

Sarameyavinoda in Manasollasa: Dogs for Recreation and Hunting

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Abstract

The encyclopedic work of the Chalukya King Someshvardeva (12th century AD) has 31 couplets on “dog as a source of recreation”. We have prepared this analytical article after translating the couplets in English. Though dog was never a pet animal with common folks, in ancient and medieval India its usefulness was well-appreciated.

Manasollasa (happiness of mind), also known as *Abhilashitarthachintamani* (*abhilashita artha-chintamani*, a “thought-stone” yielding its possessor information on almost anything he desires), is ascribed to the Chalukya king Someshvardeva of the 12th century AD (Shrigondkar, 1939). It is a well-known encyclopedic work in Sanskrit. In this voluminous text, information on various topics of different branches of knowledge – particularly of interest to the medieval kings of India – is culled together. It consists of five sections further subdivided into chapters. Each section has twenty chapters and is named *vimshati* (a group of twenty).

Sarameyavinoda (Dogs for recreation) is the eleventh chapter of the fourth *vimshati*. It is a small piece of composition consisting of thirty-one couplets in the popular Anushtubh

meter dealing with ‘dog as a source of recreation’. This is one of the several royal recreations described in this section. As a matter of fact the contents of the text under question do not justify the title as dogs by themselves are not described here as means of independent recreation as the title would suggest. *Mrigaya* or hunting is the main royal recreation and dogs being especially useful for locating, attacking, and catching forest animals, the author has devoted an independent chapter to the topic.

Dog is believed to be the first animal domesticated by man approximately 15,000 years ago. References to dog–man association are documented in the Vedic literature (earliest, Rigveda, c. 8000 BC), which is the earliest extant literature of any branch of the Indo-European family.

Vedic literature

There are specific references to dog in Vedic literature:

- Dog was a tamed animal. (Rigveda II-39-4) (Sontakke and Kashikar, 1933–51)
- Dogs with yellow or white coat mentioned. (Rigveda VII-55-2)
- Dog protected dwellings of people from thieves and aliens. (Rigveda VII-55-5)
- Dogs were particularly great assets in hunting hogs. (Rigveda X-86-4)
- They were unable to attack lions. (Atharvaveda IV-36-6) (Satavlekar, 1917)
- They were considered unholy in the sacrificial rituals. (Rigveda IX-101-1)
- In the horse sacrifice several animals along with the horse were ritually slaughtered but in the long list of animals and birds ranging from tiger and wolf down to cats, goats and so on, dog is not mentioned. However, after the horse is let loose to proclaim the sovereign rule of the king, the performer of the

sacrifice, a dog is slaughtered symbolically pronouncing the punishment for anyone who should obstruct the path of the horse defying the king's sovereignty. (Yajurveda; Taittiriya Samhita 7.1–5)

- In Krishna Yajurveda (c. 7000 BC) there is a mention of several types of humans offered to different Vedic deities in the *Purushamedha* (human sacrifice). 'Shvanita' (one who earns his livelihood by exhibiting acrobatics of dogs for entertaining people) is mentioned as an offering for a deity responsible for taking away human life. (This list of the human oblations consists of individuals with physical or mental deformities or of those whose conduct is against the set rules and conventions or who for one reason or other are looked down in society. Incidentally, it is also believed that after tying these humans to the sacrificial post and reciting the relevant Vedic mantras they were set free, the offering ceremony being only symbolically performed.) (Ketkar et al. 1921)
- Dog's flesh was eaten only as a last resort under most severe circumstances. (Rigveda IV-18-13)
- Dogs were employed to retrieve lost cattle (property). (Rigveda I-62-3; X-108-1 to 11)

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This last mentioned reference alludes to the famous story of Sarama, a female dog of that name in the service of Indra who helped Brihaspatis to retrieve their cows stolen by Panis (thieves). (This story is repeated in different versions in the later Vedic literature.) The story brings out many other

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great qualities of dog such as loyalty, honesty, courage, bravery, a special knack of following the track of persons, animals or objects with a sense of smell, readiness to suffer strenuous physical exertion to achieve the goal, intelligence (to argue and negotiate in this context), selfless service, communication skill, integrity of character and implicit obedience to the master, absence of greediness, etc. (In fact, the story is quoted now in the management parlors as an example of many of the desirable qualities and skills required for a successful career.) It is also noteworthy that the importance of the role played by Sarama in the story left an indelible mark on the public memory and in later period she is considered the ancestor of dogs as is implicit in the Sanskrit word, 'saarameya' (progeny of Sarama) for 'dog'.

While in the Vedic period people must have discovered and appreciated many great qualities of dog it is only a utilitarian role that it appears to play in their life. Apparently references to dogs being tamed just for pleasure and pastime are not documented.

