CHAPTER IV

Literary Value Of The Pancatantra
Māmaṭa in his Kāvyaprakāśa says that literature produces fame, one can know from it the manners and customs of the age and that it produces immediate artistic satisfaction of a transcendent order both for the reader and for the writer and it is also instructive by the presentation of great ideals in a sweet and captivating manner.  

From literature one can follow the essential characteristics of a nation. The individual poet being a product of the society his writings leave the mark of the time and its culture. When we read the Pañcatantra, pictures come vividly to our mind of people living in palaces and huts or in the public squares, under most enchanting views - conversing, discussing, exchanging stories - nimble in mind yet perhaps a little lazy and temperate in nature. That is why we try to discover its sources of origin, classify the poems, realise the political constitution of the country and analyse the language and its literary style. Thus the Pañcatantra brings into light across the lapse of centuries the living men as to how they worked, how they were hemmed in by their customs,
so that we may feel that we hear their voice, see their gestures postures and features, their dress and garments, just as we can do of friends whom we have visited in the morning or seen in the street.

Viṣṇusārma, an old man of eighty years, agreed to coach the princes of Mahilāropya not against money but for delivering knowledge. He promised to make the princes expert in Nitiśāstra in six months. And he "invented a useful method and wrote five books for their instruction." So the Pañcatantra is essentially a book of didactic fables whose avowed object is to impart instruction in Niti-politics and practical wisdom in a charming and attractive manner. The language is on the whole simple, chaste and clear. It would not have achieved its avowed object if it were otherwise. Simple and idiomatic, the style of the Pañcatantra is direct, forceful, smooth-flowing. It contains wise and witty stories in most of which the characters are animals. The fable and the political purpose are so skilfully blended that a fable which is good in itself as a fable serves also as a befitting illustration of some moral or political maxim. For example, the first tale of Book I narrates how a monkey who pulled out a wedge was caught in it, thus illustrating that one should not poke one's nose in other's affairs. Tale
21 of Book I illustrates the famous maxim of the Mahābhārata, *satam prati satyamācare*. A merchant turns dishonest and says that the balance of iron was eaten away by the mice. The clever friend stole his son and said that the boy had been carried away by a hawk. Reluctantly the merchant had to return the balance to get back his son.

The object of these stories is to teach practical politics and not necessarily morality which has been discussed previously. Even the frame story of Book I illustrates how by their cunning two clever jackals succeeded in causing estrangement between two intimate friends, the lion and the bull. The last tale of Book I illustrates how a wise foo is better than a foolish friend. A thoughtful but foolish servant of a king killed him while asleep with a stroke of sword, intended for the fly, that sat over him again and again, these instances can be multiplied.

The author combines in himself not only a good story teller and clever politician but also a master of narrative. More often than not, we find him lost in the joy of telling some charming and attractive stories. Another chief feature of the author's style is his use of epigrammatic verses by the characters. To quote one illustration - the lion says to the jackal:
It is these verses which by their wit beauty and appropriateness elevate the Pañcatantra far above the level of the best story books. It must be mentioned however that most of such verses when translated become empty because in translation the word music of the original is lost. We have discussed before that it is difficult to say that all these verses are the poet's own composition. The Pañcatantra is based on stray álokás and phrases and proverbs, some anonymous and some from known treatises. In the epic poems and the bigger compositions, we are probably reading the works of the luckier poets who were able to secure the patronage of a king or a wealthy man. But there must have been many who were not so fortunate, and in all likelihood these anonymous small stray álokás of the Pañcatantra are the works of this less fortunate category. As the vernaculars began to develop what little patronage they gained from the people also dwindled, caste restrictions might also have stood in the way of their names being known and recognized. We get vivid glimpses of their own state from numerous álokás of the Pañcatantra. The anonymous poets abuse poverty and king's hostile attitude (see chap. II) and say emphatically that these ruin a man's
life and career. The skill of the poet lies in the clever selection of these verses.

