

Nītiśataka- A Guide to Psychological Wellness

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Abstract:

Sanskrit, being an ancient language, has numerous books and treatises stating the moral values and the good behaviour. We find some texts in Sanskrit which discuss nīti- the etiquettes, the good manners, the ethics, and the rules of good behaviour. A significant among those texts is the Nītiśataka. It is a text with nearly 100 verses in Sanskrit that mostly talk about the good moral behaviour of a human being. In doing so, it guides the reader on the path of developing good virtues and in turn, improving one's psychological health.

The text of Nītiśataka, with its ten sections, focusses on the many aspects of human behaviour, which need to be studied deeply for moral teachings. The society which is made up of good moral values naturally has psychological wellness. This text showcases the ancient Indian wisdom, which helps not only the common man, but also the kings, the influencers and the people who are the leaders of the society.

Present paper is an attempt to understand the Nītiśataka as a guide to psychological wellness.

Keywords:

Nītiśataka, psychological wellness, ancient Indian wisdom, ethics, moral literature

Introduction

The psychological well-being has affected more than a billion people, contributing to 7% of the global burden of diseases [1].

global burden of diseases Since ancient times, the Sanskrit literature has been guiding the mankind to be in sync with the nature and to oneself. The ancient most Vedic literature was “seen” and not “written” by the seers. They saw the hymns in front of them and uttered the same. The Vedic hymns were mostly the praise of the natural forces like the Sun, the fire, the rains, the water etc. By this, the Vedic man tried to understand various forms of nature and their effects on his mind. The sacrificial fire was a means to take his demands to the Natural Form or Devatā in consideration. The fire took the oblations to the Devatā and the Devatā fulfilled his desires.

After the Vedic literature, the Rāmāyaṇa, The Mahābhārata and the Puranic literature continued the tradition of addressing the Devatās or the deities and in turn the man gained several material things from them. The abstract thing which was supposed to generate from the worship of theses deities was the “merit”. The whole idea of spiritual wellness revolved around obtaining the merit- the *Puṇya*. Thus, many later texts, basically the Puranic texts, discussed the actions which led to merit.

The meritorious deeds of a man need a certain harmony and peace of mind. The same harmony of mind is necessary for the psychological well-being of a person. The spiritual well-being of a person needs a certain psychological well-being of that person, without which the actions of a person will not be sound and approved by the society in general.

In Sanskrit literature, we find many such scriptures which talk about the moral rules and the mannerisms. The ancient Indian wisdom has contributed a lot to the mankind regarding the psychological wellness.

The Psychological wellness of a human being has been variously studied by scholars across the globe. While the physical wellbeing is well addressed and talked about, the psychological wellness is spoken about in narrower sense. It is the mental wellbeing of a human being. Various factors determine it. The socio-economic factors and the physical well-being are important among them. Since ancient times in India, psychological well-being has been given a lot of importance in terms of morality and good deeds. The common people, with the help of many good sayings, i.e., *subhāṣitas*, would get acquainted with the good mannerisms and good thoughts that were an integral part of the ancient Indian society. There are many compilations of *subhāṣitas*. Generally, the pattern of these *subhāṣitas* is such that there is some observation of the human behaviour and there is some conclusion drawn. Sometimes there is even some illustration or example from nature present in the verse.

Nītiśataka is a Sanskrit text of that kind. As the name suggests, it is a compilation of nearly one hundred verses, or some more, which are divided into 10 sections, i.e., *paddhati*, as they are called in the text. The word *paddhati* can also be divided as *pad* (the foot) and *hati* (the print). Thus, these ten sections are basically the ten approaches with which the surrounding situations are responded. The ten *paddhatis* are as follow-

1. *ajñāpaddhati*- the path of the ignorant ones
2. *vidvatpaddhati*- the path of the learned ones
3. *mānaśauryapaddhati*- the path of the self-respectables and the valorous ones
4. *arthapaddhati*- the path of the money
5. *durjanapaddhati*- the path of the bad people
6. *sujanapaddhati*- the path of the good people
7. *paropakārapaddhati*- the path of the benevolent people
8. *dhairyapaddhati*- the path of the brave ones
9. *daivapaddhati*- the path of the destiny
10. *karmapaddhati*- the path of the actions

The following paragraphs will discuss some of the verses in the *Nītiśataka* that lead to the psychological wellness of a person.

Literature Review:

The author of the *Nītiśataka* is *Bhartrhari*, an eminent Sanskrit poet. His date is supposed to be 1st century B.C. [2], however, this is not accepted by many. For this paper, the researcher has gone through the famous commentary and Marathi translation of *Nītiśataka*, by Aravind Mangarulkar and Digambar Moreshwar Hatvalane, published by S.R. Deshmukh in 1961. There are various commentaries of *Nītiśataka*, like *Nītipathā* by Pandit Rajeshvar

The composer salutes the form, that is beyond the space and time, and which is measured only by one's own perception.

2. The first division in the text- the behaviour of the ignorant ones- has several verses which guide a person to accept the behaviour of the ignorant and yet pride ones. Some of them are as follows-

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The meaning of the verse is as under- One may obtain oil even from the sands if they are properly crushed, a thirsty one can drink water from the mirage, one may find the horn of a hare; but one cannot please the mind of a foolish person, who is adamant.

The next verse in the same division, which will be considered is as follows-

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Its meaning is- An ignorant can be pleased easily. An expert can be pleased even more easily. But even the creator cannot please a person who is proud due to a small piece of knowledge one has.

