definite purpose, and when the didactic fable became a definite mode of inculcating useful knowledge. We do not know at what date this took place; we could not expect to find fables in the \textit{Rgveda}, and how easy it was for Indian thought to transfer to men's neighbors the habits of men. Whatever be the purpose of a famous hymn in the \textit{Rgveda} (VII. 103) in which Brahmins are compared to croaking frogs as they sing at their sacrifices, it is clear that we have a recognition of a certain kinship between men and animals, which comes out clearly in the \textit{Upaniṣads}, where we have the allegory or satire of the dogs...
who search out a leader to howl food for them, the talk of two flamingoes whose remarks call attention to Raikva and the instruction of the young Satyakāma first by a bull, then by a flamingo, then by an aquatic bird, granting that we have not here the didactic fable, in which the actions of beasts are made the means of advising men, still we can realize how easy it was to pass to this form of instruction, and in fact in the epic clear recognition of fables, and that not merely in the late didactic book but elsewhere. Not only do we hear of the bird that provided the equivalent of the golden eggs, but of the naughty cat which deceived the little mice by an appearance of virtue so that they delivered themselves into her power, and we have a motif which certainly is strongly suggestive of the material hence developed the Pañcatantra. The Pāṇḍavas, it is suggested, are to be treated as the intelligent jackal treated his allies the tiger, the mouse, and the wolf, when he smartly cheated them out of any share in the booty he had won with their aid. About the same time, as the monumental evidence of the Buddhists were already making another use of the common belief in the close relationship
of animals and man, now accentuated by the adoption by Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains alike of the doctrine of transmigration into animal as well as human forms. They chose by relating beast stories to illustrate the deeds and greatness of the Buddha and his contemporaries in past births.\textsuperscript{54}

The Indian rhetoricians do not make any distinction between the class of literature represented by the \textit{Bṛhatkathā} on the one hand and the \textit{Pañcatantra} on the other. A comparative study of the two, however, conclusively shows that they do not entirely belong to the same category. They differ in spirit, in form and in subject-matter. The ultimate object of the former is to amuse the reader, that of the latter is to teach \textit{nīti}, good conduct of life and polity. The former is written in simple prose or narrative verse or a mixture of both but the latter is written in elegant prose interspersed with gnomic verse. Even the titles of the stories in the latter are given in verse. In the popular tale we find superstitious beliefs, popular myths, stories of love and

\textsuperscript{54} A. Berriedale Keith, \textit{A History of Sanskrit Literature}, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1\textsuperscript{st} Ed., 1993, pp. 242-243.
adventure, dreams and counter-dreams, but in the Pañcatantra find mostly stories of birds and beasts which appear to possess human feelings and nīti. To distinguish it from the popular tale, the Pañcatantra has therefore been classed as the didactic fable.\(^{55}\)

**Narration of Pañcatantra**

*Pañcatantra* is regarded as the best collection of stories for children in the world. Nowadays, children do not like to read goody-goody stories, which teach them not to do this, that and the other. In the *Pañcatantra* tales we can find that it is not the good and the foolish who succeed in life but those who are good and at the same time shrewd. In life we must learn to hold our against cunning people the 'jackals' among men. Mere goodness or learning is not going to help us against such men as much as commonsense and shrewdness. But at the same time these tales point out that no man can succeed or be happy in life if he is not honest and true. So it is worldly wisdom that these stories teach

