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THE *PANCHATANTRA*

WORLD'S OLDEST COLLECTION OF STORIES FOR CHILDREN

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Her Majesty, the Empress, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very thankful to Ms Mikiko Tomita, Director General of The International Library of Children's Literature, and Mr Takao Kurosawa, Librarian of the National Diet Library, for inviting me for this Lecture. I feel greatly privileged for the invitation to speak before this august audience. I also feel greatly honoured that Her Majesty has found it possible to grace this occasion.

The subject of this Lecture is the *Panchatantra*. As is well known, *Panchatantra* is the oldest collection of stories for children in the world. It is also the first anthology of animal stories. The *Panchatantra* stories contain the wisdom of ages. It is also unique contribution of India to the world of literature. The *Panchatantra* was originally written in Sanskrit language and it constitutes five books. There are 84 stories and also many interpolated fables in it. In olden days this was the typical Indian way of story telling to keep the interest alive.

The first book in the *Panchatantra* is Loss of Friends (Mitrabhed) and it contains 34 stories. The second book is The Winning of Friends (Mitra Sampraptau) and it contains 10 stories. The third book is Crows and Owls (Kakolikeye) and it has 18 tales, the fourth book is Loss of Gains (Labdha Parashe) which contains 12 tales and the fifth book Rash Action (Aparikshit Karke) contains 10 tales, making 84 tales altogether.

The central theme of the *Panchatantra* is the harmonious and integrated development of man, a life in which security, prosperity, friendship and learning are combined as to produce a lasting joy. It exemplifies and upholds ethical values, social order, customary law and yet is an important medium through which protest, dissent and reform are articulated.

The *Panchatantra* stories are not moral stories. The *Panchatantra* stories are there to teach the *Niti* – the sensible way of living. Different points of view are expressed through dialogues in the stories accompanied by maxims. These maxims

are thought provoking and offer an exercise for the brain that sharpen the mind. It suggests that there is no place for a fool in the world. At one place, for example, it is said, “Shun him who is rogue and fool”. In another story, it is said, “Scholarship is less than good sense, therefore seek intelligence”. Some of the other maxims are:

“Nothing is impossible if one has intelligence”

“For lost and dead and past
The wise have not laments
Between the wise and fools
Is just this difference”

“ A man to thrive, must keep alive”

“Wrong doings will always be wrongful
A wise man will not direct his mind towards it
However tormented by thirst one is
None drink the water of puddles
That lie on well trodden highway”

About friendship

“ Six things are done by friends
To take and give again
To listen and to talk
To dine and entertain.”

The *Panchatantra* is also a part of India’s ancient story telling tradition which goes back to the earliest times of Indian civilization and the development of which has been nurtured over the centuries. No one knows exactly the dates and the authors of the Sanskrit original and there are at least 25 versions of the *Panchatantra* in India alone. In a few versions the name of Vishnu Sharma is mentioned as the author and therefore it is believed that he first compiled the stories, as it is said,

“One Vishnusharman, shrewdly gleaned
All worldly wisdom’s inner meaning,
In these five books the charm compresses
Of all such books the world possesses.”

How the *Panchatantra* was created, is an interesting story by itself. The story goes like this. Thousands of years ago, there lived a king in India. He had three foolish sons. The king wanted them to lead a happy life. He also knew, 'A fool cannot lead a happy life.'

One day, he called his ministers and said to them, "Please suggest some way by which my three sons can become wise." One of the ministers stood up and said, "My Lord, I know of a renowned teacher. His name is Vishnu Sharma. He is eighty years old. He alone can help to make sensible young men out of the princes."

The king invited Vishnu Sharma to his court. When Vishnu Sharma arrived, the king requested him, "Revered sir, please do something so that my sons can lead sensible lives. I will give you whatever you want. "

Vishnu Sharma was a proud old teacher. He took it as a challenge and declared, "Oh, king, I pledge today that I will make your sons wise and intelligent within six months. I will not accept anything in return. Let them come with me right now."

The king sent for his sons. The three princes accompanied Vishnu Sharma to his hermitage. They lived with him and he instructed them by telling stories with maxims every day. After six months, Vishnu Sharma brought the princes back to the king's court. The king was surprised to see that his sons had become intelligent, practical and worldly wise.

The king was delighted and he asked Vishnu Sharma, "What did you do, sir?" Vishnu Sharma, the great teacher just smiled and replied, "I merely told them some stories."

The king thanked Vishnu Sharma. Vishnu Sharma did not accept any reward. The king's three sons led a very happy and successful life thereafter. This story concludes with a saying,

Whoever always reads this work;
Whoever listens to it told;
He will never face defeat, no
Not even from the Lord of Gods, Himself.

(Chandra Rajan's translation from the original in Sanskrit.)

In the ancient times in India, anonymity of creative persons, including writers and artists, was an important characteristic of their psyche. Their creative activity was an expression of their total dedication to the cause. They did not seek any personal fame, but only served a cause dear to them. In the *Vedas* also, many hymns end with three short words in Sanskrit, *idan na mam*, meaning, 'it is not mine.'

