

Talking Animals: Explorations in an Indian Literary Genre

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ABSTRACT: Animals are certainly good to think (*bonnes à penser*), as famously noted by Claude Lévi-Strauss, but from the dawn of literature humans have also given them voices so that they can participate vicariously in an anthropomorphized animal linguistic and social world paralleling the human, giving rise to the literary genre of the animal fable. The earliest use of animals in literature was probably as similes. Such allegories abound in the earliest strata of the Ṛg-Veda. What is interesting in these comparisons for later animal tales is that a particular characteristic is singled out as defining a particular animal and constituting its very nature (*svabhāva*). The association of a particular species with a set of moral and intellectual qualities, with personality traits, plays a central role in later animal fables. But what about talking animals? When do they make their first appearance in the extant corpus of Indian literature? This article will reflect on the religious and cultural backdrop within which the anthropomorphizing habit of Indian animal tales took place in Indian Sanskrit literature.

KEYWORDS: animal fables; *Pañcatantra*; religion and nature; Sanskrit literature; talking animals.

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In our local newspaper here in Austin, Texas, there are two full pages devoted to comics with about 30 comic strips. Discounting the occasional animal appearances, in 30 percent of them animals play the leading role. People in general appear to be fascinated by thinking and talking animals, even if their talk is limited to the bubbles of cartoons. Beyond newspaper cartoons, look at the billions spent on Walt Disney movies and toys and at various Disney Lands. Nor is this a recent fascination.

Animals are certainly good to think, as anthropologists have pointed out, but from the dawn of literature humans have also endowed them with voices so that humans can participate vicariously in an anthropomorphized animal linguistic and social world paralleling the human. This is the birth of the animal fable. There must be something that talking animals achieve that cannot be accomplished by simply human talk or abstract discourse. In this article I want to focus on the ways this crossing of species boundaries is represented in a variety of Indian literary genres and look at some of the beliefs and ideologies that may underlie animal fables.²

The earliest Indian use of animals in literature was probably as similes. As Stephanie Jamison (2009) has pointed out, such similes abound even in the *Ṛg Veda*, the earliest literary product of India. A god is compared to a bull or a horse; tenderness is like a cow lowing for her calf. We have the metaphors of *narasiṃha*, ‘man-lion’, *puruṅgava*, ‘man-bull’, *siṃhadamaṣṭra*, ‘lion-toothed’, *rājasīṃha*, ‘king-lion’, and the like. What is significant in these metaphors for later animal tales is that a particular characteristic is singled out as defining a particular animal and constituting its very nature (*svabhāva*). Such characterisations are expanded in later times to include a donkey, who is both stupid and over-sexed, a jackal, who is greedy and cunning, and the like (see Olivelle 1997: xxii–xxv). The association of a particular species with a set of physical, moral and intellectual qualities with personality traits plays a central role in animal fables.

The broader classification of the animal kingdom into village or domestic (*grāmya*) and wild (*āraṇya*), already attested in the rather late hymn of the *Ṛg Veda*, the *Puruṣasūkta* (10.90.8), also plays a significant role in later tales. Associated with this is the division of animals into prey, designated as ‘grass eaters’, and predators, designated as ‘meat eaters’—the former generally with hooves (*śapha*, *khura*) and the latter with five nails (*pañcanakha*), the former being the food and the latter its eaters. These classificatory systems play central roles in storytelling. For example, the moment we see the domesticated bull *Samjīvaka* at the opening of the *Pañcatantra* striking up a friendship with

2. Human interactions with animals, of course, go far beyond fables and talking animals. They play crucial roles in human dietary regulations and speculation (Olivelle 2002), in ethics and religion, and in art and music. Animal rights have emerged as a major area of moral discourse. For a comprehensive survey, see Waldau and Patton (2006). For animals in human thought in India, see Balbir and Pinault (2009).

the lion king Piṅgalaka we know that it is not going to end well. The maxim is that there can be no friendship between grass-eaters and meat-eaters, between prey and predator, between food and eater; add to this the mixture of the village and the wilderness, and Saṃjīvaka was bound to end up at the losing end.

