



# The Relevance of Sanskrit Ethical Tales and Their Moral Teachings in Contemporary Social Problems: A Critical Study

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**Abstract** – Ethical fables in Sanskrit constitute one of the most significant components of Indian cultural heritage. This genre of literature is distinguished by its unique capacity to communicate profound moral principles through simple narratives, allegorical expressions, and stories involving animals. Classical works such as the Panchatantra and the Hitopadesha have historically played a vital role in imparting ethical values, practical wisdom, and social awareness. These narratives encompass timeless teachings related to truthfulness, friendship, prudence, justice, leadership, and broader social ethics.

In the contemporary era, various social challenges have emerged as a consequence of rapid development, technological advancement, and the transformation of socio-cultural values towards materialistic tendencies. Issues such as moral decline, lack of empathy, corruption, and social irresponsibility are increasingly evident. In this context, the ethical insights embedded in Sanskrit narrative literature can serve as effective tools for promoting moral education and encouraging responsible conduct within society.

This study critically examines the relevance of ethical tales in Sanskrit literature in addressing present-day social problems. Through a detailed analysis of selected narratives from classical Sanskrit texts, the research evaluates how the moral dimensions of these stories contribute to value-based education and ethical development in the modern world. Furthermore, it explores the potential application of such narratives within contemporary educational frameworks.

Thus, the study demonstrates that Sanskrit ethical tales are not merely historical artifacts but remain highly relevant, offering meaningful guidance and practical solutions to current social issues.

**Keywords:** Sanskrit Ethical Stories, Panchatantra, Hitopadesha, Moral Training, Ethical Virtues, Modern Social Issues, Instructional Literature, Value-oriented Education, Social Unity, Morals Education.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sanskrit literature represents one of the richest intellectual and moral traditions in the world. Among its various genres, ethical narrative literature occupies a special place because it conveys profound moral and social teachings through simple and engaging stories. Works such as the Panchatantra and the Hitopadesha were composed not merely for entertainment but primarily for imparting practical wisdom (nīti), moral discipline, and social awareness. Through narratives involving animals, kings, ministers, and common people, these texts communicate universal ethical principles that guide human conduct and social relations.

Indian intellectual tradition has always emphasized the inseparable relationship between knowledge and ethical living. Education in ancient India was not limited to intellectual development but aimed at shaping moral character and responsible citizenship. Ethical stories were therefore widely used as pedagogical



tools to cultivate virtues such as truthfulness, prudence, loyalty, and compassion. The fundamental moral vision of Indian culture is reflected in the well-known maxim:

**“ayam nijaḥ paro veti gaṇanā laghu-cetasām |  
udāra-caritānām tu vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam ||”<sup>1</sup>**

Such a stanza reflects the concept of universal brotherhood and broad-mindedness, which constitutes the moral essence of Indian philosophy. Likewise, the significance of knowledge and wisdom as sources for directing human life can be appreciated from another well-known saying: “

**vidyā dadāti vinayam vinayād yāti pātratām |  
pātratvād dhanam āpnoti dhanāt dharmam tataḥ sukham ||”<sup>2</sup>**

Such lessons make it clear that genuine education results in humility, morality, and the overall betterment of society. The ethical stories of Sanskrit incorporate these ideas through storytelling techniques, enabling students to comprehend and absorb them effortlessly.

In today's world, on the other hand, society faces many ethical issues including the decline of morality, increasing individualism, corruption, conflict among humans, and deterioration of human values. Fast technological advancements and materialistic lifestyles have a tendency to overlook ethics both personally and socially. In this regard, the ethics within the ethical stories of Sanskrit take on new meaning and importance.

The present investigation hence focuses on analyzing the importance of Sanskrit fables and moral values for resolving today's social issues. It is through the analysis of some stories taken from classics like Panchatantra and Hitopadesha that an attempt will be made to show how morality in these stories can serve the purpose of promoting value-oriented education along with instilling moral consciousness in today's society. The current study thereby emphasizes the importance of moral lessons from Sanskrit fables for guiding mankind in today's modern times.