The author of the Pañcatantra has remarkable power of characterisation. Not only the kings and nobles or the minor characters but even the animals are all very vividly drawn in his writings. They have got their own individuality and are painted with the author's insight and liveliness. As for example, the author describes the bull Samjivaka thus: the bull was left by the merchant inside a great jungle getting strong by eating emerald green grass tips. It roams about at will every day tearing open the tops of the anthills with the strokes of his pointed horns, and bellowing loudly. A lion ready to attack gazing in the prey's direction, with uplifted tail, four feet drawn together, mouth open and ears erect. The animals in the Pañcatantra are all masked human characters acting and conversing while pointing out some teachings or warnings. Thus we see Samjivaka when first conducted into Pingalaka's (the animal king's) presence - salutes the king respectfully and stands modestly before him. Samjivaka lays upon him his right hand - which is plump, round and long and adorned with claws like thunderbolts. The author describes sunset; the sun, resting on the sunset mountain, with rays of fiery splendour, the bees entering the lotus
eager to drink from its filaments, closing the petals in the twilight, waterrose and blue lotus blossoms opening, together with heavily fragrant jasmine. The author, while describing the bed of the king is stirred to poetry. "The bed had a very fine upper coverlet and double pillows, it was broad as a Ganges sandbank and very soft and of fragrant perfume."

The flea who had tasted many kinds of blood from people of all spheres describes the King's blood "as delightful as nectar." The heron's neck in story 5 of Book I has been very aptly resembled to a lotus stem. "The crab taking the heron's neck like a lotus stem very slowly crawled back to the lake again."

Here is a description of the insecurity of kingly glory: "Fidgety as the monkey, unstable as water on a lotus-leaf suitable as the wind's path, untrustworthy as rogues' friendship, gleaming but a moment like a strip of evening cloud, fragile by nature like the bubbles on water, lost in the moment of attainment like the treasure in a dream."

There is a sensitive awareness of the tragedy that recurs daily in the village though nobody has the patience to notice it. "The white ox which always alone bore the heavy loads on the roughest roads, which never tolerated in its own enclosure the slightest suggestion of pride from another, which was the chief ornament of the herd - now, the minute it shows signs of age, is put up for sale."
The stories cover the everyday life of rural and urban living. There is a city in a certain region where we find a half built temple. It is deserted. The master-builders and the other workmen employed have gone into the city restaurant at noon time to eat dinner. In the construction of the temple the author portrays a great crowd of apes playing about at random among the treetops, the towers of the building and the piles of wood. We see the members of the king's harem, playing in the water of the lake, having laid aside near the water their gold chains, pearl necklaces, fine garments and other finery. The city is full with hums and hubbubs of busy dwellers going out and coming in their houses, with innumerable chores to attend to; while in the village we encounter peaceful living - quail picking up seed at the edge of a muddy field, sparrows scratching in ploughed furrows, farmers guarding his field at the dead of night with bow and arrows, a dog wagging an abject tail at response to some offerings. There are vivid vignettes of rural life. We see village women busy with household duties, peasants at work in the field, farm worker busy with chasing away harmful animals during a harvest, the archers catching games in the forest, bird hunters trapping birds while roaming about in the forest.

The author has perfect command over the language.
Occasional elaboration, multiplying epithet and imagery, reveal the influence of Kāvya manner, but even here the two ornate, is avoided. Here is description of king's nature:

It is hard to win the favour of kings. They are like mountains, for they are always harsh (punningly, of mountains, rugged) by nature, and surrounded by vicious men (crowded with beasts of prey), and they are on the look out for faults, (they are explored through elefs), and they make use of fraud (they harbour treacherous monsters). This is a beautiful example of pun ornamentation. Lyricism is combined with wit but without the heaviness of later Kāvya manner. The author aims at easy intelligibility, exactness of expression, sweetness of form and elegance of diction and strictly avoids hardness of sounds and bombast. Even in prose he avoids long compounds which are difficult to comprehend.

