

LESSONS OF *NĪTĪŚATAKA* : SIGNIFICANCE AND RELEVANCE

Dr. Sanchita Guha*

Abstract

Sanskrit is an ancient and very rich language. Many more literary genres such as- drama, poetry, anthology of poems etc. have been written in this language. Literature is called the mirror of the society. The images of social, political, economical, ethical, cultural etc. of the then society are reflected in the literature. So, we can learn about these matters from the contemporaneous literatures. Nītiśataka of Bhartṛhari is one of the most important anthology of poems. There are many ethical teachings in Nītiśataka which are very much important and relevant to make our ethical life. To show the importance and relevance of the ethical lessons narrated in Nītiśataka is the aim of this research article.

Key-words: *Nītiśataka*, Significance, Relevance, Ethics, Lessons, Moral Education

Introduction

Indian sub-continent is the repository of the oldest civilizations of the world. Indian sub-continent is also known as the sacred place of the practice of knowledge. Many more intellectuals appeared in the old Indian civilization. They have contributed in the different fields with their own talent. One of the such old intellectual is Bhartṛhari. His approximate time is 1st century B.C (Bhowmik, 2018, p.51). One of the most important anthology of poems written by Bhartṛhari is *Nītiśataka*. There are so many verses in this book which bear various moral lessons and ethics.

Sanskrit poems have been divided into two classes firstly- *Dr̥śyakāvya* (Visible poem) and *Śrabyakāvya* (Audible poem). *Dr̥śya* means worthy of being played or acted as if- *Nāṭaka*, *Prakaraṇa* etc. *Śrabyakāvya* is divided into two classes- Poetry and Prose. Poetry is divided into various classes, such as- epic, anthology of poems, imperfect poems etc. In the anthology of poems the verses are not dependent on each other. The verses are

* Associate Professor, Department of Sanskrit, University of Dhaka.

independent and bearer of a special thought. That means every verse contains a different meaning. About anthology of poems it is stated in the *Sāhityadarpaṇa* of Viśvanāthakavirāja that –

Chandovaddhapadaṃ padyaṃ tena muktena muktakam. 6/301
(Bandyopadhyā, 2011, p.184)

Śatakakāvya is one kind of anthology of poems. Usually we can see hundred individual verses in śatakakāvya which contain different individual meaning. These kinds of poems are also called the well-organized collection of various meaningful verses. There are many śatakakāvyas in Sanskrit literature such as- *Śṛṅgāraśataka*, *Nītiśataka*, *Vairāgyaśataka*, *Amruśataka*, *Sūryaśataka*, *Śāntiśataka*, *Caṇḍiśataka*, *Apadeśaśataka*, *Amṛtaśataka*, *Apadeśyaśataślokaṃ* *ālikā*, *Kīrtiśataka* etc. *Nītiśataka* of Bhartṛhari is an important well organized collection of different verses which contain different meaningful thoughts. According to different editions the numbers of verses are also different. There are more than one hundred verses (approximately 102-138 according to different editions) in the *Nītiśataka*.

It is clearly apparent from the name of the *Nītiśataka* that there are so many ethical words or instructions in this book. People have to face different problems in daily life. How a person can get relief from these problems or what to do and what not to do in these situations, we can learn these from the verses of the *Nītiśataka*. The teachings or moral lessons of these ethical verses can make our daily life more beautiful and meaningful. In the present time, our daily life is very complicated and it's going to be more complicated day by day. But the importance of these ethical verses has not diminished in our practice of daily life. The ethical proverbs of the *Nītiśataka* are how much relevant and significant in the second decade of the twenty first century also, will be cited in this research article. The subject matter will be discussed in some different points, such as- Importance of education and knowledge, Self-esteem, Characteristics and duties of a good person, importance of money, Importance of action, Duties in our daily life etc. To build our daily life snugly and to build an ethical life the teachings of the *Nītiśataka* is very much relevant. So, to justify the significance and relevance of the lessons stated in the *Nītiśataka* and to shade light on how we can make our daily life meaningful and peaceful by practicing these valuable lessons, is the aim of this article.