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us: a happy combination of goodness and sound commonsense. The *Pañcatantra* is an 'illustrating novel' *nidarśana-kathā*, the subject of which is *nīti*, 'policy', applicable in both private affairs and public politics. Its title may mean either 'Five Divisions (of the science of policy) or five systems'. The whole is presented in the frame work of the problem of educating three young princes averse to formal study. The problem is solved by the ancient sage Viṣṇuśarman, who takes up the challenge to his intelligence by instructing the princes through the medium of story telling. There follow five main narratives the *tantras*, illustrating successively the topic of splitting an alliance (or a friendship) contrary to one's interests, forming an alliances, making war, outwitting and despoiling a fool and lastly the folly of action without reflection. These narratives contained a number of subsidiary emboxed short stories, illustrating points made by the characters. The five *tantras* are unequal in length, which perhaps

encouraged later editors to add to the shorter ones. These additions were mostly of further short stories, tending to change the character of the original work to a collection of stories instead of five main narratives with an occasional incidental story. The sharpness of the satirical element in the Pañcatantra is enhanced by most of its narratives being beast fables. Since the sources of 'Viṣṇuśanman' are often discussed and parallels or prototypes drawn for his stories from, for example, the Pali Jātaka, and the Mahābhārata, it is well to stress that the Pañcatantra does not give the impression of being a kind of anthology of good stories. On the contrary it is very much a piece and a stylistic unity, as well as a splendid model of narrative art.\(^57\)

Pañcatantra is essentially a didactic book, and thus must consist in part of a tale, but in part also of a moral or maxim of practical life which may, of course, not be moral in the higher sense of the term. The fable, indeed, is essentially connected with the two branches of science known by Indians as the Nītiśāstra and the Arthaśāstra, which have this in common as opposed to

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the Dharmaśāstra that they are not codes of morals, but deal with man’s action in practical politics and conduct of the ordinary affairs of every-day life and intercourse. The contrast between these śāstras, for in the Arthaśāstra and the Nitiśāstra alike there is much common sense, and that is often in accord with practical morality; the didactic fable as intended merely to extol cleverness without regard to morality; there lingers around the work a distinct influence of the Dharmaśāstra, as was only to be expected, seeing that the Pañcatantra was intended for the instruction of the young and the instructors were Brahmins. But the youthful pupils were evidently not intended to be Brahmin boys either solely or mainly; tradition enshrined in the Pañcatantra itself asserts its composition for the instruction of the sons of a king, and with this accords the use of Sanskrit, for at the probable time of its first production, Sanskrit was already essentially the language of the Brahmins and of the high official classes in the royal entourage. A work of this sort, it is evident, was a very definite creation, something vastly different from mere
tales regarding beasts or even the simple fable as it may have passed current orally.\(^5\)

The form of the fable is essentially dictated by its origin. The story is naturally related in prose, but the moral is fixed in the memory by being put in verse form, and it is natural that other didactic verses should be strewn in the tales; such an employment of gnomic stanzas is found in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*. The maxim embodying the truth or point of the tale naturally stands in a different position from the more general didactic stanza; it must be capable of serving as an identification label, or *Kathāsamgraha śloka*, a verse that sums up the tale. It must, however, have been natural on the basis of such stanzas to insert in the narrative itself. Stanzas which are not maxims, but like the label, refer definitely to the tale itself and thus achieve the use of *Ākhyāna* or narrative verses, but primarily at any rate as a minor feature. It is only slowly and late that the didactic fable comes to be written wholly or largely in verse.

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Yet another peculiarity marks the form of the fable. It was a distinctly artistic touch to complicate and enlarge the theme, not merely by combining a number of fables to form a book, but to interweave the fables so that the whole would become a unity. This involved making the characters in the fables support their maxims by allusions to another fables, which they necessarily are asked to tell, resulting that in a fable others are normally inserted, while the process may even be carried so far as to include in such an inserted fable another inserted fable. There is, of course, nothing simple or popular in such a form; indeed, it is highly inconvenient for merely practical purpose, as the thread of the main narrative may be so interrupted to it difficult; it must have been the invention of some definite person or persons. For models, can only refer vaguely to the love of direct speech shown in the epics where, if possible, the actor is made to relate his own deeds, as does Odysseus among the Phaiacians. Nor would it be reasonable to doubt that those who introduced these important changes into the form of the fable, as contrasted with the simpler form we must presume it once had, were responsible for
inventing many of the fables which they tell. From the popular fable they may well have borrowed a good deal in substance, but in adapting it for every definite didactic ends they must have vitally changed it. We can support this view by the wholesale alterations evidently made in the conception of fables by the Buddhists in the *Jātaka* book.\(^{59}\)