The author can excite laughter too. The wild venture of the wives of the weaver and barber and the queer methods of achieving their end amply bespeak of the author's power of wit and humour. Occasionally, the mood becomes as naughty as in Boccaccio. A woman in bed with her paramour, discovers to her horror the feet of her husband sticking out from below the bedstead. Obviously he had his suspicions all along. But the resourceful woman pretends to have noticed nothing amiss and tells her
paramour loudly that a goddess had appeared to her in a vision and told her that her husband was facing imminent death and that there was only one way to escape from the doom. "If you go to bed with another man, then the untimely death that threatens your husband will pass to him and your husband will live another hundred years." 20

A sane, balanced life view emerges from the lively narratives. Dear is life to man. It is true that time will engulf everything. Where are those mighty kings, Daśaratha, Sagara and Manu? Imperious time awakened them at dawn, at evening closed their eyes? But if death is in escapable, it is still far away, and every man can reasonably expect some summers on the sunlit earth. And it is therefore better to settle down and get the most out of life. Poverty is a terrible thing. Even real worth is not recognised by the world when a man is poor. Besides, what native intelligence is there when it is withered by household worries?

Characterisation and dramatic method are the two main points of literary style in the Pāñcatantra. The plan of attaching stories together so as to make a collection is very old, as we have discussed it fully in the previous chapter. What people could do in old times, but tell stories, when they were assembled, and had plenty of leisure? That the author knew collections of tales may be taken for granted, that he often followed convention is a matter of course.
The author actually had no need to borrow or to invent. As he had much knowledge of the immemorial habit of mankind, he needed only to observe. His genius appears in the first place, in making a good choice among his several observations, in perceiving the most appropriate one. The stories are not alike in form or subject, nor are they all in one key. There is infinite style and substance. We can call it a micro-cosmography, a little image of the whole world. The author has a profound sense of the joy and beauty, the sadness and irony of human life.

Sometimes, to be sure, the stories get out of hand with too many slokas, instances and examples. But not for long, and usually, on such occasions, the author is content to let go the reins, since the item is guiding itself. Poetry in the Pancatantra has taken two broad courses satire and didacticism. When the author wishes to stress a particular point he switches over to poetry from prose. As for example; while the monk Drhatsphika was telling Jūṭakarpa, a story, he kept constantly striking the alms bowl with a stick. This angered Drhatsphika and abandoning prose he changed his dialogue to poetry and uttered:

"vimānanā duścaritānukīrtanam
kathā prasaṅgo vacanādavasmayaḥ
na dṛṣṭidānam kṛtapūrbanāsānām
viraktabhbasya narasya laksanam ".
The transition of poetry is mediated through the glimpses of nature, of sunset and moonlight, spring and rain. Damanaka gives this pretty fancy about kings beguiling caprice; kings are like snakes, they are luxurious (punningly; they have coils), and are covered with armour (snake-skins), they are savage, and act (move) crookedly, they possess nostrils (hoods, of serpents) and can be managed by good counsel (by snake-charms). The poet of the Pañcatantra however look at nature more objectively instead of always trying to see in it either a reflection of or a response to the romantic mood. As for example he states that men look for something wrong even in the righteous, when they are made wary by imposters. He takes the instance from nature and resembles such type with a foolish swan who hunting for the white lotus shoots by night, has bitten again and again, the tricky shadow of stars in the water, deceived afterwards he suspects that the white lotus is a star and does not bite it even by day.23

To comment directly on life the author sought instances from nature: Ketaki flowers are beset with thorns; water-lilies grow out of the mud; wantons are attended by bawds; where is there a jewel without a flaw?25 Like the Christian parables it takes instances from nature to make its teachings easily understood. Though the approach here is objective, fancy and imagination are at work on the first visual impression. As
for example to clarify the point that no one enters the service of the exalted except to gain distinction he says: when a morsel is tossed to a dog he wags his tail, rolls at the feet of the giver falls on the ground and turns up his face and his belly towards him. But a noble elephant preserves a serious mien and eats only after endless coaxing. The description could not be more vivid or picturesque.