A categorical taboo on any contact with dog, however, appears to be a later development. In the Smriti literature, for example, dog is considered unholy and outcaste. It is

watchfully kept away from auspicious ceremonies and rituals as should be clear from the following disparaging references to dog in Manusmriti (c. 200 BC) (Acharya, 1946). Some of these are worth noting in this context:

- A Brahmin taming dog for recreation must not be invited for meals in connection with rituals performed for gods or manes. (III-164)
- If a dog passes through the space in between the preceptor and the disciple during the teaching session, further teaching should be suspended for a day and a night. (IV-126)
- A good Brahmin must never eat in the house of those who nurture dogs. (IV-216)
- Hunting is the only activity when contact with dogs can be tolerated and approved. Flesh of an animal killed by dogs is acceptable. (V-130, 131)
- Dogs and donkeys should be reared only by the *Chandalas* (the untouchables) and the *Shvapakas* (the dog-eaters, people belonging to the outcaste tribes) who must reside on the outskirts of villages and towns. (X-51)
- If Vamadeva, Bharadwaja, and Vasishtha (names of sages) ate dog's flesh, it was only when they had no other

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recourse for saving their life (X-106-108) and they had to observe severe vows for expiating their sin.

- He who steals belongings of a Brahmin is reborn as a dog after death. (XII-62)
- If a Brahmin eats even unknowingly the food previously licked by a dog, he must observe vows for purification. (XII-159)
- Bitten by dog, a Brahmin must perform *pranayama* (ritualistic yogic breathing) for purification. (XI-200)

Hindu mythology

Animals play a significant role in the Vedic and post-Vedic religious rituals. Those which are relevant here are noted below:

- Yama, a Vedic deity associated with death is believed to have two dogs in his service, one, gray with black stripes and the other, black (or reddish according to some versions). He is designated as '*shvashva*' (= one riding a dog for a horse). The two dogs are believed to keep track of the humans entering the path of the other world after death. (Rigveda VII-55)
- Bhairava, the chief attendant of Shiva is also associated with a pair of dogs.
- In the later period, Dattatraya, a deity believed to be an incarnation of the

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trinity (Brahma–Vishnu–Mahesha) is associated with four dogs considered (quite paradoxically) to represent the four Vedas.

- In the Mahabharata (3000 BC) only a dog (believed to be Yama, his father) accompanies the eldest of the Pandavas, Dharmaraja, till the end of his path to heaven (Mahaprasthanika Ch III, Swargarohana Ch III) (Potdar, 1948).
- The Puranas (200 BC to 750 AD) are replete with stories of dog in several contexts.

Panchatantra

The Panchatantra (c. 200 BC) is one of the earliest Sanskrit texts to cross the borders of India through translations in different languages. It is a collection of didactic fables in which most of the edifying teachings are illustrated metaphorically through the tales of animals and birds. Lion, cat, wolf, tortoise, hare, doves, crows and so on are chosen here as the characters to convey the moral of the story. This is one Sanskrit text in which it would be very natural to expect frequent allusions to dog. What is surprising, however, is the near absence of dogs in it although they are known for their oldest association with man and the story of

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Sarama in all probability had paved the way for such animal tales. Out of the tales numbering about seventy (Acharya, 1950), dog acts only in one story of Book IV (which brings out a moral that even during adversity, one must not leave one's home land).

Brhatsamhita of Varahamihira

Brhatsamhita (6th century AD) contains references to several animals and birds in different contexts (Source: Varahamihirasya Brihat Samhita in sanskrit.gde.to/all_pdf/varbrhs.pdf). Chapters 60 to 66 independently describe characteristic features of seven animals/birds: cow, dog, cock, tortoise, goat, horse, and elephant. The intention behind this selection is not discernable. Chapter 61 is about dogs. It consists only of two verses one referring to male dogs and another referring to female. Being one of the earliest references to taming of dogs, it is worth noting here in detail:

- A dog who possesses five claws on three of its legs with the right front foot having six, whose lips are red, nose fierce-looking, gait like that of a lion, tail hairy, eyes resembling those of a bear, ears long (or hanging), and soft, and who

smells the ground while walking, brings enormous wealth for his master who rears him up in his house. (61-1)

- A female dog with two white spots above the eyes, who has five claws on the three of her feet and six on the left front foot, whose tail is curved, ears long (or hanging), reddish brown, when brought up and tamed (by a king) guards the entire territory under his rule. (61-2)

Besides these two verses a complete chapter (Chapter 88) consisting of twenty verses is about good and bad omens as indicated by various movements, actions, and cries of dogs. Most probably these were stray dogs whose sight and movements are unforeseen.

