Chapter 4: At A Glance

The Panchatantra, Akbar Birbal and Tenali Raman in various media

Figure 74 The various forms of media which have assimilated the tales of The Panchatantra, Akbar Birbal, and Tenali Raman

[116]
Chapter 4

Indian popular tales in different media

In this chapter the focus is laid on the compatibility of popular tales in different media. Attention has been directed towards the fact that despite different channels of transmission, the tales of *The Panchatantra, Akbar Birbal* and *Tenali Raman* are attuned with all other mediums. They are assimilated within all forms of media, i.e., in postal stamps, mobiles, on stage adaptations, on the big screen, in newspapers, comics, magazines, radio, television and the internet. Moreover, in contemporary adaptations of these tales, ancient and medieval wisdom is presented in a manner suitable to the post-modern society, i.e., in cartoons, television, internet, etc.

It was, in fact, their unrivalled popularity which facilitated Doordarshan almost two decades back to air episodes based on the tales of *The Panchatantra* as well as the humour-filled anecdotes of Birbal and Tenali Raman. Later the Cartoon Network, which caters to a global audience, aired the witty tales of both Birbal and Tenali. It also aired *The Adventures of Chhota Birbal* which portrays Akbar and Birbal as childhood friends. Apart from this, these stories also created their space in various comics and magazines like *Amar Chitra Katha, Chandamama* and *Nandan*. They entered almost all the electronic audio visual mediums like mobiles, internet, etc. All these mediums can be broadly classified under three heads as shown in Fig. 75. The diagram illustrates the shift of these tales from pre-print media to print media to post-print electronic media. But even though there was a shift, yet the purpose behind these tales remained the same, i.e., to enlighten and instruct the listener, the reader and the spectator.

![The accent process shows the sequence of different media](image-url)
Pre-Print Media

The journey of these tales began with the oral medium\(^1\) or the pre-print media with the listener as the prime component. But apart from the oral telling, the paintings have been placed under this category since many of the paintings are part of the original manuscripts, written much before the advent of printing. Moreover, many carvings based on the tales of *The Panchatantra* also belong to ancient times. Though paintings on the anecdotes of Birbal and Tenali are available in abundance on the internet yet only some sketches on Tenali Raman are worth the mention. They are not as old as *The Panchatantra* paintings and reliefs yet they hold a prominent place.

**Paintings**

Abdallah Ibn-Ul-Muquaffa, an Arabic scholar who translated *The Panchatantra* from Pahlavi into Arabic 570 A.D, in his book *Kalila wa Dimnah* complemented the text along with the paintings. He mentions the reasons for this in the preface of *Kalila wa Dimnah*, i.e., to provide pleasure to the reader and also to make the reader more mindful of the book's value\(^2\).

The framing story of Book I concerning the lion and the jackal can be seen in Fig. 4 of Chapter 2 which shows the crafty jackal Victor with the lion Rusty. The source of the manuscript is a Persian translation of *The Panchatantra* called *Kalila wa Dimna*. This Manuscript dated 1429 AD is placed in Topkapi Palace Museum, Turkey.\(^3\)


---

1. See Chapter 1 for a detailed discussion.
4. Ibid
The paintings shown in Fig. 76 are from *Kalila wa Dimna* and they are based on the two different stories from *The Panchatantra*, i.e., ‘The Ungrateful Wife’ and the framing story of ‘The Winning of Friends’ as it presents the doves caught in a hunter’s net that are later released with the help of mice. Both the paintings shown above are among the original manuscripts found in the Egyptian National Library in Egypt.

*The Panchatantra* paintings are spread all over the globe and for this reason, they also adore the Gulistan Palace Library in Tehran, Iraq. The painting shown in Fig. 77 illustrates the story of Fig. 76, i.e., the framing story of Book II while Fig. 78 depicts the story of ‘Flop-Ear and Dusty’ in which Dusty, a jackal willingly serves his master, a lion and finds a prey (a donkey) for him by telling the latter about a charming spot with three she-donkeys are waiting for a husband. The lion fails to kill the donkey but Dusty, with his clever manipulation of facts, brings Flop-Ear again who then is killed by the lion. The given painting is also a part of one of the original manuscripts.

The famous Candi Mendut Temple in Borobudur, Indonesia is also known for its stone carvings and their close resemblance with *The Panchatantra* tales. One reason for their resemblance is that the Candi Mendut Temple is a Buddhist Temple and *The Panchatantra* stories have many parallels with the Buddhist *Jataka* tales. Fig. 79 and Fig. 80 are both stone carvings at the Candi Mendut temple; Fig. 79 reminds the spectator of the tale of the Bhurunda Birds while Fig. 80 depicts the story of two friends ‘Right-Mind and Wrong-Mind’.

---

The Panchatantra reliefs are found at the Mukteswara temple too which is believed to be built in AD 950. This temple which is dedicated to Lord Shiva is situated in Mukteswara. In fact, there is no doubt regarding The Panchatantra tales sculpted on the walls since the local guides and people of Orissa confirm it. Moreover, almost all the travel sites on internet mention that the Mukteswara temple offers pride of place to tales from The Panchatantra.

This 10th century temple has some of the most ornate carvings and renditions of the Panchatantra tales. Sculptures can be found of the elephants, monkeys, lions, and other animals of the Panchatantra tales. Around the windows of the Jagmohana are monkeys engaged in a variety of humorous and lively scenes depicting popular stories from Panchatantra.  

See Orrisa Mukteshwara Temple. Web.
http://www.yogamalika.org/templesite/TAMILNADU/ORISSA_GALLERY.htm

[120]
The sculptural decoration of the Mukteswara Temple is exquisitely done and when *The Panchatantra* tales become its part, then the sculptures seem interesting not only to an art critic but even to an ordinary man. The carving shown in Fig. 81 demonstrates the framing story of Book IV i.e., the story of ‘The Monkey and the Crocodile.’ Another carved stone describes the story of a tortoise who insists to shift to another pond along with his two geese friends, Slim and Grim (fig. 82). Both the geese hold the tortoise with the help of a stick. While the three are flying, the impulsive tortoise opens his mouth in the mid air and falls down which leads to his death.