In view of these facts it is clear that it is not possible to speak of a *Prākṛt* fable literature as being the precursor of the *Pañcatantra*. We have no reason whatever to suppose that any real parallel to the structure of the *Pañcatantra* ever existed, and we can not even say that the substance of the individual tales was current among the people until much later, when the popularity of the *Pañcatantra* led to the wholesale effort to appropriate them for the humbler ranks of society much as apparently happened in the case of *Aesop’s fables*, the fable was far more of an independent creation in Sanskrit than the popular tale, which is free from the didactic aim of the fable and expresses much more directly the religious feelings of the people,

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their myth-making capacity, their belief in magic in all aspects, and the native ingenuity of humble narrators. It is an entire harmony with this obvious distinction that Indian tradition is as positive regarding the Prākṛt original of the great collections of tales as it is silent on the existence of any Prākṛt sources of Pañcatantra.

Clear distinctions in literature, as in everything else, are not common in Sanskrit, and no terminology was invented by writers on poetics to discriminate between the fable and the tale, though as regards the tale itself some efforts were made to discriminate the species of Kathā or Ākhyāyika, though without success. The stories in the several books of the Pañcatantra are styled Kathas, while in one version the title is Tantrākhyāyika. The terms themselves merely denote, Ākhyāyika, narrative, sometimes minor narrative, Kathā, conversation, story, and it was hardly possible to discriminate them seriously. Nor are in fact in the Pañcatantra fables, tales, and narratives of actual or possible human events rigidly discriminated; it differs from the tales in that the fable element with its didactic stanzas decidedly prevails over
other elements, while the tale includes the fable merely as a lesser constituent. Both profit by this absence of rigidity, which permits either a richer content and more elaborate development. Even so late a work as the *Hitopadeśa* knows how to speak variety by blending the beast fable with myths and spicy narratives of human life.\(^{60}\)

**Why the *Pañcatantra* stories were narrated?**

Long long ago in the kingdom of *Mahilāropia* in India, there lived a king by the name Amaraśakti, whose three foolish sons were averse to education. They were lazy boys who did not like to do their lessons. They played all day long or sat under a tree to listen to stories which their grandmother told them. They could neither read nor write. This made the king their father, very sad. He said to himself "It is better to have daughters than to have sons who are nothing but block heads".

When the king asked his advisers what could be done to awaken the princes intellectual faculties, they replayed that the mastery of grammar alone took 12 years; only then could one

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begin to study the treaties on spiritual and worldly affairs. They added that as life was short and the obstacles to learning were many, some more expedient path should be found.

At last one of the King's minister's said to him. "There is an elderly Brahmin named Viṣṇuśarma. He knows many sciences. Send your princes to him for schooling. He will make them intelligent in a twinkling".

When the King had listened to this, he called Viṣṇuśarma to his court and said to him, "Holy sir, be kind to me and make my children masters of the arts of practical life. In return I will give a hundred farms as a gift".

The brāhmaṇa replied that as an octogenarian for whom sensual pleasures no longer held any attraction, he had no desire for wealth. But he accepted the king's proposal and undertook to educate the princes in the science of worldly conduct by amusing them with stories. Asking that the date be noted down, Viṣṇuśarma declared that if he had not fulfilled his promise with in six months, "Then it would befit your majesty to show me your
buttocks". Amused at the brāhmaṇas unconventional pledge, the king nevertheless places the princes in his care. Viṣṇuśarma took the boys to his own home where he composed five books, or tantras:

1. "Separation of friends", in which a jackal manipulated the friendship between a lion and a bull to enhance his own position.

