

# Analyzing The Classical Panchatantra Stories From A Postmodern Perspective: Deconstructing Fabulist Anthropomorphism

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## ABSTRACT:

Literature reflects humanity and provides the readers a rich window into human experiences as well as a profound insight into human nature. Literature acts as a prism through which society is reflected while also serving as a lighthouse that inspires the people to uphold virtues with a progressive mindset in order to bring about constructive social reformation in society. Literature has influenced civilizations, altered political systems, and revealed injustice through potent narratives that address the most pressing social issues and expose grave societal reality that eventually calls for a thought provoking and critical comprehension of the social evils prevailing in society making essential judgments and amendments required in order for the civilization to evolve gradually. The study of literature is a rewarding and enlightening experience that promotes sustainable worldviews and enables one to make a valuable contribution to society. To move beyond a reductive human-centrism, an alternative reading of critically reflective literary and philosophical perspectives is needed. Placing too much attention on the human sphere has raised worries that it is failing to adequately examine the non-human world, its agencies, and human kingship with it. An eco-critical inquiry into the use of anthropomorphism as a literary technique for instructing, motivating, and amusing young readers is required in order to perhaps pave the way for fresh approaches to environmental literary scholarship. The 'discourse of man' is centrally constructed on the animal preaching voices in fable tales, which is reduced to the status of an anthropomorphic taming, a moralizing subjugation, and domestication. The study intends to dissect the term 'anthropomorphism' and all of its varied ramifications for the seemingly fixed binary oppositions of 'human' and 'animal.' literary sustainability offers a theoretical practice arguing for the use of a deconstructive approach in understanding the fabulous animal through a reversible and subversive system of binary opposition instead of a rigid hierarchical structure. The violent construction of a human versus non-human animal identity is evidenced by text's deconstruction of anthropocentric, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic self-other dialectics. The dualistic presumptions that pit humans against all other species are rooted in the conflating of the term's 'animal' and 'natural', and 'human' with 'cultural/ social'. This dualism distorts how people perceive the non-human animal as a mere 'referent' by elevating humans to the status of 'mind' with social intelligence possessing cognitive competencies while relegating all other animals to the biological confines of the natural world. The hegemonic discourses of knowledge on non-human animals must emphasize the need for a modern fable theory that offers fresh perspectives on how to think about other animals fairly and legitimizes their subject positions in the context of eco-critical concerns for a better future and demands for a paradigm shift from ego-awareness to eco-consciousness, a transition that vividly embodies the harmony in diversity concept of coexistence.

**Keywords:** anthropomorphism, anthropocentrism, fixed binary oppositions, mere referent, eco-critical enquiry, fable theory.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper intends to examine how popular children's animal studies classified as fables describe the hegemonic human experience projected onto non-human animal representations of animals through the practice of anthropomorphism, which dehumanizes animal existence to a reducible structure of 'being' in the world. Fables, which are a staple of children's literature are short stories intended to impart a moral lesson implicitly stated at the end in the form of wise maxims and proverbial sayings to live by, emphasizing on leading an ideal way of life. In the allegorical fable story, the anthropomorphic voices serve as mere pulpits of moral preaching, bringing in the necessary social transformation as well as reinforcing ethical behavior. Relationships between humans and animals have typically been ones of repressive dominion creating a tension dichotomy in which humans have relegated animals to the lowest possible status as passive narrators in the human discourses. It is necessary to take an eco-critical stance in order to rethink the relationship between human and animal power dynamics and create novel approaches to coping with dehumanizing and controlling cultural attitudes towards animals. It is important to place nonhuman moral agents in the centre of cultural discussions rather than keeping them on the periphery, despite how challenging it may be to comprehend and respect their ways of being that extend beyond language and human cognitive superiority. It also emphasizes how fables are viewed through a speciesist lens, which supports the assumption that nonhuman creatures are nothing more than spectacles that humans view as objects. This speciesist viewpoint has the potential to promote an anthropocentric mindset that further dehumanizes animal presences, but it can also help human audiences learn vital information about nonhuman creatures that is built on the mutual understanding necessary for the peaceful coexistence of humans and nonhumans. It is crucial for the reader audiences to think through the animal perspective that is founded on the trinity of three key factors: identity, difference,

and differentiation. It aims to study the burgeoning subfield of critical animal studies, which today provides a plethora of theoretical and philosophical viewpoints. The identification approach seeks to build bridges between humans and animals so that animals can be included in the moral and political discourse on an equal footing with humans. By doing so, the difference framework allows for animal classifications to fit into a broader ethical post humanist paradigm by acknowledging that the animal world has its own uniquely diverse and distinct ways of living. The indistinction method contends that the submission of animal analogies typical of human language promotes objectification, exploitation, and enslavement of animals which calls for a more receptive new and alternative ways of rethinking human-animal connections. The research proposal opens up fresh avenues of inquiry into anthropomorphism in the light of rising pro-animal sentiments. It also looks at the most popular literary portrayal of animals in fables, and asks numerous concerns about whether or not these stories accurately portray the lives of animals in real or invalidate their very existence. While the moral edification dispensed through animal fables tends to be quite instructive and uplifting, animal standing in the literary engagement as a whole seems to send a message that is antithetical to animal awareness, one that is exceedingly negative in terms of viewing animals as human prototypes defying their and steeped in the postcolonial thinking of massive "othering" of nonhuman animals, which undermines animal consciousness. Reading and interpreting a fable requires a critical approach based on multi-level comprehension, free from the pervasive influence of an anthropocentric perspective on animals. This perspective may be concerned with questions of animal sagacity or, more importantly, may place emphasis on the ethical treatment of animals. Human-centered anthropomorphism, as seen in many fables and other works of popular children's literature, appeals to children senses but clouds their perception of real animal identity as a result of deeplyrooted anthropocentric bias. The concept of