## 2. CONCEPT OF ETHICAL TALES IN SANSKRIT LITERATURE

Ethical fables have their place in the Sanskrit literary canon. These stories were written with the aim of teaching ethics, wisdom, and virtuous living through engaging fables. Ancient Indian philosophers understood that it was more effective to teach ethics through fables than through philosophical discourse. Hence, the genre of nīti-kathā (ethical fables) flourished in Sanskrit literature.

Some significant texts like the Pañcatantra and Hitopadeśa convey their morals using stories about kings, ministers, animals, and commoners. They teach how virtues like wisdom, friendship, honesty, patience, and righteousness can bring good results, while evil qualities like greed, stupidity, and falsehood will create problems. Consequently, ethical stories not only entertain but educate people morally and socially.

The well-known ethical saying occurs in the Hitopadeśa, distinguishing human beings from animals:

**āhāra-nidrā-bhaya-maithunam ca  
sāmānyam etat paśubhir narāṇām |**

<sup>1</sup>. Hitopadesa-v.116

<sup>2</sup>. Hitopadesa –v.6



**dharmo hi teṣām adhiko viśeṣo  
dharmaṇa hīnāḥ paśubhiḥ samānāḥ ||<sup>3</sup>**

The basic activities of eating, sleeping, fearing, and reproducing are present in both man and animal forms. Man's unique quality is righteousness (dharma). Without righteousness, man is no better than an animal.

The applicability of wisdom in ethics is further illustrated in the following stanza from the Pañcatantra: -

**yo nātmasu na ca pareṣu ca bandhu-varge  
dīne dayāṁ na kurute na ca martya-varge |  
kiṁ tasya jīvita-phalaṁ hi manuṣya-loke  
kāko'pi jīvati cirāya balim ca bhunkte ||<sup>4</sup>**

One who loves neither himself nor anyone else; one who feels compassion neither for those living in destitution nor for other humans—what is the consequence of such an individual in this mortal world? Even the crow, a bird, survives through a long period and eats the offerings (food).

Therefore, moral fables in Sanskrit literature act as carriers of morals that can be transmitted into society. Through these tales, the Pañcatantra and the Hitopadeśa have molded the way ethical teachings have been imparted throughout history until the present day.

### 3. EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ETHICAL NARRATIVES

Ethical narratives (*nīti-kathāḥ*) occupy a highly significant place in the Indian literary and educational tradition. In Sanskrit literature, storytelling has long been regarded as an effective pedagogical medium for imparting moral values, practical wisdom, and social understanding. These narratives communicate ethical teachings in a simple and accessible manner through stories centered on animals, kings, ministers, and common people. Consequently, such tales have played a crucial role in shaping individual character and promoting social harmony.

In the Indian educational system, the primary objective of education has traditionally extended beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge to include the cultivation of ethical virtues and self-discipline. In this context, ethical narratives have served as effective instruments of moral instruction. Such stories enable learners to understand the consequences of virtuous and unvirtuous actions, thereby motivating them to adopt ethical conduct in their lives.

Furthermore, ethical narratives contribute to the development of social responsibility and the promotion of harmony within society. Numerous stories found in classical Sanskrit literature highlight the importance of friendship, cooperation, and wise judgment as essential elements for maintaining social stability. This idea is aptly reflected in the following verse, which underscores the value of true friendship is emphasized.

**parokṣe kāryahantāraṁ pratyakṣe priyavādinam |  
varjayet tādrśaṁ mitraṁ viśakumbhaṁ payomukham ||<sup>5</sup>**

<sup>3</sup>. Hitopadesa – v.24

<sup>4</sup>. Pañcatantra: - v. 25

<sup>5</sup>. Hitopadesa- v.123



In this verse, the writer is advising that an individual, who has been doing evil acts to others when they are not around him and appears amicable to others when they are present, needs to be avoided. It means that an individual, whose pot is full of poison but the outer part has been covered with milk, must be avoided. Thus, through such ethical tales, the society is advised to inculcate ethical values and honesty into their lives and relationships.