Among the various patrons of *The Panchatantra* stories, one comes across many rulers who patronized the translations or the paintings of these tales. One such example is of the great Mughal Emperor Akbar who could not stay untouched by the charm of these stories. Therefore, he commissioned Abul Fazl to translate these stories. Thereafter, the latter produced a Persian version of *The Panchatantra* titled, *Iyar-i-Danish* (Criterion of Knowledge) in 1588 CE.

Akbar built up a library of 24,000 books including rare and precious manuscripts that he had either inherited, won in battle or commissioned. He also established a Bureau of Translations where books in various languages were translated into Persian, including Hindu books... There were many scholars at Akbar’s court who were proficient in more than one language, such as Badauni, who did a lot of translation work. Birbal, too, spoke fluent Persian as well as Hindi and Sanskrit. (Sarin, 69)

One may also say that the artists and painters during Akbar’s reign had brought them alive in their work because Miniatures based on this work are very popular. We may not come across Akbar Birbal carvings but mention must also be made to the fact that *The Panchatantra* stories have become a part of the temple architecture in India, along with the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* stories.

---

8 Ibid
9 Ibid
10 Qaisar, A. Jan; S.P. Verma, ed. *Art and Culture Painting and Perspective* pp. 35
There are plenty of paintings based on *The Panchatantra* tales but unfortunately one does not come across paintings or sculptures of the duo Akbar Birbal. Though there are a large number of animated versions of both Akbar and Birbal but they are not very significant ones.

On the other hand, the thought of *Tenali Raman* immediately brings to mind some of the most memorable sketches seen during the television broadcast of Doordarshan’s *Tenali Rama* (fig. 83). These timeless sketches which are shown in the figures below were part of the television version that was based on Kamala Laxman’s book *Tenali Raman*. Later, this book was serialized into thirteen episodes by national-television Doordarshan and the illustrator was none other than R. K. Laxman, Kamala Laxman’s husband, who is credited for creating the unforgettable illustrations for every episode of *Tenali Rama*.

Even though these sketches were part of the television version, i.e., they fall under the post-print electronic media yet they have been placed under this head as the television segment is dealt separately. For this reason, they have been considered here.

---

12 Kamala Laxman is an Indian author and wife of cartoonist R. K. Laxman. She has authored several books to her credit. In the mid-1970s, she was commissioned by India Book House to write for children. Among the notable children’s books are *The Thama Stories*.

13 Rasipuram Krishnaswamy Iyer Laxman, popularly known as R. K. Laxman, is an Indian cartoonist, illustrator, and humorist. He is widely regarded as India’s greatest-ever cartoonist.
Print Media

After the advent of printing, the circulation of *The Panchatantra, Akbar Birbal* and *Tenali Raman* tales became easy and speedy. Contribution in this area came from various newspapers, comics, magazines and postal stamps which fall under the print media and cater to the needs of a reader.

Newspaper

The newspaper has been a source of information since ages. Due to its large readership, it is an important part of media. Newspaper articles feature all kinds of stories which vary from national news to local ones, from sports to Bollywood, caricatures to other entertainment sections. In India, there are thousands of newspapers which cover all the segments mentioned above including *The Panchatantra, Akbar Birbal* and *Tenali Raman* stories and the articles based on these stories from time to time. But since it is practically not possible to scan all the articles featuring these tales in all the newspapers, I have taken into account one of the leading newspapers of India, i.e., *The Hindu* and reproduced two articles from it. The purpose of reproducing these articles in their original format is to provide a clear picture of the newspaper adaptations. The given excerpt ‘Tale of a book of tales’ has been taken from *The Hindu’s* Life and Style section which appeared on 6th April 2010.

Tale of a book of tales

KALA SAMBASIVAN

This book is a favourite with almost everyone even today. But you probably don't know how these stories were created or why they were told...

*The Panchatantra is a book of five chapters. that is how it gets its name.*

Today our langur friend tells a story about a remarkable book of tales. This is a timeless classic!

---

A long time ago, perhaps around 200 B.C., King Amarsakthi ruled a kingdom in southern India. He had three sons — my, don't they all — who showed no interest in learning the scriptures. This troubled the king. On the advice of his ministers, he appointed a sagacious pundit, Vishnusharman, as the princes' tutor. It proved to be a perfect choice. Through a number of animal stories the guru taught the princes the rules of kingship, which they learnt with incredible speed and interest.

Vishnusharman's collection of stories, the Panchatantra — ah, you have read it, haven't you — had stories written in prose and morals in verse taken from the Vedas. The sage could never have imagined that some 2000 years later, his fables would still be told and retold to kids all over the world.

Well, Panchatantra is a book of five chapters. That is how it gets its name. Each chapter contains a number of short stories based on a principle. The five themes are mitra bheda or loss of friendship, mitra laabha or gain of friendship, suhrud bheda or causing dissension among friends, vigraha or separation and sandhi or union. Learning these values through stories is easy; and one never forgets them.

Travellers from the east to Persia spread these fabulous tales there. King Khosraw I ordered his ministers to translate the fables into their literary language, Pahlavi. Then, as time went by, the Persian version was in turn translated into Arabic. By the 11th century, the tales of Panchatantra were read and enjoyed in many different languages in Europe.

Listen to this amusing bit! It was also known as Pilpay's Fables or Tales of Bidpai. The narrator of the fables is an Indian sage Bidpai.

Funnily, it is a corruption of the Sanskrit word “Vidhyapati”!

Did you know that Arabian Nights, Fables of La Fontaine and Grimms' Fairy Tales, were influenced by Vishnusharman's work?

The stories from this classic will always mesmerise children for all times!

The monkey on the jamun tree and the crocodile in the river below live on forever!

