

# **FABLES FOR CONSCIOUSNESS OF ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT - EXAMPLES FROM PANCHATANTRA**

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**Abstract:** Fables represents a moral-fictional-story, having human- and animal-protagonists, where animals are anthropomorphized and are portrayed as lively interacting-characters, thus, engrosses the attraction of young learners. In fables, human shares space and consciousness with animals, spheres of contact between them reveals their degree of continuum or gaps, defining zones of animality in human and zones of humanity in animal. These ethical-imperative manipulates the human-beings to see themselves in the eyes of animals and creates an estrangement from their ego-centrism. Fables have emerged from an intention of telling a story (oral-origin) that naturally had ingredients of the surroundings and the culture, transmitted down via continuous chain of storytelling with various interpretations, but each still maintaining a certain identity. Thus, the lifestyle depicted in fable often gives idea about ecosystems, spiritually-significant species, seasonal-rituals etc. of place of origin. After evolving to written-form (literary-genre), it gives an idea of nuances of origin-culture when reaches other cultures or period. Traditional-tales have often eradicated discontinuity where humans transform to animals. Fables all over the world include Aesop's Fable, La Fontaine fables, Florian fables, African Fables, Jungle Book, The Fables of Bidpai, and the famous Indian fables are Panchatantra, Jataka, Hitopadesha written in Sanskrit. Analysing, they also provide such ecological knowledge through their different deliberations. Panchatantra is the collection of ancient Indian fable, believed to have been composed in the 3rd century BC, by Pandit Vishnu Sharma. It has five treatises: Mitra-bheda (Rift between friends), Mitra-samprāpti (Gaining of friends), Kākolūkīyam (Of Crows and Owls, i.e., of War and Peace), Labdhapranāśam (Loss of gains), Aparīkṣitakāraṇam (Rash deeds). Stories from each treatise have plethora of such ecological elements which may be well instilled in young minds to shape the psychology of future-citizens showing that their consciousness has a continuum with the diversity of life-forms. The storyteller can have their versions to inculcate a sense of deep-ecology in those keen minds. Though language of animals may seem meaningless, (Heideggrian abyss), but that meaninglessness should not be cause of their sacrifice. Whether any being including human can attach sense of meaninglessness to any other being is an ethical and true question.

**Keywords:** Ecology, Fables, Panchatantra, Versions.

**Introduction:** The societies, cultures and languages have co-evolved with human civilizations to be hugely diversified. This is intimately related to biodiversity and ecological concepts as humans have come to adapt according to their local environment. Local-communities possess knowledge of local-biodiversity and physical-environment, known as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) or Indigenous traditional knowledge (ITK) [1], which in turn, influences belief-systems underneath many cultural-practices [2] that propagated through generations forming a collective unconscious and may guide decision-making at local-level about the management and conservation of both -cultural and biological-diversity [3]. In recent years on the alarming extinction of biodiversity and cultural diversity, natural and social scientists have been diverting their attention to this aspect of intricate connection between human and environment, this concept being called "Biocultural Diversity". Cultural diversity loss may cater to biodiversity loss and converse is also true. Culture may, thus, play role in building resilience against change in environment. Thus biodiversity preservation is needed [4]-[5]. This becomes the autonomous subject of philosophy and ethics [6].

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**Storytelling by Folklore and Fables (A Belief System - Has Helped in Unconscious Preservation of Nature):**

Human cultures tend to preserve historical record, be it real or fanciful imaginations that existed, narrating, and dramatizing past events that pervades human consciousness. This must have given rise to the instinct of storytelling, and people were eternally drawn to telling and listening to them, which, thus, naturally started as an oral tradition passing through generations co-evolving with the versions and interpretations of the storyteller, yet each story retains their identity amongst all its versions. Then with time the stories recorded in language, became a genre of literature. Stories breathe through people and society, affecting and constructing vision and relationships [7]. This may include real stories, folktales, myths, legends. Folktales comprise fables, fairy tales, old legends and even 'urban legends'. Diverse myths, folktales, cosmologies depict complex issues of human-environment relationships, value systems synchronizing their identity and spirituality with natural world. In some societies, there exist collective and inherited patterns of thought. Multiple belief systems may occur simultaneously in any given place at any given time, intermingling to create an outcome. Some folklores and fables made localities believe that they have a vital spiritual connection with an animal or a plant, traditional sacred places, nature-worshipping religious values and thus their identity is through the surrounding natural world which forms their collective unconscious [8] that cater to preservation of nature. Species conserved in sacred groves, for example, may come with folktales that entail the communities to believe these places are sacred and destroying any plant or animals there would create havoc in their life. Thus species that have become rare, endangered, and are endemic, are often concentrated in sacred groves [9].

