

Locating Aristotelian Nicomachean Ethics of Friendship in Panchatantra:

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Abstract:

The present world filled with tremendous scientific and technological advancements might portray the culture of folklore as irrelevant and thereby discount a phenomenal connection with the past. The same experience might elicit varied responses from different individuals, as every individual is unique, this uniqueness is maintained in reaction as well. It is at this point that folklore provides the key to wisdom to comprehend these moments from varied perspectives. Folklore showcases the fact that in spite of the uniqueness each individual is connected to the other through the collective connectivity of moral truths that govern their lives throughout different periods of cultural history. However, one of the crucial aspects of human life is the experience of friendship embodying the pleasures of happy moments and the pangs of turmoil as well. Until one gets the knowledge of the boundary between when to chase friendship and the time to forsake it, the binary of pleasure and pain regarding friendship will be everlasting. *Panchatantra*, the popular inter-woven series of animal fables, attributed to Pandit Vishnu Sharma, illustrates the principles of *niti* which facilitates the art of sagacious conduction of life. Professor Franklin Edgerton has regarded *Panchatantra* as Machiavellian and a text book of worldly wisdom glorifying shrewdness and practical wisdom in the affairs of life. *Panchatantra* creates the awareness that solutions to problems lie within an individual. This paper will be dealing with the second book of *Panchatantra* titled “The Gaining of Friends” or “Mitra Laabha”. The chief focus of the paper is to locate the three types of friendship i.e. friendships of utility, of pleasure and of virtue that is illustrated by Aristotle in the Book VIII of Nicomachean Ethics in the stories of the second book of *Panchatantra*.

Keywords: Friendship, Utility, Virtue, folklore, connectedness

Introduction:

In the context of scientific modern times folklore is often viewed as insignificant and absurd but a meticulous assessment shows that folklore or oral literature basically is the embodiment of the seminal intellectual heritage of the ancestors that guides the successors at every step in solving varied practical problems of life. Martha Sims and Martine Stephens observe that folklore provides the way of comprehending people. Folklore is, basically, the creative expressions of values, customs, ideas and tradition. *Panchatantra* is, no doubt, such a treasure trove.

The term ‘Panchatantra’ is consisted of two words ‘pancha’ which suggests five and ‘tantra’ meaning tactic or stratagem. In ancient India moral stories and fables were used to educate young students and Panchatantra pertains to the five strategies of ‘Nitishastra’ imbibing of which helped the students to conduct their lives wisely in a smooth way. In ancient India there existed a kingdom called ‘Mahilaropyam’

ruled by a king named Amarshakti. This king had three sons who took no interest in studies. Amarshakti entrusted Pandit Vishnu Sharma with the onerous task of educating these three princes so that they can become his able successors in future. Pandit Vishnu Sharma accepted the challenge of imparting life lessons and educating those uninterested princes through tales and fables, now collectively known as *Panchatantra*. There are five books in *Panchatantra*: 'Mitra-bheda' or The Separation of Friends, 'Mitra-labha' or The Gaining of Friends, 'Kakolukiyam' or Of Crows and Owls, 'Labdhapranasam' or Loss of Gains and 'Apariksitakarakam' or Imprudence. The second book of *Panchatantra* illustrates the art of befriending through friendship between a dove, a crow, a rat, a turtle and a deer and there are other characters as well who are human beings introduced through the tales told by the chief characters present in this section. In Aristotle's view, no individual, in spite of having a fulfilling life with all the good and desired things, will agree to live a life devoid of friends. Friendship or 'philia' is phenomenal as it enables every individual to share achievements and success, pangs and distress with friends and it is, thus, that an individual experiences true satisfaction. The greatest external good in this world is friendship which is deeply rooted in love or 'philia'. The life of a human being whether rich or poor, old or young, happy or unhappy, is nothing without this most precious element of happiness called 'friendship'. Aristotle in the Book VIII of Nicomachean Ethics provides a profound classical study of friendship focusing on the chief causes from which friendship develops. In Aristotle's view, primarily three kinds of friendship exist in this world: friendship of utility, friendship of pleasure and perfect friendship dependent on virtue. In case of each of these friendships a friend desires the good of the other depending on the motive on which their friendship is based. These three kinds of friendship identified by Aristotle can be discerned in the second book of *Panchatantra* titled 'Mitra-Laabha'.