Do you not agree with me?
The next excerpt is also from *The Hindu* and it covers a story of Akbar and Birbal titled *Greater than God* published on 6th May 2000.

**Greater than God**

M. SUDHAKAR

One day, two poets from a faraway kingdom arrived at the court. They delighted everyone with their songs and poems. The emperor, who was always generous, rewarded them well. The poets had never seen so much gold before. They were overwhelmed. Then the emperor ordered that they be given a set of princely clothes each. Then one of the poets begged permission to offer a poem of thanks. Emperor Akbar nodded and the poet began his recitation. He spoke of the emperor's bravery and kindness. He praised the emperor's learning and wisdom.

He ended by saying that emperor Akbar was the greatest king that had ever ruled "over this world on any other. He is greater than God Himself." With that, the poet bowed and left the hall.

There was a moment of silence. Many of those in the hall were shocked that the poet had compared a mortal to God.

Emperor Akbar looked around and his eyes began to twinkle mischievously. "So," he said, "it appears that I am now even greater than God."

All the people in the hall looked at their emperor in horror. Had he really believed the poet's words? Surely not! And yet, they were not entirely sure. Emperor Akbar looked at his ministers and commanders, his nobles and his counsellors. He wondered if any of them would have the courage to speak the truth. The ministers, commanders, nobles and counsellors looked back at him. Nobody stirred.

"So," said the emperor, beginning to feel irritated, everyone present agrees that your emperor is greater than god."
Nobody dared to disagree. Slowly, one by one, the courtiers bowed to show that they agreed. A low, shamed murmur of "Yes, your majesty," "It is so, your Majesty," filled the hall.

Emperor Akbar thought that the courtiers were acting very foolishly. He turned to Birbal with a frown. "And you, Birbal. Do you agree too?" he asked.

"Oh, yes" Birbal replied immediately. The emperor's frown grew. "Your majesty, you can do something even God cannot!" Birbal said. "If any of your subjects displeases you, O King, you can send him on a pilgrimage or banish him from your empire, never to return. But God cannot. For God rules over the entire earth and the sky and the heavens. There is no place in this world or any other that does not belong to God. So he cannot banish any of his creatures."

Emperor Akbar's frown vanished. "Well said, Birbal!" he cried delightedly. And, from every corner of the court, relieved courtiers began to smile weakly and then to laugh. Birbal had done it again!

The two articles given above have been provided to get a peep through the newspaper versions of *The Panchatantra* and *Akbar Birbal* stories. The stories given here are retained in the same manner as they were published without any editing. Even the illustrations were part of the original printing. Newspapers mostly covered articles on certain themes that ran in *The Panchatantra, Akbar Birbal* and *Tenali Raman* stories but the credit of setting up a trend of continuous series of these tales goes to various comics and magazines.

**Comics/Magazines**

One way in which the stories of *The Panchatantra, Akbar Birbal* and *Tenali Raman* became popular in recent decades is through magazines and comic books such as *Chandamama, Nandan* and the Amar Chitra Katha series. *Chandamama*, one of the oldest magazines for children in India which started in the year 1949, has behind it a sixty-year history of story-telling. Over the years it has published a regular series of these tales. Later, the Amar Chitra Katha series popularized the comic books with large publications every year. To quote, Amit Aggarwal:

> India is a rapidly evolving entertainment market and has long tradition of comic readership (almost 60 years old) publishing around 10 crore
copies a year. The concept of comics in India was first introduced with ‘Chandamama’ and later Pran created comic strips like the popular Chacha Choudhary in 70s. But the readership was confined to children and content was largely conservative and un-intellectual (Aggarwal). Thereafter, the conservative and un-intellectual comics gave way to the knowledgeable and intellectual ones which covered various subjects like mythology, history, fables, folktales and wit and wisdom. In fact, the concept of mythological Indian characters was first used in Amar Chitra Katha.

ACK Media or Amar Chitra Katha Pvt. Ltd has over the years produced many books on The Panchatantra, Akbar Birbal, and Tenali Raman. With the aim to provide entertainment and education to its young audiences, the company states that its core value proposition is ‘education + entertainment and Indian-ness. And in such case, The Panchatantra, Akbar Birbal, and Tenali Raman of course qualify to be its part. Not only do they qualify, but these tales are among the bestsellers too.

Figure 86: Amar Chitra Katha series of The Panchatantra, Akbar Birbal and Tenali Raman

Samir Patil, CEO and Co-Founder of ACK Media in his interview said, ‘ACK’s bestsellers are mythology, history, fables and folktales (e.g. Panchatantra), and wit and wisdom (Birbal).’

Amar Chitra Katha (fig. 86) has, to its credit, 200 titles in eight different languages including The Panchatantra, Akbar Birbal, and


[127]
Tenali Raman stories. Apart from this, ACK is also launching these stories in animated, live-action and gaming format for all screens - television, film, mobile and online.17

Another company to join the race in 2007 was Virgin Comics which portrays comics as a potentially mature medium with original stories and characters which further develop into films, television, animation, gaming, wireless content and merchandise. Quite contrary to the Indian comics and magazines, all Virgin comics’ series have western style of comic storytelling and art. The company was set up with the idea to sell Indian mythological stories in the west, much like how western comic characters like Batman, Spider-Man and Scooby-Doo attracted the Indian children. Inspired by India’s ancient Panchatantra fables, Virgin Comics launched a new comic book series in North America. This new version, called Panchatantra, The Tall Tales of Vishnu Sharma (fig. 87) is done in the style and sensibility of high-end graphic novel with the purpose of attracting the teenagers. Sharad Devarajan, CEO & Co-Founder of Virgin Comics and Virgin Animation in an interview said:

"With Panchatantra, The Tall Tales of Vishnu Sharma, we continue our Mission of looking to India as a source of innovative creativity with a vault of stories that should be brought to the world." "The young Indian creators behind this series stand at the forefront of redefining a new golden age in Indian storytelling and shifting the country from being an outsourcer to being the source."18

In Virgin’s new monthly magazine, the characters from The Panchatantra tales emerge from their story-world into modern India. With the purpose of retaining the ancient tales, they recruit Vishnu Sharma, the living descendent of the original creator

of these tales. The young Vishnu Sharma is a teenager who lives in Mumbai in the world of iPods, cell phones, video games and other sources of modern entertainment. He is completely the opposite of what the other characters in the magazine and the readers expect. The comic book series is written by leading Indian fantasy and comic book writer, Samit Basu and illustrated by Ashish Padlekar.