**Fables - A Part of Folklore - How it Intermingles with Animals and Environment:**

Fables are moral fiction with human and animal characters that have been anthropomorphized. They have vivacious and interacting-characters, which makes them extremely engrossing, especially for young nascent minds. Originated in oral storytelling, fables have evolved as literary-genre. Like any storytelling traditions, they include their surroundings, both biotic and abiotic, describing the ecological details, habitats, behaviour, spiritual-significance, and activity of their animal characters, different beliefs of their place of origin. Thus, they may be used as vehicle to spread knowledge of ecology. In fables, human shares space and consciousness with animals and spheres of contact between them reveals their degree of continuum or gaps, revealing zones of animality in human and zones of humanity in animal. As human is forced to see themselves in the eyes of animals, there is a scope to nullify its ego and empathize with other beings. There are opinions about continuity between man and animals and the discontinuities between them, the dualism that exist. But in traditional tales the animals have the capacity to have humanlike motivations and thoughts, sometimes are inter-converted between human and animal, thereby eradicating the discontinuity, emphasizing on the self of a being, if we think of it [10]. Here, the men and women transforms to Nietzschean innocence and eternal truthfulness of animals and the animals, in vicinity of humans, are metamorphosed to human-like [6]. Thus with the evolution of communication and language in human, there had always been maddeningly-elusive questions to know the mental-lives of animals, which may not be correlated with human-consciousness, yet may shape human-ethics and rationality in correlation to natural-world [10].

**Some Important Concepts to Consider:**

To understand the perspective of fable in integrating human consciousness with the natural world, there is need to discuss briefly about some emerging concepts:

***Deep Ecology and Shallow Ecology:***

These are concepts given by Arne Naess in 1972. It has its core belief that all living beings have the legal-right to live and flourish irrespective of their utilitarian-benefits to human. It involves “deep” questioning of our values and purposes, down to root causes of ecological imbalance, caused by inner loss of values. These long-range ideas would recommend reconstructing the modern human-societies shifting it from being anthropocentric to placing human-beings as part of living world where all organisms have inherent worth, giving a more sustainable effect. Individuals would then innately care for the earth. Shallow ecology focuses on short-term fixes (e.g. recycling, increased automotive efficiency, organic agriculture etc) often relying on the same anthropocentric value system that caused its harm. Thus, Naess’ ideas were holistic [11].

### **Eco-Psychology:**

It is a concept given by Theodore Roszak in his book, *The Voice of the Earth* (1992) that attempts to bridge this alienation regarding humans and non-humans as mutually inclusive and complementary forces trying to restore ecological balance. It may ameliorate physical and psychological disorders we face today [12].

### **Vedic Philosophy:**

Again, going back, Vedic society had a concept that everything in the world, whether living or non-living, has life in it, hence advocated respect to the nature and natural resources like land, water, hills, forest, other animals etc. [13].

Thus we have completed a cycle from humbleness to anthropocentrism and now again realizing the need for nature and animals. Thus animals, as we have understood, are indeed part of the whole truth, and herein seep in the importance of fables. Fables have animal characters, with their habit, habitats, niche, limitations, interactions etc. the details of which would intrigue the innocence of a child who would conceive of their world very deeply when told through a story from a care-giver close to their heart, generally. Since fables have versions of the story-teller, as discussed earlier, here versions may be moulded so as to impart the knowledge and consciousness of the connection with the fellow animals

**Fables of the World:** Fables have been engrossing people in many countries. There are *Aesop’s Fable*, *La Fontaine fables*, *Florian fables*, *African Fables*, *Jungle Book* (by Rudyard Kipling) to enchant listeners

### **In India:**

**Hitopadesha:** This was probably composed by Narayana in between 800 to 950 BC

**The Jātaka Tales:** These depict previous births of Buddha in both human and animal form. He may appear as human or animal and inculcate some virtues [14].