But what about talking animals? When do they make their first appearance in the extant corpus of Indian literature? Jamison (2009: 198) has alluded to the monkey Vṛṣākapi (*Ṛg Veda* 10.86) and Saramā, the messenger bitch of Indra (*Ṛg Veda* 10.108), both of whom have speaking roles in the *Ṛg Veda*. There are several talking animals, including fish, in the *Brāhmaṇas*, notably the ‘talkative fish’ who instructs Manu about building a boat in the story of the great flood. The *Upaniṣads* too contain several wise animals—a bull, a goose, and a diver bird, who instruct Satyakāma Jābāla (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 4.5-8), and a pair of geese whose conversation about the wisdom of Raikva is overheard by Jānaśruti Pautrāyaṇa (*Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 4.1-4). These talking animals set the scene for the discourse in chapter four of this *Upaniṣad*.

Even though these are tantalizing hints, we do not have examples of full-blown animal fables in the Vedic literature. Stephanie Jamison (2009: 217), nevertheless, concludes from the hints in the textual tradition, hints that appear to allude to stories well known to the audience, that ‘we must assume already for the RVic period not only the existence of a body of story literature, of animal fables, but also (more interestingly) a fairly organized rule for this literature in an instructional setting’. This is a significant point, because many of the later animal fables in India have an explicit or implicit didactic function.

The organization of the Buddhist *Jātakas* supports Jamison’s contention. The oldest parts of the *Jātakas* consist of verses, which only allude to an underlying story that the audience was supposed to know already. The *Baka Jātaka* (38) containing the story of the crab, the crane, and the fish, also found in the *Pañcatantra* (I, Story 4.1), for example, has this brief verse:

Guile profits not your very guileful folk.
Mark what the guileful crane got from the crab!

(Chalmers 1990: 98)

Without the full story this remark makes little sense, except that if this was all we had, as in some of the *Ṛg Vedic* stories, we can surmise that there may be a tale behind the gnomic verse. The same is true of the verses that begin and end the tales of the *Pañcatantra*. Here is an example:

When a man wants to meddle in affairs,
that do not concern him,
He will surely be struck down dead, like the
monkey that pulled the wedge.

(*Pañcatantra* I, 6)

This is opaque without the accompanying story of the inquisitive monkey who pulled out the wedge inserted into a half-split piece of timber while his testicles were hanging through the slit—a painful and salutary story about meddling in the affairs of others (*Pañcatantra* I, Story 1).

Besides the *Jātakas*, the oldest extant literature containing animal fables are the Sanskrit epics, especially the *Mahābhārata*, even though the *Rāmāyaṇa* is replete with animals who speak and assume human roles, for example, the monkeys led by Hanumān. The book that made Indian animal fables famous, however, is the *Pañcatantra* and its numerous editions, recasts and offshoots. It is in this genre of literature that the animal fables in India are put to specific literary and ideological use, a genre that I will focus on in this article.

At first, however, let me reflect on the religious and cultural backdrop within which the anthropomorphizing habit of Indian animal tales took place. Given the global scope of such anthropomorphism, it is clear that such a backdrop is not a necessary condition for its development. There clearly is an innate propensity for anthropomorphism within the human psyche, as many scholars of culture and religion have pointed out (Guthrie 1993). But the specific contours that such anthropomorphism adopted in India were shaped by its religious and cultural backdrop.

In the early Vedic period, we already find gods, as well as humans, adopting animal forms. Indra becomes a female hyena (*Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 6.2.4.3-4; Jamison 1991: 76), a ram (*Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* 3.234-36), and a monkey (*Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* 1.363), among others. Prajāpati, the creator god, takes on different animal forms as he copulates with his consort to create the different species of animals (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.3). The ability to transform oneself into other species, thereby performing tasks specific to the skills of that species, finds its most significant expression in the *avatāras* or incarnations of Viṣṇu. That animals can and do have thoughts and intentions similar to humans is assumed within this worldview. Gods becoming animals interestingly presents a twofold anthropomorphism of gods acting like humans and animals acting like gods, and thus as humans. That animals, within this context, can speak goes without saying.