The verses in this division collectively state that one can do many impossible or difficult things. But one cannot change the mind of a foolish person, who claims to be wise and appears arrogant.

3. The fourth verse in the second division, '*ambhojinīvanavilāsanivāsameva....*', states that the innate quality of a human being can never be ruled out or nullified or taken away by anyone. The verse is as follows-

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The meaning of the verse is as follows- An angry creator may destroy the stay of the swans in the lake full of loti, but he cannot take away his famous power of separating the milk and the water.

4. The second verse in the third division- '*svalpasnāyu...*' states the examples of a dog and a lion. The verse is as follows-

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The meaning of the verse is as follows- A dog, having obtained even a fleshless bone of a cow, which has left with less flesh, becomes happy, even though it does not suffice its hunger. The lion abandons the fox that has approached him and shows valour by killing the elephant. Thus, the poet concludes that all the living beings desire for a result which suits their valour.

The dog is contented with the smelling and soiled bone left with small amount of flesh. The lion does not pay attention to the fox, which has approached him. Instead, he tries to show his valour and kills the elephant.

5. The sixth verse in the fourth division '*parikṣīṇah...*' states that many people have different quantities of the essential things at different times. The verse is as follows-

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The meaning of the verse is as follows- The one who is very poor, wishes for a handful of grains. Afterwards, when he becomes rich with grains, thinks of the earth as insignificant. Therefore, the conditions of the wealthy people are varied, which depend upon the plenty and scarcity of the resources and it multiplies and contracts according to the availability of the resources.

One senses the same quantity of things depending upon the situation one is into.

6. The third verse in the fifth division ‘*jāḍyam...*’ states the various good qualities of a good person, like being quiet, valour etc. The verse is as follows-

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The meaning of the verse is as follows- The shyness of a good person is termed as dumbness, the observance of rule is considered as pride, the purity is sensed as the falsehood, the valour is thought as cruelty, the silence is thought as thoughtlessness, the sweet talk is thought as helplessness, the lustre is termed as arrogance, the good oratory is termed as talkativeness, the stable one is termed as non-ability. Thus, there is no quality of good people which has not been labelled as bad by the bad people.

The good people are considered the other way round, by the bad people. They always label the good qualities of the people as bad.

Discussion:

The above findings can be discussed in detail as under.

1. The *maṅgala śloka* does not salute any concrete form or any god as such, as is usually done on the scriptures [7]. It salutes the peaceful lustre i.e., the Supreme principle of *brahman*. It indicates the ability of the human being to focus on the abstract form, which in turn lead to the peace of mind, an important quality of the psychological wellness [8].
2. The verses in the first division, i.e., the behaviour of the ignorant ones, prepare the mind of the reader to accept the behaviour of the ignorant and proud people [9]. The acceptance of the behaviour of the ignorant yet proud people eventually lead one to the path of peace of mind, an important quality of psychological wellness.
3. The fourth verse in the second division of verses asserts one that the destiny or the bad luck can take away the comforts that one enjoys because of one’s ability. But it can never take away the abilities that one possesses. The verse in a way, assures one that one must never lose confidence in oneself. One must identify one’s qualities and boost one’s confidence. Confidence is a significant characteristic when one is thinking about one’s capacities. That quality certainly leads one to psychological wellbeing.
4. The second verse in the third division helps one fathom the behaviour of truly valorous people. It uses the metaphor of a dog and a lion. They both represent a specific mentality. A dog represents a mean mentality. It is happy even by a slightest

dirty flesh. It represents the people who become contented with very small or meagre thing. A lion, on the other hand, represents a category of courageous people, who do not like to be identified with other's valour and find out their own way of obtaining the things. When one comprehends the behaviour of the people around oneself, then one becomes more peaceful. The outcome of this verse is this. Being peaceful leads one to the psychological wellbeing [10].

5. The sixth verse in the fourth division is a special one. It in a way prepares one for difficult days in life. One may earn the same quantity of a thing. But depending upon the richness or poverty one is facing; the same quantity becomes more or less. When a man is very poor, he wishes only for a handful of grains. When he has an adequate quantity to eat, he considers the entire earth small and insignificant. Thus, here, a very important point is discussed that for one's psychological wellness, one must understand the scale of resources one has and its importance in one's life.
6. The third verse in the fifth division makes an important point. It states that however good you are, you will be labelled as bad by the bad people around you. It does not mean that you have bad qualities. It just means that the perception of your qualities by the people around you may differ. Your peace of mind should not get affected by it.

Conclusions:

Thus, with the above-mentioned examples from the text, the text of Nītiśataka is a guide to psychological wellness. It has been considered as a primary text for those who wished to learn Sanskrit. Thus, this also proves that the study of Sanskrit texts from the primary level was aimed at the psychological wellness of human beings. This text is no exception to this.

The relation between various factors that comprise of psychological wellness is seen directly or indirectly by the various verses in the text. It is clear from the discussion that the ancient Indian wisdom enabled each human being to handle his mind well. The verses like those in the Nītiśataka are scattered in plenty everywhere all through the Sanskrit literature. They are the lighthouses in the times of darkness of loss of confidence or any social stigma. One must try to absorb them fully into one's thoughts so that the psychological wellbeing of each person in the society is taken care of. By doing so, the society in total will be benefitted.

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