Moreover, in such ethical tales, one can find the importance of wise advice and learning through experience as well. In such narratives, one finds that those who are fools get punished while smart people succeed in life. This teaches individuals the importance of intelligence and wisdom along with moral reasoning.

Thus, through ethical tales, the educational and social importance of classical Sanskrit literature comes out because these literary genres not only entertain but teach individuals about ethics and how to behave responsibly and morally with others in society. Thus, even in today's world, where there are many ethical and social problems, one should take inspiration from such ethical tales from classical Sanskrit narratives literature.

#### 4. CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Modern society faces many moral and social problems because of the fast pace of technological advancements and globalization, as well as rising materialistic tendencies. Despite tremendous achievements in science and technology made by mankind, many traditional values on which morality of a person's behavior was based have become obsolete. Thus, phenomena like corruption, greediness, immorality, conflicts, and cruelty are becoming more frequent in today's society, disrupting the harmony of both people's lives and social life.

One of the significant social problems of the present day society is that of moral decay. In fact, social chaos always ensues when an individual disregards ethical standards and acts out of purely selfish reasons. Sanskrit ethical literature severely criticizes such behavior, pointing to the need for righteous conduct in order to maintain a healthy social environment. One of the popular verses goes as follows:

**dharmā eva hato hanti dharmo rakṣati rakṣitaḥ |  
tasmād dharmo na hantavyo mā no dharmo hato'vadhīt ||<sup>6</sup>**

This passage shows that when there is protection of dharma, dharma protects society; however, destruction of dharma brings about downfall of society. The importance of ethics is emphasized in the above passage in terms of maintaining social order.

Another important social problem faced by society today is self-centeredness and lack of compassion for others. Selfishness often makes people more concerned about their own interests than the good of society. It is always emphasized in Sanskrit philosophy that real happiness comes from being benevolent and compassionate. This principle can be captured in this famous saying:

**“paropakārāya phalanti vṛkṣāḥ  
paropakārāya vahanti nadyaḥ |  
paropakārāya duhanti gāvaḥ  
paropakārārtham idaṃ śarīram ||”<sup>7</sup>**

<sup>6</sup> .Manusmṛiti – 8.15

<sup>7</sup> . Traditional Sanskrit *subhāṣita* (often cited in collections of moral maxims)



According to this verse, the fruits of the tree, water from the river, and milk of the cow all are meant for the wellbeing of others, and so are human beings themselves. These lessons inspire people to develop a sense of generosity and compassion towards others.

Moreover, in today's society as well, there exists a problem of bad associations and poor leadership, which usually results in chaos. In this context, many ethical stories from Sanskrit literature stress the significance of good companionship and sound advice. For instance, a popular verse goes like this:

**“tyaja durjana-samsargam bhaja sādhu-samāgamam |  
kuru puṇyam aho-rātram smara nityam anityatām ||”<sup>8</sup>**

This stanza is suggesting to the people that they should not move around with evil men; they should rather mingle with good men, do good things all the time and should always remind themselves about the temporary nature of life. This advice is as important as ever today because individuals have to face different environments on a regular basis.

It is apparent from the current social problems that the need for having an excellent ethical base is imperative in the lives of people. The teachings of morality as reflected in ancient Sanskrit texts, particularly the stories of Panchatantra and Hitopadesha, offer timeless guidelines to resolve the current issues.

## 5. RELEVANCE OF SANSKRIT MORAL TEACHINGS IN MODERN SOCIETY

The fast pace of growth in science and technology in the current era has brought about various changes in human life. On one side, we have seen advancements in science and technology, but on the other side, there are certain moral and social problems in society, including corruption, lies, intolerance, and individualism. Such problems can be attributed to negligence towards ethics and moral discipline in the lives of people. At this moment, the moral lessons present in the literature written in Sanskrit become quite significant.