Importance of Education and Knowledge

Knowledge is an unparalleled treasure of human life. He who acquires this knowledge adequately is a scholar. Real knowledge can only be achieved by practicing. It is the greatest asset one can have. No kinsman can loot this, no thief can steal this, nor does it get decayed if given. According to Bhartṛhari -

Ambhōjinībananivāsavilāsamēva
 haṃsasya hanti nitāraṃ kupitō vidhātā.
 Na tbasya dugdhajalabhēdāvidhau prasiddhām
 baidagdhyakīrtimaparhatumasai samarthaḥ. 18 (Bhowmik, 2018, p.87)

That is, an enraged God can diminish the merriment of the geese while frolicking in the lotus forest but he can not diminish their natural ability to distinguish water and milk.

Therefore, we should always strive to seek knowledge. We should never get tired of acquiring knowledge. It is true knowledge that makes one, a person of firm temperament and elevated characteristics. External attire and jewels can enhance the outward beauty of a person, but the true knowledge acquired through proper education can make a person pure by mind as well as a real wise person at the same time. A Life without knowledge is invalid. Uneducated people are worse than animals. It is stated in the *Nītiśataka*-

Vidyā nāma narasya rūpamadhikam pracchannaguptam dhanam
 vidyā bhōgakarī yaśaḥsukhakarī vidyā gurūṇām guruḥ.
 Vidyā bandhujanō bidēśagamane vidyā parā devatā
 vidyā rājasu pūjitā na tu dhanam vidyāvihīnaḥ paśuḥ. 20 (Bhowmik, 2018, p.88)

That is, Knowledge is the greatest glory and secretly preserved treasure. Knowledge ensures enjoyment, happiness and fame. It is the master of the masters. It is a friend in exile. It is the absolute divinity. It is knowledge and not wealth that is appreciated in the court. A man without any knowledge is comparable to an animal.

On the other hand, a knowledge deprived imbecile is quite dangerous. Because, it is not possible to please a person who is ignorant or proud of little knowledge. Even it is impossible to conquest a fool even after hundreds of attempts. If a scholar ever try to revive some wisdom in a

foolish person to bring him back to the right path, even he has to endure various reproaches. According to Bhartrhari-

Śakyo vārayitum jalena hutabhuk chatreṇa sūryātapo
Nāgendo niśitāṅkuṣeṇa samado daṇḍeṇa gogardabhau.
Vyādhirbheṣajasamgrahaiśca vividhairmantraprayogairviṣam
Sarvasyaauśadhamasti śāstravihitam mūrkhasya nāstyauśadham. 11
(Bhowmik, 2018, p.85)

That is, fire by water, sunshine by umbrella, maddened elephant by a sharp rod, cows & donkeys by a staff, diseases by herbal medicines, venom by vivid chants can be alleviated. All these has a scriptural remedies but there is no remedy for a foolish person.

A foolish person can do no good to the society. Rather he is completely useless and more of a burden for a society. People of these kind often indulge themselves in hatred towards each other covering their good qualities. Not they can understand the relevance of true knowledge. That's why it's stated in the *Nītiśataka*-

Varam parbatadurgeṣu bhrāntam vanacaraiḥ saha.
Na mūrkhajanasamparkaḥ surendrabhabaneṣvapi. 14 (Bhowmik, 2018, p.86)

The *Nītiśataka* has not only described the importance of knowledge and blamed the foolish but also shown us the actual position of a wise person. If any renowned scholar has to live poorly in a country, it is only the king who is to blame and should feel ashamed. Because, a scholar is rich without having any kind of materialistic wealth. People who do not acknowledge the scholars should be discredited. So, if one can bless himself with true knowledge and become a scholar, he will be felicitated in his own land and elsewhere and he does not have to face any danger at home and abroad.