Gradually, as the influence of religious and social taboos and conventions receded, animals and birds were treated more amicably and many of them were tamed just for amusement and recreation not only by royal families but also by common people.

Hamsadeva's Mriga.pakshi.sashtra

Mriga.pakshi.sashtra (MPS) (13th century AD) is probably the first ever text on animals and birds (Sadhale and Nene, 2008). The author's approach to the subject here shows a marked difference in attitude not only towards dogs but towards the subhuman species, as a whole. He had a feeling of genuine affection towards them. Some of his opinions could even be interpreted as reaction to views held earlier by orthodox

communities. “People who hate these creatures miss a great deal of happiness and pleasure in life. They are in fact bereft of dharma and are worst sinners. Hence people should protect animals as per their ability. It is an act that is conducive to righteousness, fame, long life, and good prospects here and hereafter” (MPS I-978, 979). These words of the author Hamsadeva suggest that he could be vindicating his stand to controvert the religious backing which many people sought to justify their hatred, cruelty, and despise for the lower species. The author here is even concerned with the preservation of all the species of animals, which he states is a bounden duty of everyone. Animals and birds in their old age become useless for man both as sharing his workload and as a source of recreation. The author here advises man to take care of them even if he ceases to derive the benefits. This approach of the author to the subhuman species is totally positive and dog is no exception although it was one of the animals that had to bear the brunt of human despise to the maximum.

The author describes six types of dogs: *shvana*, *kukkura*, *shunaka*, *sarameya*, *mrigadamshaka*, and *gramyamriga* (MPS I-941 to 973). The fine differences noted here show a very keen and careful observation of the author. He describes facts

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relating to procreation, pups and their growth, color, behavior, species, distinctive features, females, longevity and so on of these six types. Almost all of them are described here as being loyal, affectionate, and playful besides their rendering very honest and valuable service to mankind.

Translation of Sarameyavinoda

Manasollasa (IV-11, verses 1298 to 1328):

Sarameyavinoda (Dogs for recreation)

1298a. And now hereunder, is described the recreation that kings can derive promptly from dogs.

Origin:

1298b–1300. Dogs belonging to the community of Abhiras (a tribe of mixed origin – cowherds), Sevunas and Kalheras, as also those originating from Padimanda (Paryanta?) (coastal regions?), Trigarta, Dugdhavata, Karnata, Andhra, and also the wild varieties, those from Vidarbha, Talanira, banks of Tapi (river) are all brave, energetic, and powerful.

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Characteristics:

1301. Good voice and variety of colors and qualities are the characteristics of Abhiras and Sevunas; the former having thin coat and the latter, thin skin.

1302. Kalheras have bright coat while Paryantas have short tail. Those from Trigarta have huge size while Dugdhavata dogs are slim.

1303. Dogs originating from Karnata have short body-hair and those born in Andhra are very strong, though small in stature.

1304. Dogs from forest are hairy and those from Vidarbha have attractive form. Those from Talanira are splendid with scanty bristles.

1305. Dogs originating from the regions situated on the banks of Tapi river have a delicate physique. All these dogs are found in several colors like whitish, red, yellow, bright white, and variegated.

1306. Some are smoky, pale red, and also dark blue (black) and with stripes. Some are white at eyebrows, eyes, and mouth. Others have spots of black and reddish colors.

1307, 1308. Other dogs have white spots all over or spots of various colors. Some have their ears erect, others adhering (to the sides) while still others have them drooping down. Some dogs have one of the ears hanging down. Some have white hair on the head and whitish color on the tip of the tail.

Merits and demerits:

1309a. Dogs which do not have marked circular designs of curls (or do not have

depressions on the forehead above eyebrows) are inferior and must not be approved.

1309b–1315. Dogs – the descendants of Sarama (a female dog in Rigveda who traced the stolen cows) – recommended for approval are physically strong and powerful and are equipped with the following qualities and characteristics:

- Strong molars of the shape of garlic cloves.
 - Reddish tongue resembling the tender leaves of mango tree.
 - Big and prominent eyes having a tint of red lac-dye.
 - Drooping eyebrows, large head, firm jaws, shape resembling leaves of *sarja* (*Vateria indica*) and tips of the ears having knots.
 - Thick and long claws and neck, broad and unbending bosom, slim and round shaped middle portion, and large hooves (?).
- [The text (verse 1312) is faulty and meanings of words can only be guessed.]
- Thin thighs and shanks, round foot-joints and slightly curved claws resembling seeds of date hardly touching the ground.
 - Glances resembling those of deer, very thin tail at the back, harsh to touch fur, and attractive body-splendor.
 - Short temper and valor.

1316a. These dogs can split open wild boars, tigers, horses, and bears.