Ethical writings in Sanskrit have stressed that knowledge must lead people to right actions. Without ethical values, knowledge cannot make any contribution to society. The following quotation from an ancient verse makes the point clear

**“na hi jñānena sadṛśam pavitram iha vidyate |  
tat svayam yoga-samsiddhaḥ kālenātmani vindati ||”<sup>9</sup>**

According to this lesson, knowledge is the greatest purifying power in humanity, and by gaining knowledge, man progressively comes to know himself and his moral principles. In today's society, which has access to a large amount of knowledge and information, this lesson reminds people that knowledge should be coupled with wisdom and morality.

Sanskrit ethics also stress the importance of various positive traits like patience, tolerance, self-restraint, honesty, and wisdom. These moral traits play a very important role in ensuring harmony and stability in society. Here is a traditional verse about the traits of righteousness

<sup>8</sup> . Chanakya Niti, Chapter 1.

<sup>9</sup> . Bhagavad Gita, 4.38.



**“dhṛtiḥ kṣamā damo'steyaṃ śaucaṃ indriya-nigrahaḥ |  
dhīr vidyā satyam akrodho daśakaṃ dharma-lakṣaṇam ||”<sup>10</sup>**

This verse enumerates ten basic elements that are included in dharma; patience, compassion, self-restraint, purity, wisdom, honesty, and lack of anger among them. Such moral concepts are highly applicable to contemporary society, which faces a lot of problems connected with ethics.

Another concept from the ethical tradition of Sanskrit culture concerns unity and cooperation. People can live harmoniously in society if they cooperate with each other this idea is captured in the following Vedic prayer:

**“saṃgacchadhvaṃ saṃvadadhvaṃ saṃ vo manāṃsi jānatām |  
devā bhāgaṃ yathā pūrve saṃjānānā upāsate ||”<sup>11</sup>**

This teaching emphasizes the importance of acting, speaking, and thinking as one with a common goal, similar to how the gods worked in harmony. In today's society, where differences in ideologies, cultures, and individual gains tend to cause disputes, such teachings foster collaboration, respect, and shared growth.

Therefore, the moral teachings contained within Sanskrit literature offer timeless ethical lessons that are relevant to contemporary society. Through the cultivation of values such as wisdom, honesty, self-control, and social collaboration, these teachings aid in the formation of responsible people and cohesive societies. Consequently, incorporating the ethical teachings of Sanskrit into modern society could be instrumental in tackling current moral dilemmas and building an ethical society.

## 6. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Sanskrit ethical stories are valuable literary sources for teaching ethical norms and practices. Books such as the Panchatantra and Hitopadesha have been written with the intent of disseminating the concept of nīti (ethics/practical wisdom). A critical analysis of such stories shows that they include moral instruction and practical life skills to teach individuals how to behave socially, become leaders, form and maintain friendships, and make sound decisions.

One of the most notable strengths of ethical stories written in Sanskrit language is their ability to teach morality through the use of practical stories. Instead of discussing philosophical issues, these stories use practical examples and metaphors to explain moral issues. As it has already been mentioned above, moral wisdom is crucial for leading one's life according to the following proverb:

**“na hi satyāt paro dharmo nāṅtāt pāpakaṃ param |  
satyena dhāryate sarvaṃ satye sarvaṃ pratiṣṭhitam ||”<sup>12</sup>**

In such teachings, truth is considered the ultimate virtue and that the whole structure of morality within society depends on truth. These values hold great significance even today when materialism and competition often pose a challenge to ethics.

<sup>10</sup> . Manusmriti, 6.92.

<sup>11</sup> . Rigveda, 10.191.2.