How, the *Panchatantra* travelled out of India? There is an interesting story behind it. In the 6th century, there was a king in Persia (Iran). His name is Anushirwan. He had 25 doctors, Greek, Indian and Persian. One of his favourite physicians was Burzoy. Burzoy had heard about a miraculous herb called *Sanjivani* which could bring the dead back to life. He also came to know that this herb was found only in the mountains in India. He requested king Anushirwan that he would like to go to India to find this miraculous herb. The King got very excited and he wrote a letter addressed to one of his friends, an Indian king. Carrying the letter, Burzoy traveled to India and went to the king's court.

The Indian king was happy to receive Burzoy and gave all the help to him he needed. Burzoy started his search for the herb *Sanjivani*. He went to the Himalayas, moved from mountains to valleys and talked to many people but did not find the herb. He was greatly disappointed. While he was thinking of going back to his country he came across an old and learned sage. The sage listened to him. He smiled and said,

“Oh, Burzoy, did you not understand this allegory of the ancients? By the mountain they meant the learned, and by the dead they meant ignorant. They wished to say that when the learned instruct the ignorant by their maxims, they bring the dead to life. Now, these maxims are contained in a book called *Panchatantra*, and this book is to be found in the treasury of the king. Go and read this book and you will discover the real 'herb.'”

Burzoy approached the king once again and expressed his desire to see the book. The king was very reluctant but later agreed to lend the book to him on condition that he should examine it in the presence of the king alone. Burzoy came to the king's court every day and read the book. Each day, he memorized what he had read and when he returned to his dwelling, wrote it out, until he finally completed the whole work.

Burzoy was very happy in his heart. Carrying the *Panchatantra* text he went back to Persia and appeared at the court of king Anushirwan. The king was very pleased to see the *Panchatantra*. He also asked Burzoy, “What reward do you want?”

Burzoy said, “My Lord, I do not want any gift. I only want that a chapter on me may be added to the translation of this book.” The king promised him that he would see to it.

Thus the *Panchatantra* reached Persia and was translated into Pahalvi. Burzoy’s voyage was also added to the translation. But this book remained always carefully guarded by the kings of Persia, until finally Ibn ul Muqaffa translated it into Arabic, and Rudaki turned it into Persian verse by the order of Amir Nasr Ibn Ahmad.

Ibn ul Muqaffa says, “ Having heard that the Persian had translated this book from Indian language into Pahalvi, we desired that the people of Iraq, Syria and the Hejaz should also benefit by it, so we have translated it into Arabic, which is their language.”

The *Panchatantra* was translated into Pahalvi in 550AD under the title *Kartak wa Damnak*, in Syriac in 570AD by Buda Abdul Inu and in Arabic by Ibn ul Muqaffa in 750 AD under the title *Kalila wa Dimnah*. Burzoy’s original version of the *Panchatantra* was lost, but before it disappeared, Rudaki had translated it into the Persian in 940 AD.

Today, we have 90 manuscripts available in original form in different countries. Besides, the stories of *Panchatantra* presently exist in translation or in adapted form in more than 200 languages of the world.

In Japan and China and several countries in South-east Asia, these tales have gone with *Jatak* tales, the stories connected with the life of Lord Buddha. For example, ‘The Flight of Pigeons’, in the Book II of the *Panchatantra* is found in 33rd tale in *Sammmedanam Jatak*. ‘The Cranes and the Crab’, of the Book I of the *Panchatantra* is found in the 38th tale of *Bak Jatak*. ‘The Foolish Monkey’ of Book I of the *Panchatantra* is found in the 46th tale of *Armadoshaka Jatak*. ‘The Donkey in the Tiger’s Skin’, of the Book III of the *Panchatantra*, in 189th tale of *Simhakamma Jatak*, ‘The Marriage of Saint’s Daughter’, of the Book III of the *Panchatantra* in the 200th tale of *Sadhushila*

Jatak, and the most well known tale in the *Panchatantra*, ‘The Monkey and the Crocodile’ in the Book IV in the *Panchatantra* in the 208th tale in *Sumura Jatak*. I have mentioned only few tales here as examples, but many more *Panchatantra* tales are found in different *Jataks*.

Aesop too has created many fables parallel to the *Panchatantra* stories. ‘The Lion and the Mouse’ story of Aesop is similar to the *Panchatantra* story, ‘The Elephant and the Mice’ and ‘The Lion and the Rabbit’ of *Panchatantra* is reflected in Aesop’s ‘The Jackal and the Pigeons.’