2. "Winning of friends", illustrating the collaboration of a crow, a mouse, a turtle, and a deer.

3. "The crows and the owls", in which a colony of owls was led to destruction by a crow who pretended to be their ally.

4. "Loss of one's gains", in which a monkey lured from a tree by a crocodile, saved himself by trickery.

5. "Ill-considered actions", in which a misguided barber expecting a miraculous reward, struck and killed some mendicant monks.
The princes learned these books within the time of six months. These five books are called *Pañcatantra*. *Pañca* means five and *tantra* means ways or strategies or principles. The stories are primary about statecraft and are popular throughout the world.

The stories will appear in five sections, each representing a strategy for getting over problems of life. They are of interest not just for the ruling class but also for every person. They are all about survival in a complicated world and the several ways to get over problems. The stories based as they are on human nature have an eternal relevance.⁶¹

Each *tantra* serves as a frame in which numerous sub-stories and proverbial verses are embedded. Having studied these stories, the princes gained an unparalleled mastery over worldly conduct, and "from that time onward, this treatise by the name of *Pañcatantra*, which has as its purpose the edification of the young, has spread across the surface of the earth".

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The Reconstruction of *Pañcatantra*

The *Pañcatantra* is one of the most famous works of Indian Literature, both in India and throughout the world. Its popularity may well be estimated from the fact that it has come down to us in over two hundred versions existing in more than fifty languages, about three-fourths of which are extra-Indian. In AD 1100 it was rendered into Hebrew and by AD 1570 it was translated into Greek, Spanish, Latin, Italian, German, Old Slavonic, Czech and English. At present its range extends from Java to Iceland.

In India, the work has been even more popular. It has been translated into modern languages and re-translated into Sanskrit. It has been transformed into verse and re-transformed into prose, expanded and contracted. Not only that, most of these stories passed current as folk-tales and were gathered again in the modern collections of oral tales. It would not be an exaggeration to remark that such great popularity has not been enjoyed by any other secular book of the world.
The *Pañcatantra* developed, existed and survived in a number of recensions, and some of them are not available.

Most of the main versions to examine the five main textual families: the *Tantrākyāyika*, the Pahlavi. Southern, *Bṛhatkathā* and Nepalese version.

1. **The *Tantrākyāyika*:**- It is considered the oldest version of *Pañcatantra*. Hertal has rightly traced all extant versions to a common source and from the correspondence among them, he draws the conclusion that the *Tantrākyāyika* provides the best picture of the original work and it can be said to stand next only to the original *Pañcatantra*.

2. **The Pahlavi family:**- An early version of the Sanskrit *Pañcatantra* (or possibly a compendium of Indian stories containing the *Pañcatantra*) was, translated into Pahlavi in the 6th century AD by a physician named Barzawayh at the court of the Persian king, Khusru Anushirwan. Both the original and the translation have been unfortunately lost. The translations from the Pahlavi translation into Syriac and
Arabic languages do throw some light on the original and its first translation.

The Syriac: The most accessible account of the Syriac version is given by Keith Falconer. He supplies the following details about its authorship:

Ebed-Jesu, bishop of Nisibis, mentions in his catalogue of Syriac writings a certain "Būd (or Bōd) Pediodeuta" as having composed various works, principally against the Manichaeans and the Markionites. This person, he says, was entrusted with the oversight of the Christian in India and Persia, and lived about 570 AD. He further adds "and it was he who translated from the Indian the book of Kalīlag and Damnag".

The words Kalīlag and Damnag of the title are the Syriac equivalence of Karaṭaka and Damanaka, the names of the two jackals in the first tantra of the Sanskrit Pañcatantra.
The Syriac version is known from a single manuscript discovered in a monastery in Mardin, Turkey, in 1870. It was first edited and translated into German by Bickell (1876), and later by Schulthess (1911). The Syriac text consists of ten chapters including the five *tantras*. Apart from the fact that these have been recorded and interspersed with material from other sources, the *Pañcatantra* material in the Syriac version closely resembles the core set. This material is similar to the *Tantrākhyāyika* in terms of stories, verses, structure and length. The *Pañcatantra* material is Schulthess's edition has been cross referenced with the parallel passages in the *Tantrākhyāyika*.