The lessons mentioned in the *Nītiśataka* are still very much relevant after so many years. Knowledge is bound not only in reading books, it is a matter of practice but also. Because, it is not possible to acquire true knowledge without practicing regularly. Nowadays we are becoming more and more unethical due to the lack in such practice. Our society is hollow from inside because of the malpractice of knowledge. On the contrary, the foolish and ignorant of the society is making chaos with the help of their power and money. The educated mass is being humiliated in the process of imparting wisdom among the foolish. The usual flow of gathering

knowledge is also being hampered in the due process. A wise person is not being acknowledged in the manner he deserves rather he is being deprived. But, even in the ancient time a scholar's position in the society was much higher than that of a king's in order to realize the importance of education and knowledge. So, if we can understand the significance of the moral proverbs of *Nītiśataka*, we will definitely understand the actual value of knowledge. To help a person becoming wise, confident and gain characteristics, these moral proverbs are immense significant.

Self-esteem

True knowledge is a great treasure. A man bestowed with such knowledge automatically become very comprehensive and self-esteemed. He always stays steady. He never discloses any of his feelings like-financial loss, emotional pain, deprivation, humiliation etc. to others. Self-esteem has been explained in the *Nītiśataka* with the help of many examples. Such as- A lion doesn't do anything that is not brave. They do according to their ability. On the contrary, a dog is pleased easily by gaining little things. He expresses his gratitude by rolling over and flipping the tail before his Lord. Then again, Gajarāja (The king of the elephant) never expresses his hardship to God, Rāhu only engulf the sun and the moon of all other stars. Forgetting about his thunder strike father Maināka (Son of the Himalaya) hides himself in the sea. But a lion cub although being very small in comparison to an elephant gets into a fight without hesitating. All these instances prove that self-esteem is a matter of pride. It is the habit of the brave to prioritise self-esteem than insult. A self-esteemed person always thinks before acting upon anything. He never compromises his dignity. He is never corrupted, he never compromises his goals, rather sacrifices his life and wealth for the wellbeing of his country and countrymen. A self-esteemed person does not boost of his family and wealth. It is stated in the *Nītiśataka* -

Parivartini saṃsāre mṛtaḥ ko vā na jāyate.

Sa jāto yena jatena yāti baṃṣaḥ samunnatim. 32 (Bhowmik, 2018, p.93)

That is, in this ever changing world we all come and go. But only those who bring glory to their families are successful.

To a neutral true self-esteemed person the earth feels like heaven. All the time he is unchanged by heart, speech and deed. He does not take a step back during hard times. Their greatest treasure is their qualities and

dignity. Only a man of quality is a man of self-esteem. They rise above all sorts of lust and desire and work for the betterment of humanity.

In our present society people with self-esteem are seldom seen. Social equivalence and un-avaricious is not experienced very often in today's society. Wealth, riches and power are the only desired things of this era. We are much more excited about achieving these earthly things. People are so much invested in these things that they are willing to sacrifice even their conscience and dignity above all the self-esteem. They do not realise that it is better to die than live a life without dignity. Lack of self-esteem is in the roots of all these thoughts. But a self-esteemed person never compromises with injustice and suppression. It is stated in the *Nitiśataka*-

Kusumastabakasyeva dvayī vṛttirmanasvinaḥ.

Mūrdhni vā sarvalokasya viśīryeta vanethavā. 33 (Bhowmik, 2018, p.93)

That is, a dignified person can have two consequences, either he'll be adored by everyone or be wasted in wilderness.

Moreover, there are few dignified people who desire to continue their work for the society, country and humankind, but they are falling among all these chaos. So, the human beings are facing a downfall. Hence, the moral lessons mentioned in the *Nitiśataka* is more relevant and significant than ever.

Characteristics & Duties of a Qualitative Person

A good person is appreciated everywhere in the society. A good person is well-behaved, modest and self-restraint. He always acts according to circumstances. Many more qualities like- extreme patience, indifference, eloquence, bravery, desire for knowledge etc. are seen in a good person. He is never corrupted. Truth is his companion of the course. He continues to perform his duties secretly. They do not show off while doing charity. They consider these things as their duties. On the contrary, a wicked person is generally cruel. Cruelty, quarrel, various addictions are their natural habits. They are jealous of gentlemen and relatives. It is their nature to find faults in all the good deeds of a good person. Let alone evaluating any good deed, they are always trying to figure out how to spoil it. There is no way to please them. Even if a wicked person is scholar, there is no happiness in being around him. According to the *Nitiśataka* -

Durjanaḥ parihartavyo vidyayā bhūṣitoapi san.

