



PANCHATANTRA AND BISHNOIS: EXPLORING THE INTERCONNECTION BETWEEN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

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Abstract

The Panchatantra, a collection of animal fables, is one of the most celebrated literary works in Indian history. The Bishnois, a community in Rajasthan, India, have been following the teachings of the Panchatantra for centuries. This paper explores the interconnection between the Panchatantra and the Bishnois, highlighting how the Panchatantra's teachings have influenced the Bishnois' beliefs, customs, and practices. The study is based on a qualitative analysis of secondary sources, including books, articles, and online resources. The research shows that the Bishnois' reverence for Nature and their commitment to environmental conservation are deeply rooted in the Panchatantra's teachings. The paper also examines the Bishnois' unique relationship with wildlife, including their belief in the sacredness of animals and their willingness to sacrifice their lives to protect them. Overall, this study sheds light on the profound and enduring impact of the Panchatantra on Indian culture and underscores the importance of understanding the connections between literature and society.

Keywords: Panchatantra, Bishnois, animal fables, environmental conservation, Indian culture..

The term Panchatantra refers to the Pentateuch's meaning 'Five Books'. Each of the five books stands alone, with a framing plot and various interspersed stories delivered by one or more of the main narrative's protagonists as proper conditions arise. Thus, the first volume relates the story of Rusty, the lion, and Lively, the bull, and thirty additional stories, largely told by the two jackals, Victor and Cheek. The second book's frame narrative is the friendship of the crow, mouse, turtle, and deer, whose names are Swift, Gold, Slow, and Spot. The third book begins with a frame story about birds and owls fighting. The fourth and fifth book does not have a framing story, and these appear to be later additions to the Panchatantra series. According to

Pandit Jwalaprasad Mishra, some stories of Panchatantra are taken from the epic Mahabharata and Chanakya's Arthashastra.

Panchatantra can be called India's Eco-Shastra because it not only deals with political and social concerns as a part of "Nitti" but also acknowledges Environment or Nature as a part of it. Here, the term 'India' is used because of two reasons. First, the origin of Panchatantra is in India, and second, the Bishnoi community of India claims a special reward for bringing in the wise knowledge of Panchatantra into practical life. Therefore, they claim the title "Eco Warriors" of India.

In Panchatantra, 'Nitti' roughly means 'the art of living an intelligent life'. To live an intelligent

life not only means dealing with practical affairs such as security, judgment, friendship, resolute action etc. but also living in proper harmony with Nature. The relationship between men and Nature is very old. They both are dependent on each other for their survival, but being intelligent animals, our responsibility as man is to take care of them and set a jocund company with them.

While Panchatantra is called the Eco-Shashtra of India, Bishnois can be rightly called India's Eco-Warriors. Bishnoism is a highly practical, straightforward, eco-friendly, and caring sect of Hindu Dharma, established in 1485 AD (Vikram Sanwat 1542, Kartik month, Krishna 8) on a sand dune called Samrathhal Dhora in Rajasthan, India, by great visionary sect Guru Jambheshwar ji. The Bishnois are followers of Bishnoism or the beliefs of Saint Jambheshwar. The term 'Bishnoi' is formed from the words bis (twenty) and nai (nine). (nine). To put it another way, they obey the spiritual leader Guru Jambheshwar, also known as Jambhoji, and his 29 principles.

Guru Jambheshwar Ji was a 15th century guru and environmentalist. Guru Janbhoji was the only saint of the 15th century who preached to his disciples about the conservation of biodiversity. He was born in 1451 AD (Samwat1508) on 8th day of dark half of the Lunar month Bhadrapada on Janmashtami, the day lord Krishna was born, in a village Pipasar situated in Nagpur district of Rajasthan, India. He instilled in his followers compassion for nature and the protection of life as the ultimate religious aim. Guru Jambheshwar is thought to be a manifestation of Lord Vishnu.

The Bishnois are called the "Eco-Warriors" of India because of their enormous efforts in Preservation and protection of Environment. The famous Chipko andolan or Tree hug movement of 1970s was a part of an ancestral tradition. Amrita Devi and 363 Bishnoi men, women, and children died in 1730 to prevent trees from being felled in order to build Maharaja Abhay Singh's new palace. They all gathered around the tree and clutched it to prevent the king's men from cutting down the forest. And the king's men murdered them all one by one. This sad tragedy, known as the Khejarli Massacre, was the Chipko movement's first recorded event.

Jambhoji developed a set of 29 tenants for his disciples to follow centuries ago. The tenets were designed not simply to maintain the area's biodiversity but also to promote a healthy and prosperous community. All these twenty-nine tenets and some holy gospels are together collected in a book called 'Shabd Vani'. This book is a second Panchatantra for the Bishnois. Eight of these precepts have been specified in order to protect Nature and promote a healthy, eco-friendly social life among the people. These include a prohibition on killing (and eating) animals, the need to plant a tree every year, and providing protection to all living things by offering one-tenth of our crops to feed wildlife, referred to as a 'fair share'.

The 800,000-strong Bishnoi community is passionate about the flora and fauna around them. Their lives are planned to operate in harmony with nature. They are reminiscent of a clean link between man and nature. Wild deer and antelopes are spotted grazing in local fields, and ladies in the Bishnoi village have been seen breastfeeding young deer, demonstrating an unwavering reverence for mother nature. The Bishnois believes in the practice of cleanliness and purity of inner and outer self. The inner purity is in speaking truth, respecting mother Earth, whereas the outer purity is in keeping oneself clean and hygienic. Guru Janbeshwar had said, "Labor hard with your hands, follow a part of the truth, non-violence, purity and cleanliness, and maintain Nature's balance by using your resources carefully. Men don't survive by food alone but by raising old aspect of living and thinking to the highest standards" (Reichert: 2013, p. 5-6).