<sup>12</sup> . Traditional Sanskrit *Subhāṣita* (ethical maxim)



Moreover, the ethical tales written in Sanskrit literature place great importance on proper behavior and association with virtuous people. Ethics are intrinsically linked to associations and actions within society. This is evident from the following maxim:

**“satsaṅgave nissaṅgatvaṃ nissaṅgave nirmohatvam |  
nirmohatve niścalatattvaṃ niścalatattve jīvanmuktiḥ ||”<sup>13</sup>**

This statement clarifies that being around good people will lead you away from bad people and help you achieve clarity and liberation. As we see today in the modern world, this lesson stresses the role of positive social influence in a person’s life. Nevertheless, the critical analysis of stories written in Sanskrit also shows that there are some examples that demonstrate a combination of political wisdom and survival techniques, sometimes even deceit. This can be explained by the specific historical background of ancient Indian culture. The value of intelligence in social relations can be seen in the following quote:

**“buddhir yasya balaṃ tasya nirbuddhes tu kuto balaṃ |  
paśya siṃho madonmattaḥ śaśakena nipātitaḥ ||”<sup>14</sup>**

The example given above shows us that the real strength of a man lies in his intelligence, not in his physical strength devoid of wisdom. The famous fable of the lion and the hare, mentioned in the Panchatantra, also proves that the wisdom of one can defeat the brute force of another.

Therefore, the careful study of these ethical tales in Sanskrit reveals that they have a lot of moral significance besides providing pragmatic lessons for society. Even though these stories were created during the ancient era, the basic morals of these tales, such as honesty, wisdom, and virtuous company, can still be used to solve contemporary moral dilemmas.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Sanskrit tales on ethics have an important role in the tradition of India. By using teaching stories and ethics, these tales seek to teach people good behavior. Traditional tales like the Panchatantra and Hitopadesha were written with the objective of teaching people, especially the young scholars, through stories which would teach them about the rewards and punishments associated with good and bad behavior.

It can be seen from the following tale that the importance of moral values like honesty, self-control, wisdom, and benevolence was stressed for the happiness and prosperity of individuals and society.

**“ācāraḥ paramo dharmāḥ ācāraḥ paramam tapaḥ |  
ācāraḥ paramam jñānam ācārāt kiṃ na sādhyate ||”<sup>15</sup>**

This line implies that righteous behavior is the most sublime way of righteousness and discipline. With the practice of virtuous behavior, it will be easy to have a harmonious state of affairs within one’s self and society. In today’s complex world, when people often face many moral dilemmas, such lessons motivate people to practice ethics in everyday life.

In the same way, in Sanskrit moral literature, it has been stressed that virtues and good behavior are the best decoration of human beings. It can be stated as follows:

<sup>13</sup> . Bhaja Govindam, v.9.

<sup>14</sup> . Panchatantra, Mitrabhedha.

<sup>15</sup> . Manusmriti, 1.108 (theme of righteous conduct).



**“vidyā nāma narasya rūpam adhikaṃ pracchanna-guptaṃ dhanam  
vidyā bhogakarī yaśaḥ sukhakarī vidyā gurūṇām guruḥ |  
vidyā bandhu-jano videśa-gamane vidyā parā devatā  
vidyā rājasu pūjitā na hi dhanam vidyā-vihīnaḥ paśuḥ ||”<sup>16</sup>**

This particular verse brings forth the idea that knowledge and wisdom are among the greatest assets of man. While money and other forms of material goods might bring pleasure temporarily, knowledge and ethical values ensure that an individual leads a dignified and happy life.

Hence, the ethical principles found in Sanskrit literature prove extremely significant even in modern times. In an era where civilizations confront many moral problems, these principles can serve as an important source for acquiring virtuous traits. With the integration of these moral teachings of Sanskrit narrative literature into modern life, a society that is full of harmony is definitely attainable.

In conclusion, the moral lessons from Sanskrit narratives are not something of the past; rather, they will guide humanity towards an ethically upright existence in the future.

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<sup>16</sup> . Niti Shatakam, v.16.