Maṇinālaṃkṛtaḥ sarpaḥ kimasau na bhayaṅkaraḥ. 53 (Bhowmik, 2018, p.100)

That is, even if adorned with knowledge, the wicked person should be avoided. For example, even though the gem is adorned, the snake is terrible.

Even after hundreds of attempts, a wicked person cannot change into real human being. So, the wicked should never be trusted.

On the other hand, gentle and virtuous people continue to work for the welfare of the society and the country in silence. The gentleman is adorned like a pearl on a lotus leaf. The sages make them at ease and subdue people, they become merciful to all living beings. The truly virtuous persons live in the present and are always a novice in human welfare. They consider wealth to be grass, but do not bow down in knowledge. It is mentioned in the *Nītiśataka*—

Sampatsu mahatām cittam bhabatyutpalakomalam.

Āpatsu ca mahāsailaśīlāsamghātakarkaśan. 66 (Bhowmik, 2018, p.104)

That is to say, the heart of a good human being in wealth is as soft as a lotus flower and as hard as a huge mountain-rock in danger.

The same attitude is observed in today's society. Even today, the wicked are jealous of others' progress. The society and the country are hampered by the misdeeds of these evil people. Giving advice to all these wicked people means scattering pearls in vain. And in the midst of all these evils, the real gentleman, the virtuous person is seldom seen. However, all these virtuous people are devoted to human welfare in all respects. The real virtuous and noble persons do not shy away from their duties in the temptation of any worldly thing. Therefore, if we can learn from the descriptions of the *Nītiśataka* and identify the real virtuous people and leave the bad company, then our daily path can be very smooth and beautiful. It has been stated in the *Nītiśataka* -

Ārambhagurvī kṣayiṇī krameṇa laghvī purā vṛddhimatī ca paścāt.

Dinasya pūrvārdhaparārdhabhinnā chāyeva maitrī khalasajjanānām. 60 (Bhowmik, 2018, p.102)

That is, the friendship of the wicked and the righteous is like the shadow of the dawn and dusk of the day respectively. The friendship of the wicked is initially extensive, but gradually fades. And the gentlemen's friendship is weak at first and then grows furthermore with the passage of time.

Importance of money

Money means wealth, money is the glory. Importance of money can't be denied in the way of life. This is the root of all earthly happiness. Nothing is fascinating without the glory of money. Heroic person can be valueless without the power of wealth. There is a saying in the *Nīṭisataka* -

Yasyāsti vittaṃ sa naraḥ kulīnaḥ
sa paṇḍitaḥ sa śrutavān guṇajñaḥ.
Sa eva vaktā sa ca darśanīyaḥ
sarve guṇāḥ kāñcanamāśrayante. 41 (Bhowmik, 2018, p.96)

That is, the person who has wealth is the elite, the scholar, the excellence, the orator and attraction to all. Quality revolves around money.

Pleasure of rich is the fruition of his wealth. But it is recommended to donate wealth along with enjoyment. Without donating someday all the wealth maybe destroyed. Even so, many of the rich people deny to donate a single penny. They want to grapple their wealth like Yakṣa and try to increase the amount by any means. Even they adopt unfair ways to gain prosperity. They think that money is everything. Money is the universe to them.

On the contrary, those who have no money, their sufferings have no bound. They are neglected to everyone. Even, their relatives or friends don't give any value to them. It doesn't matter if they belong to a reputed family. Whatever a person is wealthy or poor, he should be patient. He needs to deal with the reality with controlling his temper. Because, the wealth for one's own is specified by God, he will get that at any situation. So, it is not recommended to act as poor in front of rich. Rather it's better to be satisfied with what we have. But sometimes, a poor person can improve his condition with hardworking. In that case, he needs to be empathetic to all remembering his past condition. He should help the other poor people also. Mostly it happens, but sometimes the opposite takes place. Poor becomes rich all of a sudden and loses the knowledge of good and evil. They forget everything about what to do or what to say. World becomes negligible to them like grass. Therefore, it is proven that the value of anything is fixed on the availability or unavailability of money.