Parallel to gods becoming animals, we have the tradition of divine animals. I have already referred to Vedic precedents. Kālidāsa's famous epic poem *Raghuvamśa* begins with king Dilīpa, Raghu's father and Rāma's great-great-grandfather, who was unable to bear a son because he had unknowingly slighted the heavenly cow Surabhi. Then there is the divine eagle Garuḍa, and the divine talking monkeys of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In classical Hinduism all the gods have their animal mounts, who share divine characteristics. Even extraordinary humans can assume animal guises, such as the seer in the *Mahābhārata* (1.109) who mated with his wife in the guise of a deer and doe and was shot by king Pāṇḍu, thus drawing the seer's wrath and curse. There is, then, no unbridgeable gulf between gods, humans and animals within the Indian imagination.

The most significant religio-cultural belief that is connected to animal anthropomorphism, however, is rebirth. Taking an animal rebirth as part of karmic retribution was a well-established belief at least by the early centuries prior to the Common Era. It was also believed that, just as residence in various hells, so birth as animals was a punishment for sins committed in previous lives. The *Viṣṇu Dharmasūtra*, a seventh-century Kashmiri text, provides a clear statement (44.1-9):

Now, sinners who have experienced suffering in various hells take birth in animal wombs. Those guilty of the most grievous sins causing loss of caste become successively all the immobile beings. Those guilty of grievous sins causing loss of caste enter the wombs of worms; those guilty of secondary sins causing loss of caste, the wombs of birds; those guilty of lesser sins causing loss of caste, the wombs of animals born in water; those guilty of sins causing exclusion from caste, the wombs of animals living in water; those guilty of sins causing them to be of mixed caste, the wombs of wild animals (*mṛga*); those guilty of sins making them unworthy of receiving gifts, the wombs of farm animals (*paśu*); and those guilty of sins causing them to be impure, the wombs of untouchable people among humans.

Besides the general theme of being born as animals due to past sins, this text also provides two significant bits of information. Particular sins cause a person to be born in the wombs of particular animals; so the choice of animals is not random but causally determined. Second, more serious sins cause a person to be born as worse animals, thus creating a hierarchy of more desirable and less desirable animals. Clearly, anthropomorphism is again at work in this classification of animals, farm animals (*paśu*) being at the very top of this hierarchy, just below untouchable humans,³ and worms at the very bottom.

Within this religio-cultural background, it is easy to make the transition from human to animal; the crossing of these classificatory boundaries between species is facilitated by their lack of permanence. If humans can become animals, then animals may assume human roles and even human speech. Rebirth as the ideological backdrop for animal tales is explicitly stated in the *Jātaka* tales whose very purpose is to narrate the previous life stories of the Buddha.

I turn now to the *Pañcatantra*, the most famous of the Indian collections of animal fables. In this text we have, I think for the first time, the question of the linguistic abilities of animals asked explicitly. A young deer named Citrāṅga has been trapped, and the beauty of the little one prompts the trapper to take it to the young prince of the kingdom, who keeps the animal as a pet in his own bedroom. The rainy season comes along, when traditionally lovers pine for their absent partners, and the young deer pines for its herd. In the middle of the night, his longing unbearable, the deer utters this couplet:

3. This is a good example of how innocent looking lists were used to impart strong social messages. Placing the outcaste within a list containing animals clearly places him on the same plane.

When, O when will I ever get to run
 after my herd of deer,
 As they romp and revel, and tear about,
 spurred by the wind and rain?

(*Pañcatantra* II, 80)

The prince is startled when he discovers that the words came from the deer. The fright causes him to run a high fever, and he is on the point of death. As the people, fearing it is demonic, are about to beat the poor deer to death, one wise man interprets the deer's speech and says: 'All species of animals, my friend, do indeed speak, but not in front of people. This animal probably did not notice you when he gave vent to his longings. The rainy season stirred his longings, and his thoughts went back to his herd' (Olivelle 1997: 99). So speech by animals is nothing extraordinary; they just do not speak in front of humans. The issue of the deer speaking in perfect Sanskrit verse, however, is not addressed!

