



EVOLUTION OF AYAR-E-DANISH

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ABSTRACT: *In the era of Persian literature when we talk about the history and evolution of Persian literary works, **Ayar-e-Danish** is amongst those famous literary works which has gained its popularity in the entire world. Ayar-e-Danish was written by Shaikh Abul Fazl Allami in 1588 A.d during the reign of Akbar which was considered as the golden period in the history of the Mughals. This literary work is translation of the famous Sanskrit book “Panchatantra” which is an ancient India collection of animal fables and often considered as a common folklore in India. There were many translations of the Panchatantra before Ayar-e-Danish and this article will highlight the various translations of this folklore and later it will elaborate the Ayar-e-Danish in a large scale. **HOW THE PANCHATANTRA JOURNEY STARTED IN IRAN?** Panchatantra is the famous book written by Pandit Vishnu Sharma. This book was first translated in the Pahlavi language by Hakeem Burzoy in the year 1550 titled as **Kartak-wa-Damnak**. The Arabic translation of this book was done by Abdallah ibn al-Muqaffa and it was given the title of **Kalilah-wa-Dimnah**. In the Kalila wa Dimnah, it is believed he deliberately used characters from other cultural contexts to suggest the need for political reform in the Abbasid period. Rudaki translated the Panchatantra in a poetic form under the order of the Sultan of the Samanid period, Abul Fazl Muhammad Balami. During the Ghaznavid period, Nasurullah Munshi Shirazi translated this famous folklore which is quite evident by the name of **Kalila-wa-Dimnah Behramshahi**. During the reign of Sultan Hussain Mirza, this folklore was translated by Mullah Waiz Hussain Kashfih and this translation was given the title of “**Anwar-e-Suhaili**”. After Anwar-e-Suhaili, this folklore was translated by Abul Fazl in the reign of Akbar deriving a title of “**Ayar-e-Danish**” which is considered as the most recent and most relevant translation of the Panchatantra.*

KEYWORDS: *Ayar-e-Danish, Panchatantra, Kalila-wa-Dimnah, Sultan Hussain Mirza, Iran, Abul Fazl*

*Kalila wa Demna’s or Ayar-e-Danish’s contribution to the Persian literature has been known by the different versions since the 6th century CE. The complexity between the new Persian version or a lost Sanskrit original and a lost Middle Persian translation have been studied since 1859 and it was during this time that German scholar Theodor Benfey who was considered as the pioneer of comparative folklore studies, published a translation of extant Sanskrit versions of the *Panchatantra*.*

The evolution Ayar-e-Danish in Persian literature showed how Iran mediated the diffusion of knowledge between the Indian subcontinent and the Mediterranean region. The earliest version of the Ayar-e-Danish or Panchatantra is preserved in Arabic which is said to have originated in the 6th and 8th century respectively. Theodor Benfey was the first to note that the Arabic translations of a lost Middle Persian version provide the only alternative for a lost Sanskrit original. The state of research regarding the *Panchatantra* which is in the



Sanskrit language is beyond the scope of translations, but it is believed that most of the Sanskrit scholars assume that the existence of Panchatantra in Sanskrit was original compiled by a single author though there is no proof to the fact. Sanskrit scholars also agree that the literary sources of the Panchatantra comprise both the technical literature of Hindu ethics and statecraft, such as the *Arthasashtra* attributed to Kauṭilya in 300 BCE, and the popular story-telling tradition as in the case of the *Jataka* tales that tells about the former lives of Buddha and in the historical epic the *Mahabharata*, animal fables have long served religious and didactic purposes as well.

In the year 570 CE, a Persian physician named Burzoy who was serving in the Sassanid kingdom of Persia was commanded to travel to India tracing the rumours of elixir of life. Burzoy came to India he found nothing but the book of wisdom. A book greatly sought by the King of Persia Khusroy I who ruled Persia from 531 to 579 CE. Burzoy succeeded in his endeavours to found his desired book of wisdom and then returned to Persia with the book and the knowledge he gained as well. This book was in turn written down by the king's wazir, Wuzurgmihr and included, at Burzoy's own request, the story of his journey to India.