**Panchatantra:** These are ancient collection of interrelated animal fables in Sanskrit verse and prose, believed to have been composed in the 3rd century BC, by Pandit Vishnu Sharma according to most, and Vasubhaga according to few. Both these names may be pen-names of the authors. It has stories on human behaviours, portrayed by animal characters. It is popular in different countries, translated in many languages [15]-[16].

### **Examples from Panchatantra:**

Panchatantra consists of five (Pancha) treatises, each having their main story, the “frame story”, which in turn contains several inner stories, as one character narrates another story (inner story), in this story again one character may narrate another story and thus three or four stories may be fabricated in succession. Having said this much about its structure, focus would be upon the ecological and biological facts that many stories reveal in their narratives [15]-[16].

Only a few examples have been given here:

1. The first treatise is Mitra-bheda (rift between friends) in which Dhamanaka, an unemployed jackal-minister in kingdom of lion, conspire to build rift between the friends of the king, Here there is a story in which the plover bird was afraid of crocodiles, turtles, sharks, porpoises living in the nearby seas (The Plover Who Fought the Ocean) [17]-[18], Crows and snakes living in trees where the snake predated crow's eggs (How the Crow-Hen Killed the Black Snake) [17]-[19].
2. Mitra-samprāpti (gaining of friends), the second treatise, is collection of adventures of four characters, a crow (scavenger, airborne-habits), a mouse (tiny, underground-habits), a turtle (slow, water-habits), a deer (a grazing-animal viewed by other animals as prey, land-habits), which reveal how weak animals with very different skills, working together can accomplish what is impossible to achieve alone [20]-[21].
3. Kākolūkīyam (on crows and owls) is the third treatise that discusses war and peace through fables. Here crows are depicted as weaker and smaller in number and are creatures of the day (light), while owls are presented as evil, numerous and stronger creatures of the night (darkness). Some stories said different characters have different needs and motives, addressing these needs can empower peaceful relationships [17].
4. Labdhapraṇāśam (Loss of Gains) is the fourth treatise presenting negative examples with consequences that one should avoid. Here the story "The Monkey and the Crocodile" reveals how different habitats can be a barrier to movement of different animals. To the monkey water is impediment for movement while the crocodile can swim through water easily. "The Jackal Ate the Elephant" showed difference in hunting capability of a tiger and a jackal. The elephant died in wood but the jackal could not peel its skin to eat its flesh, so he instigated the tiger that had strong nails that could tear the skin. Thus he could eat it [19]-[17].
5. Aparīkṣitakāraṇam (Ill-Considered Action) is the fifth treatise which also presents negative examples, the reader would ponder to decide how to react. In the story "The Loyal Mongoose" reveals the enmity of a mongoose and a snake, which is a common experience. Several such ecological facts may be highlighted in most of the stories [17].

**Conclusion and Discussion:** Animals in fables connote the character observable in nature though metaphor relating the human personality, thus symbolism is used [22]. For instance, deer as character are presented as charming, innocent, peaceful personality who is a target for those who seek a prey to exploit, it is indeed a herbivore and peaceful by nature, easy target of higher wiser predators. Again, crocodiles are presented as dangerous hiding beneath welcoming ambiance (waters of a lotus-laden pond), indeed crocodiles attack unaware, can hide very well in water.

In many stories there are clear indications of the different habitats that the animals live in, their prey-predator relationships, the lion termed as king being at the top of food-chain (terminal carnivores), habits of different animals were clearly demarcated (nocturnal, diurnal, swimmer, arboreal, fossorial etc.). The co-operations that are preached between trees, animals and humans to create the morale instilled in these stories, may be emphasized to make a mark in young learners. As humans, we are keenly drawn to nature as being born out of it, and need the company of animals, grass, dirt, trees and the sun. Though language of animals may seem meaningless, (Heideggrian abyss) [6], that ascribed meaninglessness may be cause of their sacrifice, and through these fables there is an endeavour to dive in the mental-lives of animals, which may not be translated to human-consciousness, yet may shape human-ethics and rationality in correlation to natural-world. Quest for finding the pre-humanistic-language of animal create the dawn of new thinking.

A child, being new learner and receptive, fables may be used to instill in them the idea of ecology of animals and environment and that co-operation is required for co-existence. Though indoctrination may compromise the creativity in some cases, yet here such innovative and humane indoctrination may further increase their consciousness, mingling with their creativity. They mix the ambience of these stories with their imagination of the animals they see around, such influence could shape the psychology of the next generation instilling a sense of continuum that exists between all the diverse life-forms.

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