But why use animals as dummies for human ventriloquists in the first place? Stephanie Jamison (2009) has expressed the view—as an answer to why the Vedic literature does not contain animal stories—that animal tales are used in education when it is directed at children and the uneducated rather than at the learned. Clearly, the very setting of the story collections such as the *Pañcatantra* and its later offspring, the *Hitopadeśa*, indicates that they were directed at children, in their case the stupid children of a king. Likewise, Jamison argues that the *Jātataks* were intended for ordinary folks.

Although this is an insightful observation, I think there are also other reasons for using animal fables in Indian literature. The snippets of talking animals in the *Upaniṣads*, for example, probably fall into the general *Upaniṣadic* pattern of wisdom and knowledge coming from unexpected and extraordinary sources: non-Brahmins, poor and low-caste men, women, Gandharvas, and animals. Clearly, children like animals and animal stories, and using them is a fine pedagogical tool in instructing children. But, even adults—even intelligent and educated adults—are fascinated by episodes where the main characters are animals and which carry significant messages, sometimes explicit but more often implicit and below the surface, messages that may be religious, philosophical, or scientific. Walt Disney enterprises prove this point.

Just as animal prohibitions and prescriptions within the dietary rules of various cultures, including the Indian (Olivelle 2002), are an effective and almost universal tool for guarding social boundaries, as Mary Douglas (1966) has painstakingly pointed out, so animal stories may be more effective tools of social control and instruction than learned discourses and śāstric writings. What is clear is that most, if not all, the collections of animals fables in India promote a particular ideology and are not just for 'fun', not simply fairy tales for the entertainment of children.

I want to highlight a few aspects of these ideologically driven didactic functions of animal fables. Animals, divided as they are into distinct spe-

cies, provide a wonderful canvas to paint the picture of a society divided into distinct groups. We see already in the Puruṣa Hymn of the *Ṛg Veda* (10.90) that the four social classes (*varṇa*) of ancient Indian society were viewed as originating from different bodily parts of the primordial person, much like the sun and the moon, and animals and birds. Such social classes are not contingent social formations but essentially different species. From an early period, as I have noted, Indians projected distinct characters and characteristics onto different animals; they created distinct natures—*svabhāvas*—for each species. Such *svabhāvas* are, of course, culturally created and projected, although these creations are based on certain observed behaviour patterns of animals. And we know that *svabhāva* (inherent nature) is closely related to and drives *svadharma* (innate duties and propensities); nature drives behaviour and action. The debate between nature and nurture, between one's birth and one's character—whether one's nature or the way one is brought up is superior—has been an ongoing controversy reflected explicitly even in the *Pañcatantra*. Arguments embedded in stories are advanced for both sides. For the priority of character, several gnomic verses are cited, and I give but two:

A man's nobility comes not
from the quality of his birth;
The eminence of mortal men
rests on how they conduct themselves.
Disgrace and in its train a web
of disasters, hundreds of them,
Hound a man who is an ingrate,
both in this world and in the next.

(*Pañcatantra* I, 166)

Knowledge is the true eye, not mere eyesight;
Conduct makes one noble, not noble birth;
To be content is true prosperity;
To refrain from wrong is erudition.

(*Pañcatantra* II, 46)

The story of the crow Laghupatanaka and the mouse Hiranyaka illustrates this view (*Pañcatantra* II, Story 1). Seeing that Hiranyaka, because of his friendship with the dove king Citragrīva, had freed a flock of doves from a fowler's net in which they were trapped, Laghupatanaka wanted to befriend Hiranyaka. Here is their encounter and arguments that led to their lasting friendship. When Laghupatanaka calls out at Hiranyaka's hole, he asks:

'Hello! Who are you?'
The crow: 'I am a crow named Laghupatanaka'.
When Hiranyaka heard that and from inside saw the crow standing in front of the entrance to his hole, he told the crow: 'Get away from this place!'
The crow: 'I saw how you freed Citragrīva and I want to become friends with you. So, if one day I happen to get into a similar trouble, I can get you to free me. Please,

sir, you must do me this favor. You must become my friend!

