

**FABLES AND PROVERBS
FROM THE SANSKRIT:
BEING THE HITOPADESA**

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Fables and Proverbs from the Sanskrit: Being the Hitopadesa by Charles Wilkins & Henry Morley

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FABLES AND PROVERBS

From the Sanskrit

BEING THE

HITOPADESA

TRANSLATED BY

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INTRODUCTION.

IN the family of languages to which English belongs, the Indo-European Family, Sanskrit is eldest brother. The parent language was spoken in a remote prehistoric time by a people living somewhere about the five rivers of the Punjab. By migrations of that people westward there were afterwards established all the nations of the Iranian, Slavonic, Celtic, Teutonic and Classical stocks. The parent language, Aryan, has itself long since been lost ; but its words, subjected to regular varieties of change, have passed into many lands. Additions have been many, but those words of which the roots are common to us all, bear witness to the common origin of the chief nations of Europe, and to their brotherhood with races now in India.

Descendants of that remote prehistoric Aryan people, who remained in India and were less remote, but also prehistoric, spoke Sanskrit. They left in their own tongue sacred books by which Sanskrit was established as a classical language. It was cultivated by the religious orders and used as the language in which all high religious teaching was enshrined. Thus its grammar was studied and preserved, and the language itself, first born of the old Aryan, has been maintained in its purity until this day. As the vernacular speech of a living people, applied to all their common daily wants, Sanskrit has not been used within the memory of man, but in some parts of India the vernacular does not differ from it very greatly.

The oldest Sanskrit books are at the fountain-head of European literature. These are the four Vedas, regarded as the source of all other Sastras or sacred books. The Vedas are written in an Iambic measure of eight syllables, and the earliest of them have been assigned by Sir William Jones to a date as early as 1500 years before Christ. The word Veda means knowledge, but though names of authors of the several parts were preserved, the whole was taken to mean inspired knowledge, "the self-evident word proceeding out of the mouth of God, this is the Veda." The first of the Vedas, called Rig from a word meaning

praise, expresses the relations between man and God. The second, called Yajur, from a word meaning worship, contains instructions upon ceremonial. The third, called Sama, from a word signifying a prayer arranged for singing, contains pieces arranged as chants. Atharva, the fourth Veda, less ancient than the rest, contains forms of imprecation, prayers, hymns, and fifty-two theological treatises called Upanishads. Atharvan is referred to in it as a king appointed by Brahma to protect inferior beings. There are also detached Upanishads which are regarded as of less authority than the fifty-two contained in the Atharva-Veda. The Upanishads, or argumentative parts of the Vedas, are regarded as forming the Jñána, or philosophical part of the sacred books, and theological argument is based on these; the parts devoted to pure teaching of the religious system, its customs, sacrifices, ceremonies, form the Brahmanas; and the prayers and hymns in each Veda constitute its Sanhita. Thus, with regard to this matter the Vedas are said to contain Brahmanas, Jñána and Sanhita. The Brahmanas recognize a three-fold Veda, not reckoning the fourth, and derive the third from the first, the Rig-Veda, which teaches that there is one only supreme God, a pure spirit dwelling in eternal rest and silence, who is All, and in All. He is the supreme Brahma, who created the world by three manifestations drawn from himself, and named Brahmá, Vishnu, Siva, originally united in one essence, so that "the great One" became known as one Person and three gods. Brahmá represents Creation, Vishnu Preservation, and Siva Destruction. Of Vishnu, the Preserver, there have been nine Avatars or Incarnations, the first six were in the golden age of the world, the seventh was as Rama, the eighth as Krishna, the ninth as Buddha. The tenth, in which he will appear as a white horse, is yet awaited. In his last Avatar, as Buddha, Vishnu promoted scepticism to the end that the giants, wanting faith, might cease to obtain by prayer the powers that they misapplied.

The time during which the Vedas were produced extended over centuries, with periodic changes of style, and has been divided into four periods, the last of which, from 600 to 200 B.C., was the period of Sutra literature. Sutra means a string, and stands for a literature of short sayings strung together, by teachers who studied brevity, and of whom it was said, in their own proverbial way, that an author rejoiceth in the economizing of half a short vowel as much as in the birth of a son.

There were drawn from the four Vedas four Upa-Vedas. One was on Medicine from the Rig-Veda; one on Music from the Sama-Veda; one on Arms and Implements of War, from the Yajur-Veda; and one on sixty-four Mechanical Arts, from the Atharva-Veda. The Upa-Vedas are now lost.