The title is derived from the two jackals which appear in the first section of the Panchatantra. More than animal fables, the stories tell how to live a wise, good life, and were meant especially for princes born to rule. The similarities between the stories in the Panchatantra can be found with those in the *Aesop's Fables* and the *Jatakas*. The *Panchatantra* is among the most widely travelled and adorned of literary texts and different versions of it present in most of the languages in the world.

We know the existence of both books is due to the scholars who have worked on the topic, their various transliterations and versions over the centuries as well. It was Burzoy's book that formed the basis of the Arabic work written two centuries later (750 CE) titled *Khalil wa Dimnah*. This latter book was in turn copied several times, and formed the basic text from which later versions in New Persian language and in the various European languages were written and which exist today.

Dating the Panchatantra

Johannes Hertel prepared a comprehensive account of the Panchatantra's antecedents in the early 1920s where he used a text written in Sanskrit dated before 1200 CE. This Sanskrit text was written by a Jain monk of Gujarat named Purnabhadra. Johannes believed that Purnabhadra relied on an earlier version datable to a couple of centuries before his time, called the *Pancakhnayaka*. He also surmised that the Panchatantra's origins based on the similarity of tales in recessions, in Kashmir around 200 BCE – the version that is lost, as are subsequent versions soon after this, like the Sanskrit *Tantrakhayika* of Kashmir from the third century CE. He details the differences between the versions he made a reference and also how he came out by them. This fact of new additions is true how the Middle Persian version travelled too, as Francois De Blois (1990) who worked on Burzoy's work and its subsequent mutations showed.



De Blois believed that Burzoy's narration derived from the five books of the Panchatantra's (especially the *Tantrakhyayika* of the third century CE) and also some stories from the Mahabharata. Burzoy's book was lost but the stories and his own journey to India became the origin of the later different versions that appeared: a Syriac version titled *Kalilag Dammag* that had been transcribed after Burzoy's version of the book in Arabic, titled *Kalila wa Dimnah* by Abd-allah ibn al-Muqaffa (around 750 CE), the New Persian versions of this book was written in eleventh century and later it was also written in Greek too.

Burzoy's Journey

In the Arabic version of *the Ayar-e-Danish* – it was seen that half of its contents were based on the suggestion by De Blois, on the earlier works, while some are Al-Muqaffa's own additions – that forms the basic version of the text as it was written down later in other languages of West Asia and Europe from the eleventh century CE onwards.

The framed narrative stresses on how the stories travelled across all regions of the world. In this context it has travelled from Indo-European and Semitic languages. These versions are agreed when Burzoy took a journey to India at the king's behest and his recommendation for elixir of life – although in different ways. In another version of the book he wrote that, he made friend who steal it from the royal treasury, and Burzoy commits it to memory. In another case, it acquires more symbolic allusions, where the magical herbs he went in search of are actually books of wisdom that he brings back, including the one that will become the *Ayar-e-Danish*.

As the origins of the Panchatantra, Burzoy tells the story of a Chinese king and his adviser; the latter in turn tells him of a wise Indian king Rai Dabshalim. The king had a dream that directed him to travel eastward, where he finds, in a cave, a box that contains a message from another king (Syria) who gives the instruction him to travel to an island where a Brahmin Pandit named Bidpah impart the knowledge related to statecraft to him. The stories conveyed by the Pandit framed the basis of the book. The name was believed of Sanskrit origin – Vidyapati, a wise man, or a court pundit (in another allusion to the ancient Vishnu Sharma, the fabled narrator of these stories, in the first place).

The writer and heretic

Abd-allah ibn al-Muqaffa, who live most of his life in Basra, Iraq, died in 757 CE. He was executed by the Abbasid Caliph, Al-Mansur, on charges of treason. Basra was then in the time of flux and immense power shifts. Like his father before him, Al-Muqaffa first served the Ummayyads, rulers of Iraq, and thereafter, the Abbasids. By then Al-Muqaffa had already written several works that got large attention.