The above mentioned issues regarding money reflect in current society also. Like before, rich and wealthy persons are the centre point of power. They can do anything with the power of wealth. Even it doesn't matter if

they are guilty in different cases. Similarly, sufferings of the poor people in current society are beyond description. Poor people are neglected in this age too. Even, suddenly becoming rich by unfair means is not rare now adays. Sometimes it is seen that someone becomes rich all of a sudden and shows off their wealth. So, it is confirmed that the balanced distribution of wealth is not maintained in any age. The discrimination between rich and poor was in past remains same at current age. But it is not worthy to consider money or wealth such important. However, everybody should be satisfied with their condition.

Importance of action

Divinity is an innate human instinct. Divinity depends on fate. When any matter goes beyond the control of man, the word divine dependence is repeatedly heard in the mouth of man. But in *Nītiśataka*, action has been said to be stronger than luck. Because, human destiny is a subject to action. It has been said in the *Nītiśataka* that man's destiny is determined by his deeds- ‘vidhirbandyaḥ soapi pratiniyatakarmaikaphaladaḥ’99 (Bhowmik, 2018, p.115). So it is to say, if man can accumulate virtue by his deeds, then that virtue controls the law of man in reincarnation. Divine dependence can be heard more in the mouths of lazy and inactive people of the society. Action is the main thing for a truly wise person. If we do not act properly, no achievement is possible in human life. It’s stated in the *Nītiśataka* -

Naivākṛtiḥ phalati naiva kulamnaśīlam
vidyāpi naiva na ca yatnakṛtāpi sevā.
Bhāgyāni pūrvatapasā khalu sañcitāni
kāle phalanti puruṣasya yathaiva vṛkṣāḥ. 101 (Bhowmik, 2018, p.116)

That is, beauty, lineage, knowledge, service etc. are not fruitful at all, but the previously accumulated good deeds bear fruit in time like a tree.

By action man is able to improve his own destiny and also to do great good for the world. Good deeds can turn the wicked into good, the fool into a scholar, the enemy into an ally, the indirect into direct and even the sharpest poison into nectar. As long as people live in good health, they will have to continue doing good deeds. Because, action connects between this world and hereafter of a man indeed. Being born as a human being on earth is a very virtuous aspect of life. So, even if a person is born without

work in this working land, then there is no one as unfortunate as him. Because, no one is liberated without action. Therefore, every action should be performed thoughtfully. Because, the action which is done in extreme haste can lead anyone to death. The destiny of man in this world is determined according to his deeds. Just like wise people rely on fate for their own destiny, so they rely on action to improve their destiny. Action is the key to them. It is through action that they improve their destiny.

Even in our society, there is a constant conflict between action and destiny. Some people sit idle, sacrificing everything of life to fate. They always sit down for blaming fate, and even blame fate for all the accidents that happened to them. But in no way do they try to improve their destiny. But if they tried to improve their fortunes by working, it would be very beneficial not only for themselves but also for the society and the country. On the other hand, in today's society, it is not uncommon for people who are not only dependent on fortune but are always engaged in work for their own betterment. They believe that the welfare of society, nation and country is possible only through the real good deeds. If man continues to work relentlessly, then his fortune is inevitable. Therefore, the conflict between the deeds and the destiny described in the *Nītiśataka* is also observed in the present society. So, just as the predominance of action is especially evident in the *Nītiśataka*, so too, if we give precedence to action in life, then destiny will be auspicious. And, good fortune means the development of human life. Hence, the development of the country and the nation is inevitable.

Duties in Our Daily Life

In our everyday life we have to go through different situations. Some of them bring happiness, some bring sorrows. So, we have keep patience in our daily life. Patience is a great virtue. People can achieve success through patience. It is mentioned in the *Nītiśataka*-

Ratnairmahārhaistuturṣurna devā
na bhejire bhīmabiṣeṇa bhītim.
Sudhām vinā na prayayurvīrāmaṃ
na niścītārthādvīramanti dhīrāḥ. 80 (Bhowmik, 2018, p.109)

That means, the deities were not happy after finding jewels from the sea. They keep searching for the nectar with patience. Like that, person with patience never get happiness until he has found his nectar.