Another comics’ collection which deserves a mention is the Diamond Comics because it covers all the three titles namely The Panchatantra, Akbar Birbal (fig. 88) and Tenali Raman. It is also one of the products which contributed towards making these tales further popular. Among its most notable series are titles and characters like Vikram Betal, Panchatantra, Hitopadesh, Jatak Kathain, Akbar Birbal, Singhasan Battisi, Tenalirama.

Postal Stamps
The immortal tales of The Panchatantra did not leave behind any sphere untouched. Some of its tales can be seen in its colourful representations on letters or post mails as well.

India Post, i.e., the Department of Posts, Ministry of
Communications and Technology, Government of India issues new stamps round the year. These stamps are of two types: Commemorative stamps\(^{19}\) and Definitive stamps\(^{20}\). Among the commemorative stamps, a set of four se-tenant\(^{21}\) stamps has been dedicated to the ancient Panchatantra stories. These four stamps were issued on 17 October 2001 with the denomination of Rs. 4/- each. These stamps depict four famous stories from *The Panchatantra*. The four stories as shown in the fig. 89 are ‘The Lion and the Rabbit’, ‘The Tortoise and the Geese’, ‘The Crows and the Snake’ and ‘The Monkey and the Crocodile’.\(^{22}\)

*The Panchatantra* stories became part of the national postage not only in India, but in Lebanon too. Liban issued two postal stamps based on the stories of *The Panchatantra*. Figure 90 illustrates the framing story of Book I where the cunning jackal, Victor can be seen in conversation with the lion, Rusty. This stamp with denomination of 85 paisa was issued in the year 1971. In the same year, another postal stamp was issued which demonstrates the framing story of Book III as shown in fig. 91. With the denomination of 15 paisa, it illustrates the main story of the ‘Crows and Owls’ and the cave of owls set on fire by the crows.

One may also assume that among the stamps issued on the stories of *The Panchatantra*, there may be stamps based on the framing stories of the other three books also since the two stamps did not cover any inserted story but only the main stories.

---

\(^{19}\) Commemorative stamps are issued to commemorate important events, prominent personalities in various fields, aspects of nature, beautiful or rare flora and fauna, environmental issues, agricultural activities, national/international issues, games etc. They are printed in limited quantities.

\(^{20}\) Definitive stamps are used for day-to-day postal mailing purposes and are easily available at all postal counters.

\(^{21}\) Se-tenant stamps are a group of stamps that differ in colour, value, or design but are printed together on the same sheet and are collected without separating the stamps.

Post-Print Electronic Media

The electronic media took the world by storm and increased the pace of life. Although the circulation of printed mediums like the newspaper was extensive but with the rise of the electronic gadgets, the foundation of another change was laid. The change which was inevitable and minimized visual distance mostly to screen: television, internet and mobile screens.

Radio/Television

The television or the small screen is one media that is easily accessible to the common man. Today almost every house has a separate television set and as far as the cities are concerned almost every bedroom has a separate one. But few decades ago the scenario was not the same. In fact, a huge change ushered with the initiation of serials like Ramayana which promoted community televisions. Since, every family could not afford a separate television set of its own so the trend of community television viewing started in India.

Before the arrival of cable television, the national television, i.e., Delhi Doordarshan (DD) ruled the small screen. It took the initiative to telecast episodes based on the moral tales of The Panchatantra. And Birbal’s and Tenali Raman’s fascinating story was made into a classic TV series which was immensely popular in its time. The choice was made due to the immense popularity of characters like Birbal and Tenali Raman. DD’s Akbar Birbal’s cast included Vikram Gokhale (Akbar), Anang Desai (Birbal), Gufi Paintal, Roma Manik and Rana Jung Bahadur while the Birbal of Akbar Birbal, i.e., Anang Desai played the role of King Krishnadevaraya in Tenali Rama. The other characters were Vijay Kashyap (fig. 93), Sandhya Sudhakar, Haidar Ali, Gurumurti and Anant Harsur.
Presently, DD Urdu is telecasting a programme called *Akbar Birbal ki Kahani: Kathputliyon ki Zubani* which goes on air every Friday at 5.30 pm. As the title of the programme suggests, it presents the Akbar Birbal stories through the narration and dance of puppets. In 2007, All India Radio, Chandigarh Station too presented the tales of *Akbar Birbal* to its listeners because of their huge popularity and further contributed towards making them even more popular. Another television channel to promote these tales to a larger audience was the Cartoon Network.

After the telecast of successful animation characters like Tom and Jerry, when the channel switched over to local characters, the choice of characters like Birbal, Tenali Raman and Vikram Betal was quite obvious. Thus, the *Akbar Birbal* series and *The Adventures of Tenali Raman* (fig. 94) became part of the cartoon brigade. This new avatar with its rib-tickling humour of the two jesters Birbal and Tenali Raman pleased the audience. And the company enjoyed high TRPs since the timing slot was also kept in mind in order to attract the maximum viewers. Therefore, it was telecast every Sunday morning at 10.30. The popularity of both, *Akbar Birbal* and *The Adventures of Tenali Raman* gave way to another fictional series called *The Adventures of Chhota Birbal*.

