



Indo Asian Journal of Management and Entrepreneurship (IAJOME)

|| ISSN: 2319-2992, Impact Factor 5.007 ||

|| Peer-Reviewed | Open Access | International Journal ||

|| Volume: 17 | Issue: 10 | October - 2026 | www.iajome.com ||

THE POLITICS OF ANIMAL REPRESENTATION IN THE PANCHATANTRA STORIES

Jnanabhai K. P.*

Assistant Professor, Department of Sanskrit, St. Thomas College (Autonomous), Thrissur;
Research Scholar, SNGS College, Pattambi, Affiliated to the University of Calicut.

Dr. Justin P. G.**

Research Guide

SNGS College, Pattambi

Affiliated to the University of Calicut

ABSTRACT

Literature serves as a reflective medium that captures human experience while inspiring socio-cultural transformation. However, traditional literary analysis often operates within a reductive anthropocentrism that marginalizes non-human entities and obscures human-animal kinship. This paper presents an eco-critical inquiry into the Panchatantra, an ancient Sanskrit text traditionally read as a collection of moral fables for children. By critically examining the literary technique of anthropomorphism, the study investigates how assigning human traits to animal characters creates a rigid "human-self" versus "animal-other" binary opposition, reducing animals to symbolic instruments of human virtue and vice. Through a detailed analysis of selected fables including The Gold-Giving Serpent and The Mongoose and the Brahmin's Wife alongside Vedic environmental philosophy and modern Critical Animal Studies, this paper deconstructs speciesist hierarchies and anthropocentric bias. Ultimately, the study advocates for a paradigm shift from ego-awareness to eco-consciousness, promoting a worldview rooted in biodiversity, intrinsic animal agency, and the classical Indian ideal of universal coexistence (Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam).

KEYWORDS: Panchatantra, Eco-criticism, Animal Rights, Environmental Philosophy, Human–Animal Relationship, Sanskrit Literature.

INTRODUCTION

Literature serves as both a reflection of societal reality and a driving force for cultural transformation. Literary texts have revealed social injustice, undermined political systems, and encouraged moral thinking throughout time. At the same time, traditional literature has



concentrated solely on the human world, ignoring the agency, value, and ecological significance of the non-human world. Children's stories and fables about animals, especially those from classical folklore, highlight this contradiction. Fables tell us about morality, wisdom, and social critique, but often use anthropomorphism to turn independent living creatures into uncritical instruments of human morals.

The Panchatantra, composed by the ancient sage Vishnu Sharma, stands as one of world literature's most celebrated narrative collections. Although the theme of the work has been explored traditionally for its educational aspect and pedagogical appeal, the use of anthropomorphic animals has created various philosophical implications when evaluated under modern theories. This work employs Eco-criticism and Critical Animal Studies approach to show how the Panchatantra carries the conflict between anthropocentrism and biocentrism. Through the selected fables and their connection with Vedic texts, evolutionary theory, eco-linguistic critique, and modern animal rights discourses, it becomes evident that the ancient practice can serve the purpose of dismantling rigid speciesism and establishing a modern eco-consciousness that is founded on mutual respect and ecological sustainability.

I. ANTHROPOMORPHISM AND THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE HUMAN–ANIMAL BINARY

Anthropomorphism—the practice of describing non-human creatures' behavior as human—plays a key role in the structure of fables. The author of Panchatantra uses this technique to make animal characters capable of discerning moral choices and following ethical principles. However, through an eco-critical lens, it becomes obvious that excessive anthropomorphism is a form of cultural tyranny. By enforcing the concepts of human society on the behavior of fauna, it glorifies the idea of the “human mind”—the mind associated with social intelligence and culture—while degrading animal species to being mere biological agents of passive “nature.” This thesis reduces the genuine identities of animals making them mere references and illustrations for any human behavior.