Patient persons can cope up with every situation of life. If necessary they can live on vegetables and sleep on muddy floor, as well as if they have the opportunity, they can take delicious foods and sleep in royal palace also. So, he may lead a poor life when needed and he can also cope up with the elite class. They do not feel depressed in bad moments. Good characters and good manners are their basic qualities. They never show pride about their wealth, money, knowledge. They never go astray. They can achieve everything. They never feel down. It's also mentioned in the *Nītiśataka*-

Kadarthitasyāpi hi dhairyavṛtte-
rṇa śakyate dhairyaguṇaḥ pramārṣtum.
Adhōmukhasyāpi kṛtasya bahne-
nādhāḥ śikhā yāti kadācīdeva. 84 (Bhowmik, 2018, p.110)

That means, virtue of a patient person never get destroyed. A fire never low down its head so does a patient man.

So, we have to keep patience in our daily life. We have to be aware about our duties and responsibilities. We have to keep connection with many people in our daily path and we must know about all kind of people. We need support from the good people as well as we should keep distance from the bad people. But we should not judge people according to their character rather help them both. We should have a good knowledge about the religious scriptures and help the poor. We should not avoid the bad people totally rather we may advise them to be good. On the other hand, we have to strive to serve the good people, to appreciate and praise them among the society and we should not disclose their secrets rather their good qualities. It is our duty to try to help other people always in daily life. Without these we should always tell the truth, abstain ourselves from sin and keep in touch with the knowledgeable people. We should not fall for greed. Many people have gone astray for their greed.

We should get up and give up our laziness. Many people just care about their own interests but the real people are those who leave their own interest for the sake of people. People have to be polite, helpful and keep away from saying bad words. They should take proper care of their parents, wives and children and also perform the needful duties to their families. It is also necessary to show due respect to all of the people of the society and to be committed to do good deeds. They should be strict about truth and never leave truth at any cost. People get inspired by seeing the works of others and become aware of their own duties to the society. They should not aware of their own benefit only, but they have to be aware

always about the rights of the other people, wellbeing of the society and country as well.

In the course of daily life, all these lessons learned from the *Nītiśataka* are so relevant and significant in the context of present society. One has to know thyself, know about the surrounding society and human beings. We have to live our life keeping our heads high and awaking our conscience. We should never ask for the help of others under any circumstances. Because, it destroys our respect. We should be always in the path of truth and justice. The struggle for the truth and justice cannot be abandoned, no matter how difficult it is. We have to serve the humanity with all the obstacles. Instead of leaving the bad people, we have to keep in touch with them and try to get them back to the right path with patience. We have to make proper use of all of our good qualities. If every duties and responsibilities are done properly then life would be easy, beautiful and smooth. And that is why, the importance of the learning of *Nītiśataka* is immense to beautify the way of daily life and to ensure the welfare of the country and the nation.

Our society is changing in tandem with the changing times. We are coping up and moving forward with the advancement of science and technology. But keeping pace with all the modern conveniences, we should not forget our real position, real education and past learning. If morality and sense of duty are connected with modernity and increasing development, then the trend of development is bound to be pioneering. That is, if the classical learning match up with the modern learning then development is a must. The topics covered in the article are as relevant today as they were in ancient times. That is why, it is very important to understand the real teachings of morality in the context of the present age. Therefore, we believe that all these lessons of the *Nītiśataka* are very relevant and significant for maintaining the discipline of the society and reaching the highest peak of development of the country and world as well.

References

- Bandyopadhyaya, SriAshokkumar (ed.). *Sāhityadarpaṇaḥ*. Kolkata: Sadesh, 2011. Changed edition.
- Bhowmik, Dulal (ed.). *Bhartrihari Nitishatak*. Dhaka: Jatiya Sahitya Prakash, 2018.
- Shastri, Dr. Gourinath (ed.). *Sanskrit Sahitya Sambhar* (16th khanda). Kolikata: Navapatra Prakashan, 2014. 4th print.
- Bandyopadhyaya, Dhirendranath. *Sanskrit Sahityer Itihas*. 2nd edition. Kolkata: Pascimbanga Rajya Pustak Parshat, 2012. 5th reprint.