Aristotle opines that those who love each other for their advantage do not actually have any attachment with each other but such friends remain attached together temporarily by virtue of some benefit which they intend to derive from each other. The 'friendship of utility', thus, is based on the notion of usefulness and more precisely on the idea of satisfying one's own selfish interest. Such a friendship can be found in the first tale of the second book where a hunter tries to trap the birds who live in a banyan tree and a crow named Laghupatanaka warns all the birds on that tree by telling them not to eat the seeds spread by the hunter. All the birds act accordingly but Chitrigriva, the king of doves, pays no heed to Laghupatanaka's warning and lands there to eat those seeds with his group of doves who were almost one thousand in number. Consequently, they are entrapped by the hunter but applying his cunning Chitrigriva instructs his retinue to keep flying along with the net until the hunter loses sight of them and this trick works. Eventually, Chitrigriva goes to Mahilaropyam along with his retinue to seek help from Hiranyaka, a wise rat, who was his friend. Chitrigriva entertains Hiranyaka to free them from their entrapment. Hiranyaka, after delivering some wise practical advice to Chitrigriva, liberates the king of doves and his retinue. All these incidents were happening in front of Laghupatanaka who was following the doves to witness what ultimately happens to them. After seeing the bond of friendship between Chitrigriva and Hiranyaka, the crow, Laghupatanaka, realizes the usefulness of friendship as in heart of hearts he feels that he fails to trust anyone and what is more, he has a vacillating mind. Hence, finally he decides to seek the friendship of Hiranyaka. So, before befriending wise Hiranyaka, the crow assesses his inner shortcomings and to gain support in those areas he tries to establish a friendship with the rat. At first Hiranyaka refuses to have any friendship with Laghupatanaka as according to the laws of nature their relationship is one of the dinner and the diner. But eventually with his sincerity Laghupatanaka succeeds

in gaining the trust of Hiranyaka as he says that even seven words are sufficient to bring two noble persons closer. Since their span of talk is much more than that, a sort of friendship has already been established between them. He implores Hiranyaka to believe him and also ensures that Hiranyaka can talk with him from within his fort if he feels unsafe to come out. Hiranyaka finally understands that Laghupatanaka has no intention of harming him rather he only wants his friendship. They both started to help one another by bringing each other the types of food they liked and they also met regularly and have long talks. Laghupatanaka gets a knowledgeable friend in Hiranyaka who would provide him with wise counsels at the time of need and Hiranyaka in turn finds a loyal and sincere friend in Laghupatanaka who would not desert him at any circumstance. Hence, initially their friendship develops on terms of utility but there was no ill motive behind it. Their friendship is a ‘friendship of utility’ between the contraries, more precisely between the learned and the ignorant. However, in the story of “The Hermit and the Mouse” a very coarse form of the ‘friendship of utility’ is found. Hiranyaka narrates the sad tale of his life when Laghupatanaka introduces him to his friend Mandharaka, a turtle. Hiranyaka asserts that one he was a very rich rat as he had a huge store of food in his fort. One day the members of his retinue whom he considered his relatives complained that a hermit named Tamrachud stores food in a bowl every day and hangs it so high that it is becoming impossible for all of them to steal food from that bowl. Hiranyaka was the most confident rat amongst them who could reach any place, hence, they requested him to fetch food for them. Hiranyaka being very innocent readily promises to do the same. For a next few days he succeeds in stealing food for his retinue from the bowl hanged high up to a peg. But one day Tamrachud gets a wise idea of combating the rat who steals food every day from his friend named Brihat who came to his house. Brihat said that this rat must have stored a huge amount of food at some place which is giving it the spirit to jump so high and eat all those foods. When a man acquires a too much riches, that prosperity increases his vitality and tenacity. Tamrachud and Brihat together tracks the fort of the mouse and with the help of a dibble digs out all food that Hiranyaka had stored in his fort and carries it away to Tamrachud’s place. Seeing the desert in his fort Hiranyaka becomes utterly despondent but he never gives up. He goes to Tamrachud’s place once again accompanied by his retinue but to his surprise he found that this time he could not reach the bowl which was such an easy task for him earlier. Hiranyaka heard Brihat telling Tamrachud that there is not anymore need to panic as the rat has lost its mischievous energy as well with the loss of the storage of food. On hearing this, he tried to jump time and again out of anger but every time it is failure that he met. His dejection increased all the more when he heard his retinue saying that Hiranyaka is no more capable of getting food for them so they should henceforth stop providing him any service. Hiranyaka realizes how selfish his retinue was whom he once considered as his friends, for whom he took risk and confronted the disaster. But at the time of his utter trouble his retinue is forsaking him without a second thought. Hiranyaka strongly felt that his retinue betrayed the sham of friendship just to exploit his capabilities and when they realized that he is no more useful to them deserted him instantly. Although Hiranyaka genuinely loved his retinue, he could not recognize the selfish interest for which they established their friendship with him. Aristotle call such friendship as ‘incidental’ and further observes that such type of friendship very easily gets dissolved, if both the parties do not remain like before or if the one of the two parties no more proves to be beneficial the other party stops adoring him.