To fight against speciesism, Critical Animal Studies suggest three theoretical approaches: identification (creating moral connections which consider animals in moral conversations), difference (acknowledgment of the other ways of existing of animal species), and indistinction (criticism of the language which objectifies non-human creatures). Disassembling the anthropomorphic dichotomy enables one to stop thinking of animals merely as objects, and start thinking of them as being valued in their own right.

सर्वभूतेषु यः पश्येदात्मानं सर्वभूतानन चात्मनः। न
नर्जुगुप्सते तस्मात् स सर्वसमदर्शनः ॥



II. ANTHROPOCENTRISM AND SPECIESIST REPRESENTATION IN FABULOUS NARRATIVES

Fabulists have long employed animal characters in stories as audiences respond quicker to social and political commentary when coupled with animal adventures. This plot method is based on the theory called “suspension of disbelief” by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and permits audiences to join an imaginary world in which animals speak sense and communicate with others. Although this form of literature allows for an entertaining method of commentary on society, it often promotes anthropocentrism by undermining the animal existence.

Using animal metaphors to send message regarding ethics often leads to neglecting the essence of animal instincts, behavior, and role in ecosystems. As Charles Darwin pointed out in his famous book *On the Origin of Species*, all living beings are governed by natural instincts, which are crucial for organisms’ survival and development on Earth. Therefore, to reduce animal behaviors to “virtue” or “vice” is to misinterpret animal true nature.

अयं ननजः परो र्नेनत गणना लघुचेतसाम्।
उदारचररतानां तु सुधैर् कुटुम्बकम्॥

III. ECO-CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES AND VEDIC ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

Eco-criticism provides a revolutionary basis for the reappraisal of classical works of literature because it directs attention away from human-centered morality and asks how literature is related to the ecology of interconnectedness. Eco-criticism, utilized for the analysis of Sanskrit literature, shows an astonishing similarity between contemporary ecotheory and Indian philosophy. The Panchatantra is rich in the attitude towards nature, which sees rivers, forests, mountains, animals, and the Earth (Mother Goddess) as important aspects of the universe that have intrinsic sacredness.

The basic principle behind this concept is the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the principle of the world as one family), which insists that all shipped and unshipped organisms have the right to live in the biosphere, rather than presenting the Panchatantra as simply a system of practical rules of conduct. This is an ecocritical text, since it contains many descriptions of nature and nature's biodiversity.

माता भूतमः पुत्रोऽहं पृथिव्याः ॥

IV. ECOLOGICAL READINGS AND ANIMAL AGENCY IN SELECTED FABULOUS NARRATIVES

The story highlights the contrast between animal agency and anthropomorphic projection. The



events in the story can be studied from an eco-critical perspective to reveal how human avarice, biases, and reductive uses of language affect human-animal interactions.

The story starts with a poor Brahmin farmer named Haridatta who has immense respect for the giant snake dwelling in a mound of earth and worships it as a holy deity. The snake reciprocates the farmer's devotion by gifting him a gold coin for the milk he offers to it every day. This creates a mutually beneficial relationship between the two. However, the situation changes dramatically when the greedy son of the farmer tries to kill the snake with a stick, intending to rob the mound of its riches. The snake, in self-defense, bites the farmer's son. After a while, when the farmer comes back to offer the snake milk, he finds it unwilling to meet him, as the snake shows him a gem and refuses any further contact. Although the story is conventionally interpreted as a moral lesson on greed, an eco-critical perspective demonstrates that the snake plays the role that is similar to that of a guardian of nature. Likewise, the story "The Mongoose and the Brahmin's Wife" depicts the tragic results of human bias and hasty judgement. The story tells the story of a mongoose being raised in a Brahmin family. While the mother is away to fetch water, a poisonous snake comes inside the house and poses a danger to the infant in the cradle. The mongoose instinctively attacks and kills the snake in order to save the baby. Once she comes back from her trip, the wife sees a mongoose with blood on its mouth, and assumes the animal has killed her baby; therefore, she immediately strikes the animal's head with a heavy stick. She finds out that her baby is alright next to the dead snake and suffers from great regret. The story shows the absurdity of the stereotypes related to predatory animals in our culture. Moreover, eco-linguistic critique reveals that referring to non-human animals as "it" is a form of linguistic devaluation of living beings.

