

# Misrepresentation of Gender in Selected Panchatantra Tales

## OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 12

Special Issue: 1

Month: September

Year: 2024

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Citation:

Shanmathi, S.,  
and B. Sankar.

“Misrepresentation of  
Gender in  
Selected Panchatantra  
Tales.” *Shanlax*

*International Journal  
of Arts, Science and  
Humanities*, vol. 12,  
no. S1, 2024, pp. 81–82.

DOI:

[https://doi.org/10.34293/  
sijash.v12iS1-Sep.8341](https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v12iS1-Sep.8341)

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### Abstract

*The research article on Vishnu Sharma's Panchatantra wanted to prove that some tales are gender biased narratives. 'Panchatantra' is a collection of fables written by Vishnu Sharma in Sanskrit language. The book consists of five parts and it teaches the five essential skills in life. It is somewhat similar to the ancient text Chanakya's Needhi, which provides a straight forward perspective towards human life. These stories were specially written for the princes who will be crowned as kings in future. Since these tales teaches morality, the Panchatantra tales are widely being read by the children around the world. In that case, it is the responsibility of the author to provide an unbiased text to its readers. Unfortunately, Pandit Vishnu Sharma has projected women as wicked, evil or a submissive home maker. The main aim of this paper is to delineate how male characters are represented as symbol of power and wisdom, whereas women characters are bound to be weaker one, scurrilous, seductive and untrustworthy in nature.*

**Keywords:** Vishnu Sharma, Panchatantra, Patriarchy, Gender Discrimination

The Panchatantra was originally written by Vishnu Sharma, around 2300 years ago. It was translated by various writers into various languages around the world. The main goal of this text is to insist social and ethical values in the world. This text comes under the didactic literature. The purpose of didactic literature is to teach in an entertaining way. The research is done on the translated English version of G.L. Chandramani. The present study exposed that this ancient text Panchatantra is gender biased. This research article is to highlight how Vishnu Sharma exactly satisfied the patriarchal Indian society.

The text is crafted as per the historical and cultural customs of the ancient India. Men are projected as strong, wise, independent and authoritative, whereas women are depicted as submissive, cunning and manipulative. They are always depicted in two ways, one is helpless and the other type women are crooked mind who use others for their personal benefits. Only mother characters play a positive role, whereas the role of other females including wife characters are projected as cunning or sexual objects.

In (Mitralabha / The Gain of Friends) “The Unforgiving Woman” story, involves a woman who, despite being married, has an affair with another man. When her lover is caught and punished, she shows

no remorse and instead seeks revenge against those who exposed her. The tale portrays women as vengeful and unable to forgive or accept responsibility for their actions. In “The Merchant’s Wife and the Bawdy Parrot”, the tale revolves around a merchant’s wife who is secretly unfaithful. She tries to hide her affairs from her husband, but a talking parrot reveals her secrets. In anger, she kills the parrot, demonstrating her willingness to go to any lengths to conceal her infidelity. This story reinforces the stereotype of women as duplicitous and untrustworthy.

In Book 5, (Aparikshitakaraka): “The Faithless Wife” story is about a woman who has extra marital affair during her husband’s absence. On his returns, she tries to hide her crime by pretending to be loyal and loving. This story is used to warn men that they should not trust women easily. Women are projected as faithless and misleading. In “The Brahmani and the Mongoose”, A Brahmin’s wife, out of wrath and without thinking, killed the family of mongoose. The Brahmani mistakenly believed that the mongoose harmed her child. In reality, the mongoose had saved the child from a snake. The narrative serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of actions done without forethought. Through this tale, men are persuaded about the stereotype of women as irrational and emotional.

In “The Weaver’s Wife” (Kakolukiyam / Crows and Owls): This story describes a weaver’s wife who deceives her husband by pretending to be a devoted and pious woman. In reality, she is dishonest and uses her chance to meet her lover. This story is often used to create an awareness among men about the supposed nature of women as being disloyal and capable of deceiving.

These stories from Chandramani’s translation of the Panchatantra reflect the cultural and social norms of the time, particularly the negative attitudes toward women. They often serve as moral lessons intended to warn against trusting women, whom the tales portray as deceitful, unfaithful, and prone to causing harm through their actions. When such tales are narrated to children for the purpose of teaching moral, the children might believe all women are crafty, cunning and brainless. This portrayal contributes to the reinforcement of gender stereotypes and highlights the patriarchal context of the Panchatantra.

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