The second kind of friendship is the ‘friendship of pleasure’ about which Aristotle says that young people often seems to seek pleasure in friendship as they are very much guided by emotion they usually run after whatever seems to be pleasant to them and what is before them right at the moment; but with

increase in age and maturity their desires and pleasures become different. Love plays a very phenomenal role in the lives of young people as they are amorous in nature. For them a substantial part of the friendship of love depends on passion and emotion aiming at pleasure which is why they fall in love and even fall out of love very quickly according to the alterations in their mind occurring often within a span of a single day. Such 'friendship of pleasure' can be ascertained in the tale titled "Story of the Merchant's son". This story is about the son of a merchant named Sagargupta who buys a book worth hundred rupees with a single verse in it which implies that an individual receives whatever is there in his fate even the Almighty cannot alter one's destiny. So others can never snatch away whatever is there in a person's fate.

Sagargupta considers this act of his son to be extremely foolish and thinking him to be utterly hopeless turned him out of the house in a fit of rage. Being thrown out the merchant's son goes to another city where whoever asked him his name he replied that a man receives what is there in his destiny. From that day onwards people started calling him Praptavya implying someone who reiterates the same sentence. This city celebrated summer with a grand fair where one day a princess named Chandravati along with her maids was visiting the fair and while wandering all of a sudden she beheld a very handsome warrior and instantly fell in love. She instructs her maid to take the responsibility to ensure their meeting. As per the instruction of the princess, the maid conveys the princess's message to the warrior and make arrangements to make their meeting possible. The Warrior at first agrees but at the last moment steps back thinking that meeting the princess surreptitiously would be an immoral act on his part. Praptavya was passing by the way that was below the princess's chamber and suddenly he saw a rope hanging from the window of the royal palace and out of curiosity he climbs it up which lands him into the bed chamber of the princess. The princess initially mistakes him for the handsome warrior but when seeing the man saying absolutely nothing the princess insists him to say something. On being instigated Praptavya repeats the same line that a man gets what he is fated to. The princess's illusion shatters instantly and she immediately orders him to leave the place. On being turned out Praptavya decides to spend the night in a temple on the way. In this temple the sheriff of the city had planned to meet a woman of vice but Praptavya's presence in the temple was a hindrance in maintaining the secrecy. So the sheriff misinforms the merchant's son that the temple is not a good and safe place so it will be better if he spends the night in the sheriff's house. Praptavya being very innocent goes to the sheriff's place where Vinayawati, the sheriff's, daughter was waiting for her secret lover. Praptavya is mistaken by her as her secret lover, she arranges feast for him and marries him too according to Gandharva tradition. But on finding Praptavya not uttering a single word Vinayawati asked him to say something and he repeats the same line. Vinayawati perceives her mistake and immediately turns him out of the house. On the street again Praptavya now comes across a marriage procession and just at this moment he sees that an enraged elephant has killed the mahout and is heading towards the wedding dais where the frightened bride is standing alone as her would be husband named Varakriti along with other wedding guests were trying to flee from that place and save their life. Praptavya at this moment valorously stands beside the petrified bride and with a stick starts threatening the elephant and eventually succeeds in making the elephant leave the place. In the meantime, the princess Chandrawati and the sheriff's daughter, Vinayawati had also come to see what was causing this turmoil. When the situation becomes normal the bride declares in front of her father and all other assorted people that she will marry none other than Praptavya as it is he who saved her life at the time of crisis. When the bride's father asked Praptavya about his opinion, he repeats the same sentence, "Man gets what he is destined to." This sentence reminds both Chandrawati and Vinayawati of Praptavya and they realise the deeper

meaning of his sentence and finally recognizes Praptavya as a sagacious person. At the end the unnamed bride, Chandravati and Vinayawati all get married to Praptavya. What is very interesting here is that in case of both Chandravati and Vinayawati the choice of their lovers was based on mere infatuation which is very close to Aristotle's concept of 'friendship of pleasure' where a person is driven by the emotions to get pleasure. But emotion and passion are two very unstable faculties of human nature. Chandravati after seeing the handsome warrior in the fair feels that she has fallen in love with him and without him her life is meaningless but actually this is an illusion on her part. Since, at the end, after realizing Praptavya's wisdom she changes her mind and marries him. Her love for the handsome warrior does not disturb her even in a slightest way when she finally decides within a span of a single day to get married to Praptavya. In case of Vinayawati the situation is same as well. She used to meet her lover surreptitiously and even planned to marry him according to Gandharva tradition. This friendly attachment with her lover was completely based on sensuous passion which becomes very overt at the end. After knowing Praptavya to be a very knowledgeable and wise person Vinayawati readily gets married to Praptavya without even feeling the need to give a second thought to the matter of her ex-lover for whom she once drove out Praptavya. This tale of *Panchatantra* betrays the essence of human nature who mistakenly perceives sensuous pleasure as real love and fails to see how much it is unreal and transitory.