*The Adventures of Chhota Birbal* (fig. 94) became another favourite cartoon among kids. The series enfolded Prince Akbar and Birbal in their childhood days. In the beginning, Akbar was presented yearning to visit his kingdom and finally he set out with his caretaker - Shamsher. During his visit, he came across young Birbal and his friends. Immediately both of them developed a liking for each other’s company. Thereafter, they went through an interesting set of adventures where they tackled monsters, villains, smugglers, pirates etc. and always emerged victorious. Of course, these episodes were not factual and had no bearing to the real childhood of both Akbar and Birbal yet they took children on a laughter ride. Even the fictional Chhota Birbal had the future emperor in raptures with his ready wit, knowledge and wisdom. The episodes provided enjoyment to children.

Some of the episodes were aired on 21 and 28 Feb 2011 and 4, 11, 15 and 18 March 2011.
The series was aired every Saturday at 5.30 p.m. and Sunday at 2.00 p.m. The 29-year-old creator of Chhota Birbal, Marvin Fernandes, in an interview said:

Chhota Birbal is more than just a cartoon. We are developing Chhota Birbal as a smart kid brand, and the animation is just one of the series in our plans. The series will consist of a range of merchandise, comic books, knowledge software and even feature films. Chhota Birbal is a well-balanced smart kid with knowledge, wisdom and wit. But he doesn’t impose his smartness on his friends. (Moitra)

An interesting thing about The Adventures of Chhota Birbal is that the other characters too have been taken from the pages of history. So apart from Prince Akbar and Chhota Birbal, the series portrays the legendary Tansen also as Chhota Tansen. All these characters are projected as friends and playfellows, away from the grandeur of the court. Besides the Hindi television series, Fernandes has also come up with a comic book series, titled Chhota Birbal, in English. Apart from that there is a huge range of toys and games which includes interactive CDs, educational supplement books, picture books and fun notebooks. All these products related to Chhota Birbal are knowledge-based. The knowledge and wisdom of another cartoon character hit the small screen in 2004 called The Adventures of Tenali Raman.

Tenali Raman or the Birbal of South was brought alive in another animation series by Cartoon Network. The series went ‘global’ in 2004 and it was for the first time that an Indian story had a world premiere. The tales of Tenali were chosen to suit international audiences. The crew included both international and Indian experts who produced a series of 26 episodes. When Bill Dennis (CEO, Cartoon Network) was questioned why Tenali Raman was chosen over others when India is a rich storehouse of mythology and folklore? Dennis replied:

Tenali Raman was chosen after looking at different characters and
different stories. He appealed because he is a character anyone can identify with. He is not sacred and will be enjoyed by everyone."

Tenali Raman even took precedence over the *Panchatantra* which is entertaining and loaded with morals. Already a few episodes of Tenali Raman were telecast for children and teachers in Kerala and the response was overwhelming. It was also shown in France (at Cannes) where it was appreciated. ("Tenali Rama goes global")

*The Adventures of Tenali Raman* has made the witty court jester unforgettable among children. Its episodes take us back to the medieval times in the splendid court settings where Tenali is the prime target for the other courtiers. But he successfully outwits them with his intelligence and charm and overcomes every obstacle. In fact, he too troubles others with his pranks and satiric jokes. These humorous tales are an interesting blend of history coupled with entertainment.

The character of Tenali Raman has not just appealed to Indians; but is also a figure liked by Americans and Europeans too. The animated film was sold to television stations in Asia, the European Union, North America and Singapore by Toonz. It was screened in different languages in different countries thereby making it accessible to more people.

**Internet/Websites**

Today man is living in the world of internet. Any information, photograph, music or a video is just a click away. Among all forms of post-print electronic media, the internet is the only medium which carries with it the maximum information that is buried in the books of the libraries of the world. An easy access to the internet makes it the most operated and utilized medium among others.

The contribution of the internet regarding the tales of *The Panchatantra, Akbar Birbal* and *Tenali Raman* has been discussed below.

The internet offers an endless number of websites devoted solely to the tales of *The Panchatantra, Akbar Birbal* and *Tenali Raman*. Among hundreds of websites, the ones dedicated solely to these popular tales are [www.epanchatantra.com](http://www.epanchatantra.com), [http://tenaliramalinga.com/](http://tenaliramalinga.com/) and [www.akbarbirbal.net/](http://www.akbarbirbal.net/) to name a few. These websites
provide all the stories related to their concerned subject and further enhance the beauty of the website with a lot of illustrations and extra information.

Popular Chandamama comics offer all their published magazines on their official site, i.e., www.chandamama.com. An interesting thing about the website is that all the magazines since October 1949 onwards are available in the archives section. They have been conserved in a manner where it becomes easy for their readers to read them at any given time. Thus, they overcome barriers of time and space. The site content has been classified into three categories; namely classical, contemporary, and current. The classical section includes mythology, i.e., *The Panchatantra, Jataka Tales*, and stories about *Vikram and Betal*; the contemporary section has Indian and world history, plus stories about Indian achievers; while the current section deals with stories on Science, General Knowledge, and Sports. Sharing the idea behind the online presence, Viswanatha Reddi, editor and publisher of *Chandamama*, says that they have created a special application that would enable readers enjoy *Chandamama* classics online.

Similarly, Amar Chitra Katha series has hundreds of titles easily available online at www.ACK-media.com. All its comics' imprints are easily accessible at its website.

**Big Screen**

Movies are one of our biggest sources of entertainment. The entertainment quotient becomes double when an entertaining script takes the form of a movie. And when stories from *The Panchatantra, Akbar Birbal* and *Tenali Raman* become a part of the silver screen then magic can be anticipated. Besides other mediums, these tales also became part of the big screen. Whether in the form of an allusion (as *The Panchatantra* in *Aansoon Ban Gaye Phool*), or a character (as Birbal in *Jodhaa Akbar*) or the entire film (as Tenali Raman in *Tenali Ramakrishna*), they made their presence felt in the form of movies.

