

# Panchatantra, Hitopadesha, Jataka Katha

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**Panchatantra (पञ्चतन्त्रम् / panchatantram)** stories are famous among young and adults alike all over the world. *Panchatantra* was written in Sanskrit in 200 BC by a great Sanskrit scholar named *Vishnu Sharma*. It traveled to Persia, Greece and then Europe. Since the original composition, it has been translated into more than 50 languages and is famous in many countries.

*Panchatantra* is a collection of animal stories (fables) each giving valuable insight into politics, moral code of conduct, and practical wisdom. In essence it teaches *Neeti Shashtra* or *A Book Of Wise Conduct In Life*, through animal stories. It teaches the practical aspects of life like - understanding people; choosing reliable friends; coming out of difficult situations wisely; and living in peace while facing deceit, hypocrisy and many problems in life.

Origin of *Panchatantra* is mentioned in the beginning of *Panchatantra* itself. It is said that in certain state in Southern India there was a city named *Mahilaropya* where a just King named *Amarshakti* used to rule. The king had three sons named *Vahushakti*, *Ugrashakti*, and *Anantashakti*. The three sons who were though intelligent were not interested in any kind of learning or education. *King Amarsakti* was worried about the future of the state and the princes.

When consulted, his ministers told that, it takes a minimum of twelve years to learn Sanskrit grammar itself. Besides this the princes need to know other scriptures like *Dharma Shashtra* (by Manu), *Artha Shashtra* (by Chanakya) and *Kama Shashtra* (by Vatsyana), which will need many more years to learn. After such disappointments a minister named *Sumati* counseled that, for the princes it is necessary to know the essentials of few scriptures than the details of all the scriptures. He suggested a scholar named *Vishnu Sharma* who was famous for teaching *Neeti Shashtra* in a short time.

On counsel of minister *Sumati*, the king invited the great scholar *Vishnu Sharma* and requested him to take charge of the princes and make them knowledgeable in political and practical wisdom. In return he offered a hundred villages. The scholar accepted to take the princes to his ashrama (hermitage) and make them knowledgeable. But, he did not wish anything in return. For him his work was his reward. He said "O King, listen to my words carefully. I will not sell knowledge in return of hundred villages. Still, if I can not make your sons expert in *Neeti Shashtra*, in six months, I will change my name. This is my vow. I do not wish any wealth. I am eighty years old now and my senses have faded away. I do not need any wealth now. However to fulfill your wish I will entertain myself with teaching. Note down today's date. If I do not make your sons expert in *Neeti Shashtra* in six months, may I not see heaven."

*Vishnu Sharma* compiled *Panchatantra* - the five books/principles which is a collection of animal stories. The princes listened these stories with interest and in six months were indeed knowledgeable in the necessary branches of political wisdom, moral code of conduct, and practical wisdom.

*Panchatantra* has five tantras or principles/formulas. Each tantra starts with a main or root animal story with other stories inside the story. The main story forms the basic frame of the entire tantra. The characters in a story tell other stories, based on different situations or contexts. The thread of stories completes one tantra. Each story gives valuable insight into politics and practical wisdom as the essence or moral of the story is always close to what a person will face in day-to-day life.

Each tantra in *Panchatantra* covers a major branch of *Neeti Shashtra*. These are as applicable today as they were more than 2000 years back. Most of the stories were written by *Vishnu Sharma* himself. However many stories also date back many centuries before *Panchatantra* was compiled. Some of these are as old as 1500 BC era. These stories were used in *Panchatantra* to pass on the message in the most appropriate context or situation.

The five tantras in *Panchatantra* are:

- Mitra Bheda / मित्रभेदः / mitrabhedaH (Enstrangement Of Friends)
- Mitra Samprapti / मित्रसम्प्राप्तिः / mitrasampraaptiH (Winning Of Friends)
- Kakolukiyam / काकोलूकीयम् / kaakoluukiiyam (Of Crows & Owls)
- Labdha Pranasam / लब्धप्रणाशम् / labdhapraNaasham (Loss Of Gain)
- Aparikshita Karakam / अपरीक्षितकारकम् / aparikshitakaaraka.n (Rash Deeds)

Mitra Bheda (Enstrangement Of Friends): This tantra gives a deep understanding of how good friends can be lost. The stories mention how opponents or enemies can create many situations due to which good friends can be lost, and help the enemy become stronger and achieve its goal.

Mitra Samprapti (Winning Of Friends): This tantra gives insight into how lost friends can be gained back or new friends made. It also teaches how people or friends with mutual interest can join together to achieve a common goal and come out of difficult situations.

Kakolukiyam (Of Crows & Owls): This tantra teaches how misunderstanding between enemy can be created using deceit and duplicity, to weaken their unity. In the story crows and owls are portrayed as the opponent parties and how the crows finally destroyed the oppressing owls. This tantra is also known as - Suhrudbheda or "Causing Dissension Between Friends".

Labdha Pranasam (Loss Of Gains): This tantra gives an insight into how gains made earlier can be lost if proper care is not taken or the consequences not analysed.

Aparikshita Karakam (Rash Deeds): This tantra teaches about consequences of taking action in haste without knowing the details or the truth.

Note: In the 'Stories' section you can read some of the well known stories from *Panchatantra*. *Panchatantra* book with all original stories in it, is available from MLBD publishers with Sanskrit text and Hindi translation.

**Hitopadesha (हितोपदेश / hitopadesha)** is a collection of animal stories which are famous among young and adults alike. It was written in Sanskrit (11th or 12th century AD) by the Sanskrit scholar *Narayana Bhatta*.

Stories in *Hitopadesha* are mostly derived from *Panchatantra*. Out of the five tantras in *Panchatantra* *Narayana Bhatta* adapted stories from four tantras. Besides this he added 18 more stories to his compilation. Besides Panchantra, stories and concepts from *Mahabharata*, *Dharma Shashtra*, *Purana*, and *Chanakya Neeti* have been used in *Hitopadesha*.

Just like *Panchatantra*, intention of *Hitopadesha* is to cover major branches of political wisdom, moral code of conduct, and practical wisdom. *Hitopadesha* has the following four sections:

- Mitra Laabha / मित्रलाभः / mitralaabhaH (Gaining Friends)
- Suhrudbheda / सुहृदभेदः / surubhedhaH (Causing Dissension Between Friends)
- Vighraha / विग्रहः / vighraH (Separation)
- Sandhi / सन्धि / sandhi (Union)

**Jataka Katha** (stories) are a collection of over 550 Buddhist stories of wisdom preserved in Jatakas or *Tripitaka*. These were composed between 300 BC to 500 AD. These stories are written in *Pali* language (not Sanskrit, but said to be a descendent of Sanskrit language) spreading the wisdom of right thinking and right living. Though not written in Sanskrit, it should be mentioned along with other Sanskrit scriptures.