Thus, these stories provide vivid examples of the agency, emotions and significance of non-human entities in classical texts.

V. CONTEMPORARY PARADIGMS IN ANIMAL ETHICS AND ECO-LINGUISTICS

Contemporary advancements in critical animal studies, eco-linguistics, and environmental law have revolutionized present-day debates on non-human life forms. Animals have historically fallen victim to theriophily, the anthropocentric affection for animals, thereby gaining admiration as long as their existence serves as an example for human behavior. Currently, contemporary animal ethics challenges this utilitarian stance by advocating acknowledging the consciousness, emotional depth, and inherent rights of animals.

सर्े भर्तु सुखिनः सर्े सन्तु ननरामयाः ॥

These theoretical changes have real-world consequences. Animal captivity has been done



with the help of extreme anthropomorphism and speciesism. In fact, modern legal philosophy starts questioning this practice, suggesting the idea of habeas corpus for the captive being in order to set them free. Eco-linguists also suggest using the word "guardian" instead of "owner," which is an important change in how people view animals (as living beings, rather than things).

VI. TOWARDS AN ECO-CONSCIOUS RE-READING OF CLASSICAL TEXTS

Using an eco-critical lens to reinterpret traditional narrative forms such as the Panchatantra creates an important link between ancient literature and contemporary ecological needs. Although anthropomorphism is still an effective tool for telling stories, scholars and readers must transcend the simple meaning of the moral lessons of the characters to understand the ecological significance of the stories.

An eco-critical reading eliminates the artificial boundary between human "culture" and non-human "nature," presenting an interconnected view of life.

The significance of the Panchatantra is in its ability to stimulate reflection concerning human activity and its ecological implications. By analyzing those ancient stories through the prism of animal rights, harmony in nature, and non-violence, literature becomes a tool for educating people about ecological ethics. In this way, the text becomes not just a book that gives instruction on right living, but rather an important piece of literature that helps develop compassion and environmental consciousness.

CONCLUSION

Panchatantra is considered to be one of the great achievements of world literature and is well known for its interesting story and complexities. Unfortunately, older interpretations of this story relied only on the human aspect of the fables, illustrating moralistic lessons for people. This resulted in a bias against animals, presenting them only as characters used for the purpose of morality lesson. The application of Eco-Criticism and Critical Animal Studies made it possible to analyze the text and refute speciesist approaches to it. In order to achieve this goal, the author analyzed several stories from the Panchatantra including The Gold-Giving Serpent and The Mongoose and the Brahmin's Wife.

Upon analyzing these stories and examining Vedic philosophy of ecology and modern discourses on the rights of animals, the author provides an understanding of the importance of recognizing the agency and intrinsic value of non-human



Indo Asian Journal of Management and Entrepreneurship (IAJOME)

|| ISSN: 2319-2992, Impact Factor 5.007 ||

|| Peer-Reviewed | Open Access | International Journal ||

|| Volume: 17 | Issue: 10 | October - 2026 | www.iajome.com ||

beings. The author stresses that the combination of classical and contemporary ideas can enable the shift from anthropocentric to eco-centric perception.

REFERENCES

1. Joshi, M. N. (2007). *Pañcatantra (Aparīkṣitakāraṇam)*. Chaukhambha Sanskrit Sansthan.
2. Namboothiri, K. V. *Vishnu Sharma's Pañcatantram*.
3. Sharma, V. *Panchatantra Kadhakal*. Universal Culture Trust.
4. *Panchatantra (English & Malayalam)*. Liva Books.
5. Sharma, V. *Panchatantra*. DC Books.
6. Blackham, H. J. (1985). *The Fable as Literature*. Athlone Press.
7. Ziolkowski, J. M. (1993). *Talking Animals: Medieval Latin Monokini and Other Beast Fables*. University of Pennsylvania Press.