The Bishnois are now considered to be the world's first environmentalists. Some of their tenets for the preservation of Bio-diversity are as follows:

- Tenet 18: Have pity on all living being and love them.
- Tenet 19: Do not cut green trees; save the environment.
- Tenet 22: Provide a common shelter for male goat/sheep to avoid them being slaughtered in abattoirs
- Tenet 23: Don't sterilize ox

- Tenet 28: Don't eat meat;
remain always pure vegetarian.
(Reichert 29-30)

In this era where people are constantly destroying Nature under the veil of modernism the Bishnois are still living, holding their ancestral tradition and they remind us, no, there is another way to go. It seems that were rest of the world have an ideology of keeping men 'humanism' at centre the Bishnois keep nature 'naturalism' at centre. They are the true worshipers of Panchatantra, and have realized the underlining meaning of it. The way of living of Bishnoi can be best described by the contemporary buzz phrase 'sustainable living'.

As we see how the culture of Bishnois is solely in harmony with Nature, similarly the concept of Nature hovers in the outset of Panchatantra. The role of Nature in Panchatantra is best exemplified in these verses:

Blest be the tree whose every part
Brings joy to many a creature's heart-
Its green roof shelters birds in rows,
While deer beneath its shadow doze
Its flowers are sipped by tranquil bees,
And insects throng its cavities,
While monkeys in familiar mirth
Embrace its trunk. That tree has worth;
But others merely cumber earth. (Ryder II,1)

In these verses Pandit Vishnu Sharma praises the mighty Banyan tree who brings joy to many creature, and that too, without asking for a penny. This is how we are in debt to mother nature and so it is our responsibility as humans to protect and promote Nature by focusing on which is most vulnerable and more at risk in a rapid altering world. Here, the banyan tree tells us to live life with a 'big heart'. We should have a patriarchal approach towards plants and animals as it is being proved that their existence as well as extinction are solely under our hands.

Panchatantra is a moving tale of Nitti or practical wisdom where animals are portrayed as actors who have a fairly constant character like the fox Swift is constant in the whole narrative of "Winning of Friends". Thus, the lion is powerful but

dim-witted, the jackal is cunning, and the heron is foolish. The animal performers give a comprehensive vision of Nature and its significance. Similarly, one more verse shows the importance of Nature:

Shun pleasant days that listless pass,
The joy that hides
In sloth. For deer can eat the grass
That fate provides. (Ryder IV)

If we look at the contextual meaning, one would get the idea that our actions are strongly dominated by fate but it has an underlying meaning which emphasises on the idea that Nature is not governed by fate but by our actions. We should promote the growth of bio-diversity and sustainable leaving. The relationship between men and Nature is ancient, and we should thank our ancestors for presenting us varied varieties of Nature. The Nature whose witness we are today is a result of deep eco-consciousness of our forefathers. They believe in living together with Nature not without it. They were aware of the fruit of living in harmony with Nature and Nature's devastation also. For instance, the verse says:

And He who made the parrots green,
But made the king swans white,
And peacock particoloured, He
Will order us all right. (Ryder III)

In these lines, we see the writer's emotion reflected in Nature. This effect is reached by using positive phrases like 'parrot green', 'swans white', and 'peacock particoloured'. These phrases manifest the aesthetic fallacy by projecting beautiful attributes (green, white) onto a natural element.

Therefore, the union of Culture and Nature establish an Eco-friendly zone between the Living and Non-living, between conscious and unconscious. The 'Harmony' between culture and Nature is beneficial for "sustainable living".

Both Panchatantra and the Bishnoi religion embody a balance between Culture and Nature. But in the present scenario, we are gradually eliminating this maintained balance. Due to the progress in science and technology, men are gradually overlapping the areas moving from Nature to Culture. This movement is shown in these lines:

Area one: 'the wilderness' (e.g., deserts, oceans, uninhabited continents)

Area two: 'the scenic sublime' (e.g., forests, lakes, mountains, cliffs, waterfalls)

Area three: 'the countryside' (e.g., hills, fields, woods)

Area four: 'the domestic picturesque' (e.g., parks, gardens, lanes). (Berry 251-252)

Ryder, A.W. *The Panchatantra of Vishnu Sharma*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

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As we mentally traverse these domains, it is clear that we are progressing from relatively 'pure' Nature in the first to what is largely 'culture' in the fourth. Although global warming, a cultural force, affects the wilderness, and gardens rely on sunlight, a natural force, neither term ('nature' or 'culture') is proven. Furthermore, to varied degrees, the two middle zones have a major portion of 'both' Culture and Nature. "In Panchatantra, first and second elements are used which makes this text much closer to Nature whereas much of the text of the eighteenth-century topographical writing contains the last three elements, making it a mixture of Nature-Culture"

Therefore, this symbiosis between Culture and Nature is essential for living a harmonious life. Today, when people all over the world are concerned about environmental degradation and its terrible consequences, traditional nature protection could be viewed as a source of inspiration and advice for the future. Perhaps no other culture offers a more diverse range of cultural practices and an ecologically sound engagement with the environment than Bishnoism. Panchatantra is the deepest treatise about Nature. It focuses on the values, beliefs, and attitudes associated with the cross-cultural universality of respect for nature and the elements that comprise the universe.

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