Hiraṇyaka laughed and told him: 'How can there be any friendship between you and me?

The impossible is impossible;
 Only what's possible can a man do;
 carts don't go in water,
 or boats on dry terrain. (8)
 The things that are found to join in the world,
 Only those things should the wise seek to join;
 You are the eater, and I am the food;
 what friendship can there be,
 between the two of us?' (9)

The crow replied:

'Even if I were to eat you, good sir,
 It would not amount to much food for me;
 But if you live, my life would be assured,
 Just as Citragrīva's, my flawless friend. (10)

Surely it is not right for you to dismiss my request out of hand.

For people place their trust even in beasts,
 And make treaties with them, when they're upright,
 Solely because their character is good—
 You and Citragrīva illustrate this. (11)

A good man, even when he is enraged,
 Does not change his mind and become hostile;
 a straw torch cannot heat
 the water of the sea. (12)

Your virtues, even though they're not broadcast,
 Have attained great renown all by themselves;
 a jasmine spreads its scent,
 e'en when its covered up.' (13)

When he heard this, Hiraṇyaka said to the crow: 'Look, you are fickle by nature.

And it is said:

The fickle are not faithful to themselves;
 How can they be faithful to other men?
 every venture, therefore,
 the fickle always spoil. (14)

So, get away from this place; you are blocking the entrance to my fortress.'

The crow: 'Fickle! Not fickle!—Friend, why such harsh words? I have made up my mind once and for all. I am attracted by your virtues. So, come what may, I am going to become friends with you.'

Hiraṇyaka: 'Look, my man. You are my enemy. So how can you expect me to be friends with you? As it is said:

Never form an alliance with a foe,
 Even though he is closely tied to you.
 water, though very hot,
 will still put a fire out." (15)

The crow: 'Come, my friend. How can we be enemies? We haven't even seen each other! Why do you utter such nonsense?'

After a lengthy argument, Hiraṇyaka relents:

After listening to that, Hirayaka said to the crow: 'All right, you have convinced me. I'll go along with your wish. I said what I did only to test your intentions, so that, in the event you did kill me, you would not think that I was a fool and you beat me by the power of your wit. Now that I have spelled this out to you, I place my head in your bosom.'

(Olivelle 1997: 78)

Although Laghupatanaka wins the argument here, the proponents of nature over nurture won the debate. As the *Pañcatantra* (I, 78) saying goes, a dog's tail will never become straight however much oil or heat you may apply. This is the principle on which the theory of 'natural enmity' between species is enunciated in the *Pañcatantra*: the well-known enmity between the cobra and the mongoose, and the lesser-known enmity between owls and crows, are all based on the very natures of these species.

The principle that nature (birth, pedigree) rather than upbringing determines behaviour is illustrated in the oft-repeated proverb: there can be no friendship between grass-eaters and meat-eaters, between a food and its eater (II, 9). Several stories illustrate the end result of such friendships; the ox and the camel who befriended lions, the frogs who went for a joyride on a snake's back, all ended up dead (I, frame story, Story 7; III, Story 8). That every creature sinks back to its own nature is illustrated by the mouse transformed into a girl (III, Story 7). Indeed, in this story the girl does not voluntarily return to her native state as a mouse; the cosmos itself, represented by the divine beings who rejected her as a bride, determined her ultimate fate. As I have noted, the proverbial enmity between the snake and the mongoose (V, frame story) illustrates the primacy of nature. The story of the owls and crows (III, frame story) is based on the natural and inborn enmity between the two species, which is traced in one story to an incident in the mythical past (III, Story 2). The big mistake that the owl king Arimardana made was to give shelter to a crow, his natural enemy. The mouse Hiranyaka expounds this theory of enemies. If someone becomes your enemy for some reason, you can always make amends and restore the friendship. But when the enmity is inborn and natural, it can never be eliminated.