In France, La Fontaine included several *Panchatantra* stories in his collection of fables. In Edward Denison Ross’s Foreward in Volume V of ‘The Ocean of Story’ (the English translation of Somdev’s *Katha Sarit Sagar*) it is mentioned, “Part of the present volume of ‘The Ocean of Story’ is occupied by Somdev’s version of the famous collection of Indian stories known as *Panchatantra*.I shall confine myself in this place to supplementing what has there been set forth regarding the so called *Fables of Bidpai* (The first European use of the name) with special reference to the *Kalila wa Dimna* of Ibn-ul-Muqaffa and its translations and adaptations in the modern Persian literature.....It can be easily commented that the Arabic version is the mother of all the European versions of *The Panchatantra*.”

When *The Panchatantra* stories were translated into different languages in different countries many local variations have also taken place. The story of ‘The Monkey and the Crocodile, when written in Persia, they have used tortoise in place of crocodile.’ This can also be seen in the painting of 1354 AD, which has been exhibited here.

The most significant characteristic of *The Panchatantra* stories is that they have an appeal for all ages. Besides, the stories have a strong plot, humour, good story telling quality and these could be segregated for different ages. For example, the story ‘The Talking Tortoise’ can easily be told to young children and children would enjoy it. The older children and the teenagers find the stories of worldly wisdom truly fascinating. The adults enjoy the satirical inlay of worldly wisdom which gives an insight into the situations arising in the real world. These stories of talking birds and animals delight the readers who can easily identify themselves with the story characters. This eternal quality of stories enthrals the young and the old alike.

Several scholars have engaged themselves to the study of *Panchatantra* and have made their comments. For example, Prof. Johannes Hertel spent many years in the study of the *Panchatantra*. He writes in the preface to his *Das Panchatantra* (1914), “The Panchatantra has made an unparalleled progress from its native land over all the civilized parts of the globe, and for more than thousands of years has delighted young and old, educated and uneducated, rich and poor, high and low and still delights them. Even the greatest obstacles of language, custom and religion have not been able to check that triumphal progress.”

Ernest Rhys, a researcher says, “ We have to admit that the beast fable did not begin with Aesop, or in Greece at all. We have in fact, to go East and look to India and burrow in the tales within tales to get an idea of how old the antiquity of the fable is.”

Franklin Edgerton , an English scholar writes in his book *The Panchatantra Reconstructed* (1924) , “Of all the works of Indian literature , *The Panchatantra* has the most profound influence on world ... No book other than the Bible enjoyed such intensive worldwide circulation as the Indian collection of fables, *The Panchatantra*.”

The American oriental scholar, Arthur W. Ryder, who translated *The Panchatantra* from the Sanskrit (1949), writes in the preface, “Ever since the dawn of civilisation, ever since man first realised the imperative need to know himself and, through that self-knowledge, to win friends and influence people so to secure his own happiness and well-being no less than those of his fellowmen, *The Panchatantra* stories have unfailingly offered him significant and dynamic aid..... And at all times, the end purport of *The Panchatantra*.... is to reveal to man, woman , or child, through the fascinating medium of ‘leg less fables’ that basic knowledge and wisdom which makes one’s life richer, happier and fuller....in their endless travel through the ages in India and abroad , these stories underwent many changes not only in regard to their form, colour and setting, but even as to their total numerical strength....”

Ryder was so impressed with the *Panchatantra* that when he translated it from the original Sanskrit, he translated even the names that speak of the characteristics of the particular character, so that the readers could enjoy the real taste of the spicy text.

Dr. Winiternitz, another scholar wrote, “ It is not too much to say that life is indebted to India for fables...no other work of Indian literature has had such a long and eventful history as *The Panchatantra*.”

Joseph Gaera, a researcher and a scholar, has commented, “The Indians were the earliest and the greatest fablers.”

The popularity of this collection of stories can be judged from the fact that many important museums around the world have some folios from the *Panchatantra* stories. Depiction of the stories is also found in Central Asian wall paintings, Indian stone reliefs and decorative pottery. In many temples in India, scenes from the stories have been painted or carved on the walls and the ceilings. In the famous caves of Ajanta, in India, I have seen a painting depicting two flying geese with a tortoise holding a stick, based on the story of ‘The Talking Tortoise.’

The Panchatantra is like the evergreen Indian banyan tree which spreads its branches and roots. When an aerial root of the tree touches the earth, it becomes a new tree. It gives joy to every one by providing shelter, shade and fruit. Though *the Panchatantra* has travelled far and wide, its mother trunk is still rooted in the Indian soil. It delights every one who reads it, and also those who hear about it.

As I conclude my talk, I hope the deep and ancient relationship between India and Japan will continue to remain as deep as the roots of the Banyan tree.

Once again I express my gratitude to Ms. Mikiko Tomita, Director General of the International of Children’s Literature and the Diet Library for their kind invitation. I am also grateful to Chitose Suzuki who has taken the trouble to translate my English version into Japanese language.

I am beholden to Her Majesty for gracing the occasion this afternoon.

ARIGATOU GOZAIMASHITA
Thank you very much.

Now , I would like to announce here today that I make a gift of my personal collection (which is on the display in the museum exhibition) to the International Library of Children’s Literature. I hope you all will accept my humble gift to the library.