Beside the *Kalila wa Dimnah*, widely regarded as one of the earliest master works in Arabic prose, he had written other political texts too, one related to the behaviour of kings and on military strategy. In the *Kalila wa Dimnah*, it was believed that the deliberately use characters from other cultural contexts to suggest the need for political reforms in the Abbasid period.



Though his rendering of the fables in his own abstruse, oblique way did not lead to his execution, as historians agree, he was unpopular among the political elite. In later centuries, Al-Muqaffa also acquired a reputation for being a heretic. It is believed he translated the sixth century Zoroastrian religious prophet Mazdak, and was also known to be a follower of Manicheanism, named after the prophet Mani of the third century CE, who lived in the time of the early Sassanids and was executed by them. As the story goes, it was the caliph al-Mansur who was offended by the letter. Al-Muqaffa penned on behalf of the caliph's uncle; pleading for leniency after one of them (Abdullah ibn Ali) had rebelled against Al-Mansur's assumption of the Caliphate in 754 CE. It is believed al-Muqaffa had sneaked in concepts of political understanding and the need for patience (hilm) in dealing with rivals, but these fell on an insecure Al-Mansur's deaf ears. One of the stories of the *Kalila wa Dimnah*, it was believed, that it forms the basis of a secret brotherhood – the *Ikhwan al Safa* (Brethren of Purity) that came to Iraq in the tenth and eleventh centuries. He compiled an medieval encyclopaedia containing the knowledge of the sciences then known in the Greek and Persian world, It was written in epistolary form and its complete Arabic name is *Rasâ'il Ikhwân al-Safa' wa Khullan al-Wafâ'* (*Epistles of the Pure Brethren and the Sincere Friends*). The origin and identity of the scholars has always been debated, though it was believed they lived in Basra and also in Baghdad.

From Arabic to other versions

Between the eleventh and thirteenth century, al-Muqaffa's version was translated into Greek in 1080 CE by a physician servant in the Byzantine court at Constantinople called Symeon Seth. There were another versions in New Persian too, and then in Hebrew and old Spanish. This older Hebrew version became the source of the early European translations. The English translation by Sir Thomas North, written during the Elizabeth period, was based on the Italian one by Anton Francesco Doni and named *The Moral Philosophy of Doni*, popularly known as the *Fables of Bidpai* (the wise man who appears in Burzoy's version).

The Panchatantra at the Mughal Court

The New Persian language which was developed from the eighth century CE onward, saw several versions of the *Kalila wa Dimnah*. The poet Rudaki's verses appear in one of these versions in the tenth century CE. Beside Nasrullah Mustaufa, in the early sixteenth century (1504), it was Husain bin 'Ali al Waiz Kashefi who wrote his version titled *Anwar i Suhaili* (Lights of Canopus), while in the court of the Timurid ruler of Herat, Hussain Mirza Bayaqarah.

It was this version that serves for the base of Abul Fazal's *Iyar-i-Danish* (*Touchstone of Intellect*). There was another version of the *Panchatantra* that translated in Akbar's court: a Sanskrit version of Jain origin (perhaps the *Pancakhnayaka*, ninth century CE) by Mustafa Khaliqdad Abbasi. The translation was done in the scriptorium, called the "maktabkhana" where translators worked with their books and written materials. The translation itself followed an interesting method: Scholars of Sanskrit rendered it orally into a version of Hindi (perhaps Hindawi), which was then rendered into Persian. Among many other works that translated were the *Mahabharata*, as the *Razmnamah*, and *Singhsan Battisi*, translated as *Nama I Khirad Afza* (*The Wisdom-*



Enhancing Book): a kind of translation endeavour that would be replicated by Dara Shikoh later. The illustrations in the *Iyar-i-Danish* have some similarities with the older versions in Persia; as was well known, the artists at the Mughal court, especially from Humayun's time, were from Persia. While the Persian *Anwar i Suhaili* was used sometime as a textbook to train students at the East India Company College in Haileybury, the *Iyar-i-Danish* was translated into Urdu in 1803 by Maulvi Hafizuddin Ahmed and used for students at the Fort William College in Calcutta. This version was titled *Khiraad Afroz (The Illuminator of the Understanding)*.

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