I will cite but a single story that nicely illustrates the danger of trusting outward appearances of virtue and holiness. This is the story of a partridge and a hare who go to a holy cat to settle their dispute (*Pañcatantra* III, Story 2.2):

Once upon a time I⁴ lived in a certain tree. In a hole under that same tree lived a bird named Kapiñjala, the Partridge. As time passed and since we lived so close by, we became thick friends. Every day early in the evening, after we had taken our meals and finished our excursions, we used to spend the time together reciting proverbs and posing questions and counter-questions.

4. The narrator of the story is the crow in the story of the owl being crowned king of birds (*Pañcatantra* III, Story 2).

One day Kapiñjala failed to turn up at our normal time of conversation, even though it was evening. That made my heart extremely anxious and I wondered: 'Now, why has he not come back? Is it because he has been killed or captured? Or has he found some other residence more to his liking?' As I was thinking in this manner, many days passed by.

Soon thereafter a hare named Dīrghakarṇa, the Long-eared, came there and occupied the hole in which Kapiñjala used to live. Seeing the hare, I thought to myself: 'My friend is nowhere to be found. So why should I bother about his residence?' The hare hadn't been there too long before Kapiñjala returned. Seeing the hare occupying his hole, he said: 'Hey, this is my place! Get out of here at once.'

The hare: 'You fool! Don't you know the rule: the one who is there has the right to enjoy both house and food.'

Kapiñjala: 'There are people who can arbitrate such issues. Let us ask them what is proper. For it is stated in the Codes of Law:

In cases relating to reservoirs,
Wells and ponds, houses and lodges as well,
The outcome rests on what the neighbors say—
that's the view of Manu.' (47)

'By all means', agreed the hare. And the two of them set out to file their lawsuit. I was curious as to how the case would be settled and followed them close behind. They hadn't gone too far before Kapiñjala asked the hare: 'But who will hear our case?'

The hare replied: 'What about that old cat named Dadhikarṇa, the Curd-ears, who lives on the bank of the river devoted to austerities? He shows compassion to all animals and knows the Codes of Law well. He will be able to settle our case.'

When he heard that, Kapiñjala said: 'I don't want anything to do with that vile fellow. For it is said:

In one who puts on a hermit's disguise,
never place your trust;
We see many hermits at holy sites,
baring throats and teeth.' (48)

Now the cat, Dadhikarṇa, had assumed that fake appearance to gain an easy living. When he heard Kapiñjala's words, he wanted to win the bird's confidence. So with renewed vigor he began to gaze at the sun standing on two feet with his arms raised above his head.⁵ With one eye closed, he remained like this reciting silent prayers. Seeing him praying like that kindled their trust in him. They crept towards him softly and told him of their dispute regarding the dwelling place: 'O hermit! O teacher of the law! We have a dispute. Please settle this dispute of ours in accordance with the Codes of Law.'

The cat replied: 'I am old and my hearing is weak. I cannot hear too well from afar. Please come near and speak aloud.'

So the two came nearer and spoke to him. Dadhikarṇa then, wanting to inspire confidence in them so as to draw them closer, recited these verses from the Law Codes:

Break the Law, and it will break you apart;
Keep the Law, and the Law will keep you safe.
Therefore, a man should never break the Law,

5. It was a common ascetic practice to gaze at the sun with upraised arms while standing on one foot. Standing on two feet seems to be an allowance made to the four-footed animal.

Lest the Law, broken, will break him apart. (49)
 The Law is the one friend who follows you,
 even after you die;

Along with your body everything else,
 is completely destroyed. (50)

When we offer animal oblations,
 into blind darkness we sink;

There has been no Law, there shall never be,
 higher than non-injury. (51)

The wives of others like his own mother,
 What belongs to others like clods of earth,
 And all the creatures on earth like himself—

The man who sees this way, he truly sees. (52)

To make a long story short, through this sort of false piety he won their confidence to such a degree that they came right up to him. Then in one fell swoop that vile cat got hold of them both and killed them.