The last kind of friendship that Aristotle talks about is 'perfect friendship'. About this type of friendship Aristotle opines that perfect friendship is the form of friendship that exists between or among men who have a virtuous similarity. They are people who are good at heart and always wish good for each other. Such friendship of mutual goodness can be found in the very first story titled "The Gaining of Friends" where Chitrgriva, the king of doves, along with his retinue is entrapped by a hunter. In such a moment of trouble The king of doves goes to Hiranyaka to seek help and admits that it is their weakness for food that has brought about this disastrous result. On hearing this, the wise Hiranyaka tells Chitrgriva that a bird can identify a food grain from miles away but is unable to perceive the peril prowling around him. Thus, Hiranyaka points out the weakness of Chitrgriva and makes him aware as a true friend. As it is believed that a real and prudent friend should be one who can assert the truth no matter how much bitter it is to the ears and it is far better than the fake flattery that the 'friendship of utility' embodies. Chitrgriva, on the otherhand, betrays his judiciousness when he behests Hiranyaka to liberate his retinue first as he says that he is indebted to his retinue for the service they have rendered and it the time for him to repay that debt. Hiranyaka being very happy with the prudence of Chitrgriva, liberates his retinue first and then the king of doves. Thus, the friendship between Hiranyaka and Chitrgriva proves to be an epitome of 'perfect friendship' where one enriches the other with sagacity and thereby imparts the lessons for smooth conduction of life. Then again an exemplar of 'perfect friendship' can be found in the tale titled "The Hermit and the Mouse" where a very learned person named Brihat visits the house of the hermit named Tamrachud. He treats his guest, Brihat as a divine being and looks after his well being to the best of his capacity. Brihat in turn alleviates the trouble of Tamrachud regarding a mouse by giving him the life lesson that when a man becomes very wealthy, it is his hoard of riches that increases his stamina and spirit. And when that earned wealth is plundered that person's strength and confidence shatters immediately. Brihat wisely says that the mouse has a huge store of food somewhere which is giving it the energy to jump so high and eat all the food but once it's storage of food is no more its energy will diminish instantly. Tamrachud follows Brihat's advice and successfully gets rid of the problem. Brihat does not help Tamrachud to satisfy any of his selfish interest rather he helps friend only out of his honest desire to put

an end to his friend's trouble. Likewise, Mandharaka, the turtle, acts as a very generous host to Laghupatanaka and Hiranyaka who were fed up with the incidents of Mahilaropyam and were earnestly seeking shelter. Not only a good host but also with his virtuous nature Madharaka removes the suspicion in Hiranyaka's mind which he initially had regarding friendship between a diner and a dinner. Mandharaka affirms that the crow is his real friend as in spite of being hungry the crow did not kill the rat and made him his meal and instead, he brought Hiranyaka to the place of Mandharaka. He further suggests Hiranyaka to befriend the crow who is not corrupted by property and who extends his helpful hand in the time of crisis. Thus, basically Mandhraka explains the very essence of virtuous friendship. Eventually, Laghupatanaka, Hiranyaka and Mandharaka strikes a great friendship of virtue and it is with their virtuous unity that they later successfully save the life of a deer named Chitanga who too becomes their friend. Such friendship is not transient as each individual is uniquely virtuous as a result of which such friends cannot be replaced by another. A Virtuous individual never loses glory as it is said that a king is revered only in his kingdom but a virtuous person is honoured everywhere. Friendship of virtue thus becomes 'perfect friendship' for Aristotle as this type of friendship is neither tarnished by selfish interest not driven by unstable passionate sensuousness.

Thus, Pandit Vishnu Sharma in the second book of *Panchatantra* named, *Mitra- Laabha* encapsulates the ethos of friendship, the need of which is felt by every individual right from the ruler to the beggar, through tales sometimes having characters from the animal kingdom and sometimes involving human characters as well. And Aristotle's acknowledgement of three types of friendship in the well-known *Nicomachean Ethics* provides an in- depth notion of the true essence of different kinds of friendship that every individual experiences at different points in course of life. The tales of Mitra- Laabha when viewed through the lens of Aristotelian Nicomachean Ethics of friendship, they enlighten and caution the readers about the nature of real and unreal friendship and also demarcate between the two and thereby enabling them to realize where to pursue a particular friendship and when to eschew the same. As a consequence, *Panchatantra* becomes a timeless invaluable tool of imparting life lessons and thereby provides a right direction to the life of people through generations.

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