*The Panchatantra* stories contain gems of wisdom and when one encounters difficult and tricky situations in life then these stories inevitably provide solutions too. One such complicated situation can be seen in the Ashok Kumar and Pran starrer film
Aanson Ban Gaye Phool\textsuperscript{24}. Hence, the reference to a story from The Panchatantra is made. In the movie, Pran plays Shambhu Mahadev Rao and Ashok Kumar plays the character of Vidyanand Sagar who is also the principal of a college and morally a very strong man. But due to his strong sense of righteousness, some people do not approve of his behaviour. Therefore, they design a plot where both Vidyanand and his brother are caught and they enjoy the fruits of their efforts. Shambhu (Pran) visits Vidyanand to warn him against the impending danger. When they exchange dialogues, Shambhu makes a mention of The Panchatantra too:

\begin{quote}
SHAMBHU. Wo Bachpan me tu kisi kitaab se janwaro ki kahani sunaya karta tha na
[You remember that during our childhood, you often narrated some animal tales]

VIDYANAND. Wo Hitopadesha Panchatantra se [Oh yes, from Hitopadesa and Panchatantra!]
\end{quote}

Apart from the regular commercial movies, there are movies for children projecting The Panchatantra tales. One such contributor in the world of films is the Children’s Film Society which has to its credit several awards too. The Children’s Film Society is an autonomous body under Ministry of Information and Broadcasting which makes short documentary films round the year. Among the short films, one of the films is Manpasand (Perfect Match) which is based on a tale from The Panchatantra. This story is about a father who is in search of a suitable groom for his daughter\textsuperscript{25}. Made in Hindi, the film came out in 2006 and the duration of the film was 12 Minutes and 30 Seconds.

Another film titled Panchatantra Ki Ek Kahani was produced in multiple languages, i.e., Hindi, English, Tamil, Kashmiri, Bengali, Assamese, Punjabi, Gujarati, Oriya, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada. This story illustrates that alertness can prevent danger.

\textsuperscript{24} See Aanson Ban Gaye Phool. Dir. Ashok Kumar. Perf. Pran, Ashok Kumar, Deb Mukhrjee, Nirupa Roy and Helen. 1978.
\textsuperscript{25} See Children’s Film Society, Manpasand. India. Web. \url{http://cfsindia.org/perfectmatch.htm}
When Ashutosh Gowariker planned the multi-starrer *Jodhaa Akbar*, perhaps, it was difficult for him to stay unaffected by the charm of Birbal. And for this reason, some scenes in the movie were shot between the emperor and his favourite courtier. Later, many scenes (including Birbal ones) were edited keeping in mind the length of the film, since the duration of the movie had exceeded three hours. Finally, the edited version was shown at the big screen, but the original CDs and DVDs of *Jodhaa Akbar* contain all the deleted scenes.

In this movie, the character of Birbal is played by Indrajeet Sarkar who can be seen in two scenes. The scenes include the one in which Birbal and Akbar interact during the latter’s hunting expedition, and the sequence in which Birbal is invited to join the court where he ends up impressing the king. The king, in turn, gives him the title ‘Birbal.’ These two are among the deleted scenes from the final version that made it to the theatres in February 2008. The director proclaimed that if all the deleted scenes were to be included, the film would have been 3 hours 40 minutes long. He also added, ‘I could not include Birbal’s part as it was ten minutes long. It broke my heart literally.’ This proves that it is really hard to keep Akbar and Birbal apart. The two scenes which include Birbal in *Jodhaa Akbar* are titled: ‘Mahesh Das... also known as...?’ and ‘How many birds in my Kingdom?’

Later, when the film completed its 100 days, an announcement was made by Ashutosh Gowariker on the official website of *Jodhaa Akbar* that he planned to package the edited scenes, which would be telecast during the film’s television
premier. Soon after, all the deleted scenes were made available for the audience during its television broadcast.

Mention must also be made of the fact that a lot of research went into the making of this film. The team tried to make sure that most of the events portrayed in the movie are based on real events. Ashutosh Gowarikar said, ‘I consulted the best historians and went through the most rigorous research.’ A research team of historians and scholars from New Delhi, Aligarh, Lucknow, Agra and Jaipur were hired to guide the team and help it keep things historically accurate including Birbal facts.

**Tenali Ramakrishna (1941)**

The story of clever and quick-witted Tenali Ramakrishna has attracted the attention of many film makers in South. But among the different films based on *Tenali Raman*, the first film to be highly acclaimed was 1941 *Tenali Ramakrishna*. The film produced under the banner ‘Rohini pictures’ was directed by H. M. Reddy and its cast included S.P. Lakshmana Swamy, L. V. Prasad, P. Koteswara Rao, Tilakam, Puvvula Anasuya, P. Gangaratnam, T. Hanumantha Rao, Parepalli Subba Rao, K. V. Subba Rao, Sarala, Master Raju and Baby Rohini.\(^{28}\)

The title of the film itself suggests that it is a tale which revolves around the court jester Tenali Ramakrishna. In the opening scene of the film, Tenali is presented as a child (Master Raju) who is astonished to know that the lecher Karanam is about to marry the nine-year-old Saubhagyam inspite of being married twice. He wishes to prevent the wedding and comes up with a plan. He wears the costume of a bride to look like a child bride and makes the groom look like a fool.

The film then takes the audience couple of years ahead where the adult Ramakrishna manages to secure a job as the royal poet in the court of King Krishnadeva Raya. Thereafter, he comes across the calculative Brahmin Tatacharya who always tries to manipulate the emperor’s decision for the sake of his own advantage. Both Tenali and Tatacharya collide with each other on several occasions.

The movie presents the famous *Tenali Raman* story; Royal Mother’s Last Wish wherein the king’s mother dies while desiring to eat a mango. As a result, the king feels guilty and consults Tatacharya to find a solution to satiate his mother’s last

---

wish. Tatacharya, on the other hand, seeks his own benefit and predicts that the royal mother's soul will not rest until the king gives every Brahmin a mango made of gold. In order to teach a lesson to the greedy Brahmin, Ramakrishna traps him saying that his mother died with a longing to be seared with a hot poker, and then arranges for every Brahmin to be branded.