Also there were six Vedangas, or limbs of the Veda, treating severally of six sciences needed for interpretation of the sacred books. They were Pronunciation, Grammar, Prosody, Explanation of difficult words or phrases, Religious Ceremonial, and Astrology. To these were added four Upangas or additional limbs; History (the Purana); Logic (the Nyaya); Moral Philosophy (the Mimansa); and Jurisprudence (the Dharma-Sastra).

The earliest of these sacred writings, in their earliest period, were preserved only by oral tradition. They continued to live in the persons of men of the sacred caste, and thus different texts or versions of the Vedas, known as Sakhas, were preserved in different Charanas or schools of the Brahmans, who preserved the books in memory. A name for a Brahman settlement was a Parishad. It was said that "four or even three able men from among the Brahmans in a village who know the Veda and keep the sacrificial fire, form a Parishad." Members of different Parishads might be associated in one school or Charana.

Of the Law Books, or Dharma-Sastras, the most ancient and most famous is that known as the "Institutes of Manu," first translated into English by Sir William Jones. Manu was fabled to be the son of Brahmā, to have preserved the Vedas from destruction in the Hindoo deluge, and to have given in that Book of Laws an abstract of their contents.

The Indians had also six Darsanas, or systems of philosophy, all seeking the highest good in eternal happiness, and all accepting the authority of the Vedas but interpreting them variously. The six systems are essentially three. One, the Nyaya, brings knowledge in through the five channels of the senses; one, the Sankhya, looks to the emotions, and seeks the sources of pleasure, pain, and the neutral state of indifference, in which states alone it holds external nature to consist; one, the Vedāntin, seeks only to determine what Is or Is Not. Besides the philosophy of the Darsanas, there were the teachings of several sects; among which the most important in their influence on thought was that of the Buddhists, chief opponents of the Brahmans. Their founder, Buddha Sakya Muni, began his teaching at an uncertain date, but it prevailed in India and Ceylon in the third century before Christ, and was introduced into China A.D. 61. Though the Brahmans finally prevailed in India, the Buddhists held their own in Ceylon, Burmah and China. They denied the existence of the One First Cause represented by the Brahma who gave forth Brahmā, Vishnu and Siva to create, preserve, destroy; One who is All in All, and of whom all forms of divinity—Indra, the Heavens with his thunderbolt and thousand eyes; Surya, the sun; Agni, fire; Pavana, wind; Varuna, ocean—are manifestations. Not less were the elements of human life and death such manifestations of the God in all,—Ganasa, wisdom, perfecter of work; Lakshmi,

goddess of prosperity, formed by the churning of the sea ; Saraswati, goddess of learning ; and Yama, judge of the dead.

Epic and dramatic poetry form also a part of Sanskrit literature. The two great Sanskrit epics are the *Ramáyana*, or Adventures of Rama (one of the incarnations of Vishnu), and the *Maha-bhárata* ; both of them less ancient than the Vedas, but both so old that, like the Vedas, they were long preserved by oral tradition before they were committed to writing. The *Maha-bhárata* is in eighteen books, containing altogether 220,000 lines, and is a collection of national legends. In old Indian legend there were two dynasties of the north ; those of the Sun, those of the Moon. Rama, the hero of the *Ramáyana*, was of the line of the Sun ; *Bhárata*, the hero of the chief story in the *Maha-bhárata*, was of the line of the Moon.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* is an episode in the *Maha-bhárata*, a divine song in the form of a calm dialogue on eighteen subjects held between Krishna, the eighth Avatar of Vishnu, and his pupil Arjuna, while tumult of battle raged around them.

The great dramatist in Sanskrit literature was Kalidasa, author of the *Sakuntala*. The oldest known collection of Fables is the *Pancha-Tantra*, a collection into Five Tantras or sections, which is represented by the book now in the reader's hand, *The Hitopadesa*, or Friendly Instructor, in four books. The purpose of its interwoven fables and maxims was to present, in a way likely to win and keep attention, a system of good counsel for right training of a prince in all the chief affairs of life. It comes to us from a far place and time as a manual of worldly wisdom, inspired throughout by the religion of its place and time. There are, in fact, so far as concern the great forces of Nature, but accidental differences between the cities of men or the ant-hills of to-day and yesterday. When allowance has been made for some real progress in civilization, as in the recognition of the place of women in society, every fable in the *Hitopadesa* can still be applied to human character ; every maxim quoted from the wise men of two or three thousand years ago, when parted from the local accidents of form, might find its time for being quoted now in church, at home, or upon Change.

H. M.

September, 1885.