(Olivelle 1997: 118–20)

A particular species of animal represents a particular anthropomorphized nature. Alan Dundes (1997) has shown how the tale of the sparrow and the crow, a story told to children across much of India, carries the message of the inherent danger in associating with someone of a low caste or an outcaste. Sparrow is the Brahmin and crow is the outcaste. When the foolish sparrow mother permits her friend Crow to stay overnight in her house on a particularly rainy day, disaster strikes that house. Crow eats all her food and leaves only her excrement behind. And Sparrow's children, trying to get some food, only get their hands soiled in Crow's muck.

Whether it is a grass-eater consorting with a meat-eater, a mouse with a crow, owls with crows, frogs with a cobra, fish with a heron, or a camel with a lion, the outcome is always the same. As the *Pañcatantra* (I, Story 7) says: 'Association between grass-eaters and meat-eaters is incompatible'. Animal society functions naturally and appropriately when the species are kept separate and in their distinct roles. Human society, likewise, made up of different species of humans functions best when these species are kept separate and social boundaries safeguarded.

There are other pedagogical ends served by animal fables, and it is the very richness of the possibilities offered by these tales that make them ever popular with the invitation to various and often contradictory reader responses. One of these pedagogical goals pertains to another controversy in ancient India between fate and human effort: which has the priority. The *Pañcatantra* comes down squarely on the side of human effort and the need to be active and proactive in order to succeed. A good example of this is the story of the three fish (I, Story 8.2) that lived in a lake:

In a certain large lake there once lived three big fish. They were named Farsighted, Quick-witted, and Inevitable. One day as he was swimming in the water, Farsighted heard a conversation between some fishermen who were passing nearby: 'This lake has a lot of fish. Let us do some fishing here tomorrow.'

When he heard this, Farsighted thought to himself: 'They are sure to come back. So, I will get hold of Quick-witted and Inevitable and go with them to another lake with open channels.' He called his two friends together and asked them to come along.

Quick-witted replied: 'If in fact the fisher folk come back here, I will save myself by some strategy that fits the circumstances'.

Inevitable, whose end was near, paid no heed to Farsighted's plea and remained idly by making no preparation for the journey. Seeing that the two were determined to remain there, Farsighted made his way into a stream of the river and proceeded to another lake.

The day after he left, the fishermen together with their helpers blocked off the outlet, spread a dragnet, and caught every single fish. When this happened, Quick-witted lay in the net and made himself appear as if he were already dead. The fishermen, thinking, 'This big fish has died on his own', drew him out of the net and threw him near the water. He then jumped in and fled quickly to another lake. Inevitable darted here and there, totally at a loss and not knowing what to do. The fishermen bound him with the net and beat him to death with clubs.

The lady sandpiper continued: 'Therefore I say:

Farsighted and Quick-witted,
Happily did these two thrive;
While Inevitable died.'

(Olivelle 1997: 52–53).

The *Pañcatantra* presents itself as a *Nītiśāstra*, a scientific composition on politics and government, given that the setting is the teaching of this science by a Brahmin expert on pedagogy to a king's stupid and ill-behaved sons. The *Pañcatantra* ends with a moral discourse on Hasty Actions: think before you act! One story is about a Brahmin boy who had a little bag of flour—he day-dreams of selling it and buying a goat, then a cow and so on, until he becomes very rich, marries, and has a son. When his wife scolds the son, he raises the stick to beat his wife but hits the pot containing the flour; the flour comes down on his head and paints his body white. Or the more famous story of the Brahmin who left his pet mongoose to look after his only son. The mongoose comes running out to greet his returning master. Seeing his bloody mouth and paws, the Brahmin thinks the mongoose has eaten his son and beats it to death, only to discover that the mongoose had killed a vicious snake that had come to attack his son.

The moral of each story, the teachings of story collections, may be different. Yet, I think that the organization of animal society according to the human, and thus presenting animal interaction as a mirror of the human is at the heart of the Indian animal tales and the phenomenon of talking animals.

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