theriophily, which defines a love for animals, is a highly contested one because it is rooted in an anthropocentrically motivated mode of thought that uses animals as exemplars for human conduct, which denies the nonhuman animal its rightful existence, particularly when the non-human animal with anthropocentric projections serves as a moral agent within the fabled narrative.

Charles Darwin, the world-renowned naturalist, famously proposed the evolutionary idea of 'survival of the fittest' in his most celebrated works titled *On the Origin of Species*. According to the proponents of evolutionary synthesis, non-human animals are inherently motivated by their animalistic impulses and predisposed to act in accordance with their baser primal instincts in their quest for survival, and these innate natural urges cannot be equated with the rationale that underlies the human behavior that is predominantly driven by reason. As part of eco-critical practice, non-human animal species are accorded an equal degree of agency and autonomy as a result of their ability to adapt to their environment as a survival manoeuvre for existence. This empowers them to serve as the primary subjects for teaching humanity to be more accepting, inclusive, and humble toward all forms of life while also highlighting the absurdity of humans' disdainful, dismissive, and deprecating treatment of other species. The study goes on to argue that the focal point of the fundamental division between human and animal species is rooted in the human mind's superior capacity for abstract thought conveying intriguing mental imagery through symbolic communication, which has in turn spawned has led to the morphological literary renderings of humanized animals. Human-centered, anthropocentric scholarship highlights the necessity to incorporate historically underrepresented animal groups in critically productive discussions on animal rights using theoretically sound eco-critical research methods.

The fabulists' deliberate selection of talking animals stems from the belief that humans are more amenable to accepting their own foibles if they are presented

humorously, configured in the form of stories about beasts that they believe to be inferior to themselves in many aspects, and this allows the storyteller ample opportunity to insert bits of social and political criticism into the process of instructing young minds. Myths, legends, and folktales from the distant past sometimes serve as the inspiration for short stories set in a fantastical realm. As such, it echoes Coleridge's "voluntary suspension of disbelief," the acceptance of the implausible or the make-believe world for the sake of entertainment, often with mystical overtones or a sense of wonder. Myths, legends, and folktales from the times of antiquity frequently serve as the basis for short stories set in a fantastical realm. Coleridge's idea of "voluntary suspension of disbelief" captures this idea of suspending disbelief to enjoy a story underlying surreal mystical overtones of wonder and amusement. In *Panchatantra*, a collection of animal fables are timeless pieces of wisdom originally composed in Sanskrit and penned by Vishnu Sharma, creates a space within the narrative where a fusion takes place between the animal and human worlds, thereby establishing a harmonious relationship between the two distinct species analyzed in the backdrop of eco-criticism. The text highlights the concept of "Vasudev Kutumbhakam," implying that the world is one family developed in Indian philosophy advocates that all living things have a right to exist and are interconnected as part of a greater whole. Through a sustained green reading of literature, children develop ethical considerations towards the animal agents without limiting animals' freedom to live an independent and undomesticated life outside of the prevalent confinement of exclusion. The stories of the *Panchatantra* are also categorized as anthologies of environmental folklore due to the author's apparent empathy and veneration for the flora and fauna depicted in the stories. The ecological value of the *Panchatantra* extends well beyond the original goals of intellectual stimulation and the cultivation of emotional intelligence, owing to the book's vivid and moving depictions of its rich biodiversity and natural scenic splendor of the wilderness and its teeming wildlife inhabitants that pervades throughout the