The story shown in this film must be an authentic one since its parallels can be seen on Doordarshan and the Cartoon Network version also.

**Tenali Ramakrishna (1956)**

In 1956, *Tenali Ramakrishna* was again produced in Telugu and in Tamil. Both the films were produced and directed by B. S. Ranga. Superstars of Telugu film industry Akkineni Nageswara Rao (fig. 99) and N. T. Rama Rao (fig. 100) played the key roles in the Telugu version. The plot was based on the play written by C. K. Venkataramaiah. To quote, the Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema:

> The Bahamani Kingdom, in a protracted war with Vijayanagara, sends The dancer and courtesan Krishnasani (Bhanumathi) to seduce the king (NTR) and to spy on him. The king falls in love with her and only an elaborate ruse by Tenali Ramakrishna (Nageshwara Rao) and Chief Minister Timmarasu (Nagaiah), another legendary figure (and the subject of an independent film biography by K. Kameshwara Rao in 1962), in which they disguise themselves as a holy man and his disciple, enables the king to realise the truth. Bhanumathi’s musical presence was again the film’s star attraction. The story had been filmed

---

by H.M. Reddy in 1941. The other film with the same title was made in Tamil starring the top South Film star Shivaji Ganeshan who played the role of Tenali Raman. In fig. 101, he can be seen in one of the scenes from the movie Tenali Ramakrishna. Made under Vikram Productions, the rest of the cast and the director remained the same in the Tamil version except the main lead, i.e., Tenali Ramakrishna.

The movie was acclaimed and appreciated resulting in the National Film Award which it won for the Best Feature Film in Telugu in the year 1956.

Mobile

The Panchatantra and Akbar Birbal tales have also found an access to one of the most common electronic gadgets which has become an inseparable part of our lives. This happened when different media collaborated with one another to extract benefit from the others' resources. One possible reason for adopting this methodology was to earn profit by providing multiple services.

Amar Chitra Katha (ACK) CEO, Samir Patil, considers multi-platform approach as critical. Therefore, the company believes in providing multiple formats in the form of print, DVDs, online services, games, TV and film. The result is that after collaboration with ACK, mobile companies have come up with mobile comics which

---

are also termed as Momics\textsuperscript{31}. It was Tata Docomo that initiated this new venture and later other mobile companies like Airtel followed its footsteps. Preethi J wrote in an article titled \textit{Tata Docomo To Launch Mobile Comics:}

Tata Docomo, the GSM joint venture between CDMA telco Tata Indicom and Japanese firm NTT DoComo, will soon launch comics for mobile phones. The new VAS will be in the form of a downloadable application called \textquote{Comix On The Go}. Tata Docomo has partnered with publishers ACK Media and Walt Disney Animation Studios for content. The company spokesperson said, \textquote{The various comix options would be Suppandi, Akbar Birbal, Manga, Disney, Mickey Mouse, Panchatantra, Devi amongst others}.\textsuperscript{32} (Emphasis added) (MediaNama)

\textit{Amar Chitra Katha} is working in partnership with Vodafone too. So, \textit{The Panchatantra, Akbar Birbal} and \textit{Tenali Raman} comics can be downloaded on Vodafone mobile phone by its users. When a simple sms ACK COMICS to 111 (toll free) is sent, it immediately responds with a link. Once the customer clicks on the link, the comics are made available to be enjoyed. But one has to pay for it, i.e., each comic costs Rs 30 and the usage charges are 10p per 10KB.\textsuperscript{33}

Mogae Digital\textsuperscript{34} in collaboration with Astro Malaysia has developed over 20 titles including daily comic strips and monthly titles. These momics are based on \textit{Akbar-Birbal, Tenali Raman}, Bal Hanuman and a series on historical characters such as Hitler and Alexander.\textsuperscript{35} The company has collaborated with various mobile companies like Idea, Aircel and Tata Teleservices but the property rights remain entirely with the comics' company.

Rediff has also been working in partnership with \textit{Diamond Comics} and \textit{Amar Chitra Katha} to bring their merchandise on the mobile screens. \textit{Cartoon Network} too will offer the mobile comics as it has teamed up with a host of telecom operators such

---

\textsuperscript{31} The word comes from two words, Mobile + Comics = Momics or the comics on mobile.


\textsuperscript{33} Source: \textit{Amar chitra katha on Mobile/ Vodafone India.} Web. http://www.vodafone.in/existingusers/vodafonelive/pages/entertain_mcomics_amar_chitra_katha.a spx

\textsuperscript{34} Mogae Digital is a joint venture between the Mogae Group and Astro Malaysia for value added services on the mobile platform and for original IPs for the internet.

as Airtel, Idea, Reliance Mobile and Tata DoCoMo. These comics will reportedly be offered for download for as little as Rs 1 per day, Rs 10 per week or Rs 30 per month, although the charges may vary from one operator to the other.

Stage Adaptations

Stage adaptations and theatrical productions have been one of the important destinations in the long journey undertaken by the magic fables of *The Panchatantra* and the anecdotes of Birbal and Tenali Raman. These stories hold so much appeal that they have been enacted and dramatized not only by children but also by the senior artistes and Children’s Film Societies. Mumbai based Children’s Film Society produced short feature films based on the tales of “The Monkey and the Crocodile”, “The Lion and the Rabbit” etc. and received acclaim for the same. These adaptations have taken various forms like the dance theatre format adopted by Ananda Shankar Jayant Dance Ensemble and Pavithra Srinivasan, a musical play like the one by Balaji Manohar or an amalgamation of music and dance, humour and tears as in the *Tales of Tenali Rama* presented by the Bangalore Little Theatre.