Females:

1316b. Females of dogs having long and thin mouth, thin nose and needing little food –

1317. – having thin necks and voice resembling the sound of *jingini* (*Lanea coromandelica*; syn. *Odina wodier*) leaves, backs similar to those of rabbits, heads round like a ball –

1318. – middle portion similar to that of ants, size large, shanks evenly shaped, claws small like wheat, soles similar (in color) to the *tundi* (*Coccinia grandis*) fruit –

1319. – bosom raised and compact, thin skin and fine fur, tails attractive like creepers, beautiful front as well as hind portion –

1320, 1321a. – having swift gait, even after producing pups once, twice, or thrice, are used along with the hunters. These fast running bitches are employed to hunt rabbits, young wolves, spotted deer, antelopes, stags, and other species of deer like *Enas* (nilgai; blue bull).

1321b. They should be nourished by feeding meat. They fall into power when fed and gratified by milk at night.

1322. After delivery of pups they should be given scum of boiled rice and the newborn pups, milk.

Recreation:

1322b, 1323. For recreation, two bitches should be released simultaneously to catch a rabbit hidden in forest; one by the king and the other by one with whom he takes a bet. He, whose bitch catches the animal first, is the winner.

1324a. If both the bitches catch the animal at the same time, both are on a par.

1324b. For catching a hog, the king should let loose several mighty dogs.

1325, 1326. When the hog in defense resists the attack by stopping them in huff with its hair raised erect, with its entire body contracted, dropping balls of froth from mouth, protesting in shouts of deep and indistinct gurgling sounds, all the more fearsome due to tightly locked fangs, the king should kill it with sharp arrows of the kind of *tomara* (lance), *bhalla* (arrow with crooked head), and *naracha* (iron arrow).

1327. Thereafter the dogs take over sinking their teeth into shoulders, throat, ears, and hind portions of thighs of the animal and start devouring it.

1328. The hog makes pathetic feeble sounds and finally dies. King Somadeva has described this recreation with dogs.

Comments

Since Manasollasa was written for the rulers, it was logical that description of dog breeds pertained mainly to those who were useful in hunting games. However, the author does point out the dog breeds kept by the common folks to manage animal herds. Regions where good breeds were available have been mentioned. These are Sevuna or Seuna

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(Aurangabad–Nashik region), Kalhera (?), Padimanda (coastal region), Trigarta (hilly regions of Punjab where dogs from West Asia must have been brought by invaders), Dugdhavata (?) (Dugdaghata, area further north of Srinagar), Karnata (northern parts of Karnataka), Andhra (present Andhra and Telangana), Vidarbha (corresponding to Berar), and further north to the banks of River Tapi (Tapti).

As pointed out before, the oldest reference to a female dog is found in Rigveda (1:62:3). *Rishis* (sages) belonging to Indra and Angira *gotras* (the lineage or clan assigned to a Hindu at birth, which relates directly to the original seven or eight *rishis*) sent a female dog named Sarama to successfully find the cows that were stolen and hidden by an *asura* (demon or enemy of gods). The name Saramaya became synonym with dogs, possibly the good breeds.

Someshvardeva has given a general description of different dogs that were commonly seen. He has also given somewhat detailed information about the dog breed, Sarama. General description of dogs gives features such as thin coat, thin skin, short tail, large size (from Trigarta), slim, small, and strong (from Andhra), hairy (forests), scanty bristles, colors varying from bright white, whitish, smoky, red, black

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(dark blue), and variegated, white eyebrows, eyes and mouth, white spots all over the body, white hair on the head, ears erect, sideways, or drooping or hanging, and tail tips white. If we take an in-depth view of the features mentioned by Someshvardeva, we would conjecture that the features of well-known dog breeds around the world can be found in Indian dogs. Thus even today, Indian dogs probably represent a large gene pool. The Blue Cross of India makes a similar statement (Fig. 1).

The description given for Sarama breed, popular with the ancient rulers, fits in with the Indian breed, Chippiparai that was originally found in the Thanjavur area of Tamil Nadu (Fig. 2). The Chippiparai and the other Indian hounds such as the Mudhol hounds have semi-drooping or drooping ears. This particular characteristic was considered essential in a good dog breed for the royals by Varahamihira as pointed out earlier (Bhat, 1981).

Granted that a scientific study of animal species is a rare and valuable gift to the modern world by Darwin in the 19th century, the collection of data on the subject, intense study and keen observation of animals in India in the early ages as discussed above,

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Figure 1. A poster by the Blue Cross of India.



Figure 2. Chippiparai hound that is similar to Sarameya described by Someshvardeva.

without the assistance of modern tools and equipment deserve the unique place for the valuable contribution to the sum total of human knowledge.

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