Another literary characteristic of the Pañcatantra is that the title of each tale is given by means of a śloka which gives the moral of the story and also narrates the chief character, as for example the eighth tale of Book I bears the title stanza:

"yasya buddhirbalaṁ tasya nirbuddheṣtu kuto balam
pasya simha madomattah ṅaṅkena nipātitaḥ." ²⁷

It means whosoever has wit has power, but as for the foolish, how can he be powerful? Behold how the lion Haughty was destroyed by the hare? This śloka naturally opens the story of the Lion and the Hare.

In some of the title stanzas even the names of the character are given. As for example:
There are some rare verses in the Pāncatantra which are narrative in character. As for example we find the following verse in the Deer’s tale:

"vātavṛṣṭividhūtasya mr̥gayūthasya dhāvataḥ
praṭhato nuguṇighāyāṁ kādā tanne bhavīyati ".

The originality of such verses cannot be doubted. They seem to have entered the text spontaneously because otherwise the author seems to be careful enough to describe the narrative in prose only (the verses being either gnomic or title stanzas).

In verse the śloka metre or anustuv predominates which in the style of the epics and the smṛtis avoids long compounds and difficult construction as for example:

"āpatkāle tu saṃprāpte yanmitraṁ mitrameva tat
vṛddhikāle tu saṃprāpte durjano'pi suhṛd bhavet ".

Another example:

"kiṁ tayā kriyate dhenuyā na sūte na dugdhada
ko’rtheḥ putreṇa jātena yo na vidvāna bhaktimān ". 
These verses are so simple that they are generally included in the syllabus for beginners.

In some cases though the author resorts to elaborate metres using long compounds. As for example:

"siddhiḥ prārthayatā janena viduṣā tejo nigṛhya svakam
sattvotsāhavatāpi daivavidhiṣu sthairyaman prakāryāṃ kramāt
devendra dravīnesvārāntaka-saṃair-agyanvito dhṛtṛbhiḥ
kīṁ kliṣṭaḥ sucirāṁ tridāṇdamavyahacchāmna dharmātmajāḥ."\(^{32}\)

It means — in action of fate a wise person, wishing success, even though possessing energy and courage, should gradually observe firmness, having suppressed his lustre. Did not the distressed Yudhīṣṭhira (lit. son of Dharma), although possessed glory and accompanied by brothers like Indra (lord of gods), Kuvera (god of wealth) and Yama (god of death) bear for long the tridāṇḍa (the sannyāsin’s rod).

But even these verses are simplicity itself when compared with the Kāvyā style of the later writers. The following verse of the Pancatantra describing the relation between the king and the prime minister occurs also in the Kudrārakṣa.
"atyucchrite mantriṇi pārthive ca
viṣṭabhyā pādāvupatiṣṭhate śrīḥ
sā strīsvabhāvādasaḥ bhārasya
tayordvayorekatarām jahāti ".

The style of exposition of the Pañcatantra is oblique instruction or anyāpadesa. It is apparently addressed to someone other than the person for whom it is meant. Usually the instructions are towards the king, to check absolutism. Mostly the technique relies on metaphor with a transparent meaning. The author under the guise of a jackal or an owl does the plain speaking.

Thus we see that the author of the Pañcatantra possesses wonderful power of description, keen observation of human tendencies and natural objects and strong poetic imagination. not only the principal characters but even the minor ones are very vividly drawn. His command over language and selection of words and verses are also striking. The only draw back is perhaps his lack of the sense of proportion; no topic is let go till it is almost impossible for the author to say anything more about it. Still the style being simple, clear and elegant the Pañcatantra has gained an important place in the popular literature of the world.

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