There is, however, one important difference between the Syriac and all the Sanskrit versions of the *Pañcatantra*: it takes the form of a discourse between a king named Dabdahram and a philosopher, Nadrab. Each of the ten chapters begins with the king asking the philosopher a question, just as Yudhiṣṭhira questioned Bhīṣma on his bed of arrows in the *Śantiparvam* of the *Mahābhārata*. Thus
the whole kathāmukha, which is so characteristic of most Sanskrit versions, is absent. Perhaps this lack of a strong introductory frame story enticed later authors, such as the creator of the Arabic version, to supply their own. Later versions certainly exhibit a rich variety of introductory sequences to explain how the stories came into existence.

It is not clear when the arrangement of the text as reflected in the Syriac version took place. The tenth chapter, possibly of Persian origin, may have been added after the collection left India.

The Arabic: Two centuries after Būd translated the Pahlavi stories into Syriac, 'Adballah ibn al-muqaffa' reworked the Pahlavi translation into an Arabic version under the title Kalikah wa Dimnah. As with the Syriac, this title is also a rendering of the names of the two jackals from the first tantra, Karaṭaka and Damanaka. Ibn al-muqaffa was born to a noble family in fars in about 720. He has been discovered as "one of the most prominent exponents of the
Intellectual awakening and literary development enjoyed by Arabic prose in the period between the 8th and 11th centuries". Kailah wa Dimunah the first masterpiece of Arabic narrative literature, enjoyed great popularity and is known from numerous manuscripts and printed versions.

Arabic translation was the basis for all subsequent translations in the Middle East and Europe. Unlike the Syriac, which lay sterile and forgotten in a monastic library, the Arabic text went to forth and multiplied: it exerted a huge influence through its literary progeny, which not only dispersed North and West, but reached back South and East into India and Southeast Asia.

3. The Southern *Pañcatantra:* Numerous manuscripts in this version in various scripts have been found all over south India. The Southern *Pañcatantra* is one of the shorter *Pañcatantra*s: Hertel's critical edition is only about fifty eight pages long and contains 341 verses. Southern *Pañcatantra* is less than half the length of the
Tantrākhāyika, and has significantly fewer verses than the 530 found in that text.

Even though the southern Pañcatantra is much shorter and has fewer verses, its basic structure and content do not diverge far from the core set. It contains all the core stories with a single addition, and also an abridged selection 'for the instruction of the boys who have learnt little', based on a north western abridgement made after the seventh century (according to Hertal): The text preserved is close to the Tantrākhāyika, hence it is quite valuable as it can be used for the reproduction of the original text. A large number of recensions were produced on the basis of this abridgement, many of which are still extant, contributing thus towards the circulation and popularity of this work.

Edgerton maintained that the southern Pañcatantra contained three quarters of the prose of the "original"
Pañcatantra and preserved the original text 'more accurately than the Tantrākhāyika.

4. Bṛhatkathā version:- Most scholars accept without question the existence of the collection of stories called Bṛhatkathā ("The great story"), attributed to Guṇḍādhya, and written in a Prākrit dialect called Paiśācī. It is thought that the original Bṛhatkathā did not include the Pañcatantra, but that materiel was added in the later version, which was created in Northwestern India or Kashmir.62 Neither the original Bṛhatkathā nor its Northwestern derivative are extent.

There are, however, two collections of stories, both written in Sanskrit verse, both containing abbreviated versions of the Pañcatantra, and both claiming descent from an original lost Bṛhatkathā: these are the Bṛhatkathāmañjari by Kṣemendra and Kathāsaritsāgara by Somadeva. Both are from Kashmir, which at that time was an active centre of Sanskrit learning and literature.