Among the various theatre groups which presented the ancient tales of *The Panchatantra* in a dance theatre format, one of them is the famous Hyderabad music and dance institution, Shankarananda Kalakshetra. This institution came up with unique choreography called *Dancing Tales...Panchatantra* (fig. 102) during the National Festival of New Choreography. Led by Ananda Shankar Jayant, the dance ensemble presented the animal fables through Bharatanatyam. In an interview Ananda Shankar Jayant shares the reason for the choice of *The Panchatantra* stories:

> A few years ago I revisited some of these stories and I was tickled and inspired with the antics of the various characters. I decided to translate these stories into dance because they contain centuries of wisdom, compressed into funny and innocuously small fables. (Prabhala)
In *Dancing Tales...Panchatantra*\(^\text{36}\), Ananda Shankar Jayant troupe exhibited various vices and virtues inherent in the characters of *The Panchatantra* through movement and sound. Once again life was infused into these fables when they came alive on the stage. It is interesting to note that the performance captivated the audience in spite of the fact that they were minus narration. The choice of the tales incorporated in the presentation was done on the basis of their popularity. For example, the tale of the lion and the rabbit, the tortoise and the geese, and the monkey and the crocodile were among the five tales that were presented. The entire stage was converted into a jungle with animals and birds roaming around, providing a visual treat to the spectators. Elements of humour and wit were interspersed during the staging of *The Panchatantra*. To quote, Lakshmi Prabhala:

> The production is a seamless and aesthetic blend of contemporary as well as traditional dance. The basic dance style comprises of mixed flavours of Bharata Natyam, Kuchipudi and Kathakali which complement each other and eventually work in harmony with the theme. The whole performance lays a great emphasis on expression, movement and body language depicting the mood and gait of the characters in the story, with excellent support from lilting instrumental music and narrative which provides introduction and context. (*Dancing tales*)

The *Dancing Tales...Panchatantra* left the audience fascinated and mesmerized with its powerful performance. Showcasing the spirit and wisdom of the timeless fables with great energy and graceful dance, the performance was enjoyed by the young and the old alike.

Another stage adaptation which presented *The Panchatantra* through the dance theatre format was by the renowned Bharatanatyam dancer, Pavithra Srinivasan (fig. 103). She started the dance performance with a brief explanation of the origin and the spiritual symbolism behind the ancient art of Bharatanatyam and further moved on to the stories from *The Panchatantra*. An

---

admirable quality about her performance was the use of emotional expressions and body movements used to depict various actions. Even the wicked crocodile in 'The Monkey and the Crocodile' was depicted through beautiful hand and leg movements coupled with utmost grace.

Another theatre group, Harlequin Entertainments, presented a grand English musical based on the good old tales of *The Panchatantra*. The success of the play can be judged by the fact that it presented houseful shows at Rangashankara. Directed by Balaji Manohar, the stories held the interest of the audience through attractive visuals and a touch of mischief. The dramatic piece hooked the audience with beautiful animal masks, costumes and sets. The environment of the forest was created with music and sound effects. Lighting effects coupled with smoke and animals prying around added an icing to the cake. The choreography added to the show with all the forest sounds and animal antics. The story of the crow and the owls was striking for its night scenes. The human characters were projected with peculiar traits much to the amusement of the audience.

Unlike the two stage productions mentioned above, this presentation was supported with a narrative, a script that was a mix of rhyming couplets and casual

---

speech. On the whole, the show fulfilled the entertaining quotient through the moral tales.

Sholai School is yet another theatrical production which came up with a story from The Panchatantra, ‘The Ungrateful Man’ performed in 2007, followed by ‘The Magic Drum’ in 2008. After the huge success of both its previous productions, Sholai School has collaborated with Bangalore Little Theatre in partnership with The Association for the Mentally Challenged for the play Tales of Tenali Rama. The production claimed to take the audience through the corridors of King Krishnadevaraya’s palace to sneak around a bit and eavesdrop on the workings of his court. It stated that the play had a special significance because the year 2009 was the 500th year of King Krishnadevaraya’s coronation which began the golden age of the mighty Vijayanagar Empire. He was coronated on 8th August 1509. Five hundred years hence, music and dance, humour and tears and clever plots within plots takes us back on a rollercoaster ride into a colourful world of powerful kings, demure queens and cunning courtiers.

The play written by Sridhar Ramanathan and directed by Aliyeh Rizvi opened on a funny note wherein young girls and boys were asked to mind the adults accompanying them. Surprisingly, the narrative was not by the hero of the play, Tenali Tama but by a trio of narrators, i.e., Guruji and his two students. They added into the mix their own commentary which included, among other things, nursery rhymes depending on the mood of the play. Moreover, the play did not move around Tenali Rama but it was Guruji who took the lead. The wit and the laughs too came not from the jester but from the other characters surrounding him.

The play was presented with a difference because when Tenali Rama invoked Goddess Kali, he recited multiplication tables instead of mantras at

Figure 105 The invitation card of the play Tales of Tenali Rama

---

the Kali Temple. Furthermore, he got surprised to see Mother Kali emerge as a pretty girl rather than a tongue-lolling dark demonic being. He became inquisitive and questioned her about the change. The expected got converted into unexpected when the Goddess rattled off the dangers of stereotyping. A joke on inflation left the audience with laughter.

During the play, the children from the audience were invited on the stage to be a part of the play. The sequence blended well with the proceedings of the play, and took everyone by surprise. Though aimed at children, the play did not alienate the rest of the audience. Some laughs were tailor-made for parents hassled by school admissions. The play offered moments of fun and laughter for both parents and children alike. In short, Tales of Tenali Rama brought into life some of the most well known and well loved characters from Tenali's adventures.

The tales of The Panchatantra, Akbar Birbal and Tenali Raman have not only survived shifts in culture from its being oral to written to print to visual and then to audio-visual but also have evolved in terms of their representation with an amazing regularity. Since all knowledge has now become inter-disciplinary, the expansion of popular tales has also become wider and larger. This is quite evident from the role played by various media in popularizing The Panchatantra, Akbar Birbal and Tenali Raman tales as shown in this chapter.