fictional stories. The book as an eco-conscious narrative is brimming with environmental imagery that presents overlapping spaces between the human and animal worlds, yet both retain their unique distinctive identities. In the Panchatantra story "The Gold Giving Serpent," a poor Brahmin farmer named "Haridatta" labors long and hard in the fields but is rewarded with nothing for his efforts. This serves as a cautionary tale about the perils of excessive greed. As he relaxed under a tree at the end of a long day, he saw a giant hooded snake emerge from an anthill. The Brahmin reasoned that because the serpent guardian deity of the field wasn't being honored, the field was barren. As a kind of animal worship, he hurriedly brought the sacrificial offering such as milk as part of the ritual worship and presented it to the serpent as a gesture of respect. When the farmer returned the next day to till the field, he discovered a gold coin near the anthill, beginning what would become a daily ritual of Brahmin life. One day the Brahmin had to go to a faraway land and requested his son to watch for the serpent and the son carried the milk to the serpent's anthill. The son became avaricious and resolved to kill the snake in order to gain access to the anthill and its collected treasure. The next day the son returned with the milk and a stick, but the boy was unfortunately killed by a single venomous sting of the serpent as the snake bit him to death after he struck its head with a stick. Later, after hearing the saddening news of his son's death, the Brahmin returned to the field and praised the snake by leaving milk near the anthill. The serpent then responded recalling the whole incident as to how his naïve son tried to hit the reptile with a stick which eventually led to the boy's tragic end. The serpent judged Brahmin's motives, wondering if he too had come here for material gain, and pondered the inherent humanity of a father who had yet to recover from the loss of his son. Finally, the snake gave him a pricey diamond and a stern warning not to return to the anthill for seeking more wealth before disappearing within. The Brahmin took possession of the gem and berated his son for being so ignorant. The lowly farmer learns the hard way that excessive avarice can have negative consequences.

In Indian Vedic philosophy, every animal has a sacred spiritual significance to humans, and this incident lends credence to the aforesaid tale. For instance the casting of a snake's skin in the local tradition symbolizes rebirth, death, and mortality, and is often interpreted as a representation of the divine messenger of Lord 'Shiva', who wears an ornament of one around his neck or referred to as 'Sheshnaag', the one upon whose sacred seat Lord 'Vishnu' and Goddess 'Lakshmi' rest. This adds a pantheistic perspective to the narrative while also functioning as animal totems, or animal spirits that an individual or a tribe can call upon for its specific qualities to serve as a guardian or protector in times of adversity. This famous anthology of Indian fables is a powerful instrument for developing in young audiences a strong feeling of environmental responsibility due to the prevalence of abundant animal allegories that pervades throughout the fable stories. The selected text portrays an ecologically sustainable relationship with the abiotic and biotic components of the environment preaching or exhorting worship of trees, forests, rivers, mountains, the sun, the moon, and the earth itself as the "Mother Goddess," all of which are central to the Indian ethos.

Another interesting story from the Panchatantra collection is of "The Mongoose and the Brahmin's Wife" where a Brahmin, his wife and their newborn son lived raising a pet mongoose as a family member. On one occasion when the Brahmin was out doing chores, his wife left their infant in the cradle and went to the kitchen for fetching a kettle of water. For the duration of her absence, she has entrusted the baby's care to the mongoose. The mongoose while guarding the infant saw a snake making its way inside. Swiftly, it pounded on the snake and killed it. The mongoose greeted the Brahmin's wife with a grin and a mouthful of blood as soon as she came in with the water. The woman's fearful reaction was justified as the mongoose clearly looked like it had murdered attacked the baby. In her rage, the woman smashed its skull in with the stick. Then other peeked inside and saw her baby contentedly occupying the cradle. When she

found out what had actually really happened, the woman was horrified by her own actions and repented for her hasty impulsive judgment. The mongoose's dreadful fate in the fable stems from the widespread socio-cultural influences in the Indological context that labels the animal referent as a vicious carnivorous predator thereby refuting the idea that animals are hardwired with innate desires reflecting a strong genetic base. Eco-linguistic concerns are raised within a literary framework when the object variant pronoun "it" is used to refer to a non-human animal antecedent instead of the personal gendered pronouncements "he/she," that is suggestive of a dilutive exhaustive position of animals as mere mouthpieces of human virtues and vices that are overlooked within a literary discourse. Oversimplified animal stereotypes that fail to reflect real-world animal behavior have relegated non-human animals to the periphery, treating them more like commodities in the fable fashion than conscious sentient creatures deserving of respect and consideration on par with humans.

The literary practice of anthropomorphism is detrimental to animal welfare as it holds the different animal species to unjustified and unreasonable human standards by expecting them to exhibit human characteristics. If anthropomorphism is practiced to the extreme degree and accepted as the norm, society may concur that animals held in illegitimate captivity such as zoo confinement of animals deserve a 'haebus corpus' a fundamental civil right established to promote animal liberation from arbitrary power of human custody of pet ownership and to counteract homocentric discourses that are overwhelmingly dominant in present society. Furthermore, the term owner sounds demeaning to the plight of animals in literary representations, so the word guardian needs to be supplanted in its place. This suggests that animal is not an object to showcase in zoos or a private property to be domesticated as a pet, defying their very existence and leads to the rational idea that animals have the same consciousness and emotional understanding and calling as humans do.

In the face of ethical deliberation, the traditional

anthropocentric vision of human uniqueness, which reduces animals to utilitarian functionality as a means to an end, where they are subjugated to human demands in defining what it means to be human, silences the non-human animal's own voice by appropriating cultural references to animals. In order to promote a humanitarian concern for the fictitious nonhuman creatures, it is necessary to demolish the rigid binary oppositions of human "self" and animal "other," which can only be done through meticulous reconceptualization, rethinking, and earnest fabulation of the animal characters.

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