The form in which these versions of the *Brhatkatha* preserve the *Pañcatantra* appears to be at a great disagreement with the original in its objective and treatment, as it has been transformed into light literature. These versions of the *Pañcatantra* do not have an independent value.

The version of the *Pañcatantra* in these two have much in common: they are much shorter than all the others; they are composed entirely in verse; they contain no additional verses; they lack the *kathāmukha* set in Amaraśakti's court; and they launch straight into the first *tantra*. Despite these peculiarities, the basic structure of all five *tantras*, and to a large extent the embedded stories and the order in which they appear, approximate the core set.

5. Nepalese Version:- This manuscript from Nepal, which contains most of the verses from a text similar to the Southern *Pañcatantra* but lacks the prose sections, is
described by Hertal. The wording of individual verses in the Nepali version differs from the Southern recension, but both Hertal and Edgerton agreed that the version form which the verses were extracted and the Southern *Pañcatantra* were offshoots of a common archetype. This archetype apparently also served as the basis for the *Pañcatantra* stories included in the *Hitopadeśa*. Olivelle makes the interesting point that "the connection between Nepal and South India, revealed also in the case of manuscripts of other works, was facilitated by the employment of South Indian brāhmins in the royal temples of Nepal".63

The *Hitopadeśa*:- The *Hitopadeśa* ("Good Counsel", "Appropriate advice") is a substantial reworking of the *Pañcatantra* by an author called Nārāyaṇa. The Author Nārāyaṇa says of the *Hitopadeśa* that it "was written having drawn on the *Pañcatantra* and another work".64 As mentions above the *Hitopadeśa* shows some influence of

the Southern *Pañcatantra*. The king who commissioned Viṣṇuśarman to teach his sons was names Sudarśana and not Amaraśakti, and his court was in Pāṭaliputra. The *Hitopadeśa* like the Southern *Pañcatantra* also contains the story of the cowgirl and her lovers.

Of the 71 motifs in the *Hitopadeśa*, 56 are found in the *Pañcatantra*. In some cases even the order in which they appear is the same. Where stories are common to both, they appear to have been substantially rewritten in the *Hitopadeśa*, i.e. the wording in the *Hitopadeśa* differs radically from that the *Pañcatantra*. In spite of this the general thrust of the stories remains the same.

The *Pañcatantra* has enjoyed immense popularity in India and abroad. It has been taught in the traditional curricula of the *Pāṭhaśālās* (schools) for centuries and even now it is prescribed for various Sanskrit courses up to the university level. It is considered an essential text to attain maturity, worldly wisdom and knowledge. The *Simhāsanavatrinṣika* says that a minister to
a king should read the *Pañcatantra* along with the works of *Cānaka*ya and *Kāmanda*kiya. Also, among the world classics the *Pañcatantra* scores the highest number of translations. Hertal has recorded as many as two hundred versions of it in fifty different languages.\(^{65}\)

We can hear its distant echo in La Fontaine’s charming fables written as late as the seventeenth century. It had started traveling beyond the Indian frontiers from the fifth century and Benfey, in the most elaborately prepared introduction to his translation of the *Pañcatantra*, shows how it had impregnated the literatures of three continents for many centuries and particularly influenced the European narrative literature of the medieval period.

P.H Wolff, the German translator, remarked that the *Pañcatantra* was, ‘probably next to the Bible, translated into the largest number of languages in the world, and called it a book ‘that inspired the entire mankind and held in reverence by kings

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and princes'. The observation of Max Muller is perhaps more to the point: 'the history of the march of Indian tales from the east downward the west is indeed wonderful, more wonderful and more instructive than many stories themselves'.

Thus Pañcatantra is not only the root of all culture, the sum total of all wisdom and a guide to every kind of profitable work, but also serve as a guide to the journey to the other world.

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