CHAPTER FOUR

Indian Fable: Contemporary Theory

But first “Fable” is the tale of invention, it recites and describes itself; it presents itself from the start as a beginning, the inauguration of a discourse or of a textual mechanism. It does what it says, not being content with announcing...

Jacques Derrida

In his widely acclaimed book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson posits that, by proposing a narrative discourse, narratives create an imagined community of people across different cultures that are not familiar to one another and yet inhabit the same narrative space that the reading of the story creates. For the Indian fables that have traveled to all the corners of the world, it is worthwhile to perform a cross cultural analysis by discussing them in the context of contemporary theories of narrative and discourse from the West. There is no better text to quote from to understand the centrality of the narrative in the modern western knowledge systems than Roland Barthe’s *Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative*:

The Narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances- as though any material were fit to receive man’s stories... narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting ( think of Carpassio’s Saint Ursula), stained-glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite

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The diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor have been a people without narrative.

The Indian people have been gifted with a rich narrative tradition, the fable tradition being one, and the universality of which, both in terms of time and space, is revealed in the way the narratives lend themselves to the theoretical models of narrative analysis developed in the recent times. What is even more interesting, however, is that the Indian texts, themselves, internalize theoretical systems of various types that seem so close to what has been understood in recent times as postmodernism.

For specialist critics and the common readers alike, it is a matter of great reflection as to how the various texts of the Indian tradition, including the collection of fables, have survived so long. The reason, which the texts make apparent, is that they are open to the mutability of the time. Being part of an oral tradition, the texts are not restricted within an elite domain closed by the signature of the author. In this sense, they have been referred to as work in the previous chapters more in the sense of a text, rather than a copyright-creation of an author.

In the Indian tradition, the texts display "the relativization of the relation of the writer, the reader and the observer." The Mahabharata is a wonderful case in point. The text, in the oral form has come down to us through the cumulative efforts of the Ganesha, Vyasa, the Sutas, the Bhrgus and the many later compilers, who included the mini narratives in the epic. But, who is the author of the Mahabharata? It is not important for an Indian mind to associate a text with an author. Since the very beginning, the compositions have developed with the mutable relationship between the various composers, the listeners and the observers. Generation after generation a new relationship between the narrator and the listener (now, also the reader) keep the text circulating in the culture. The varying wring of the narrator-listener relationship, that dilutes the author-centric approach, is mentioned in the Mahabharata:

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Saunaka said, “O son, thou hast narrated to me this extensive and great history commencing from the progeny of Bhrigu. O son of Suta, I have been much gratified with thee. I ask thee again, to recite to me, O son of a Suta, the history composed by Vyasa. The varied and wonderful narrations that were recited amongst those illustrious Sadasyas assembled at the sacrifice, in the intervals of their duties of that long-extending ceremony, and the objects also of those narrations, I desire to hear from thee, O son of a Suta! Recite therefore, all those to me fully.”

‘Sauti said, “The Brahmanas, in the intervals of the duties, spoke of many things founded upon the Vedas. But Vyasa recited the wonderful and great history called the Bharata.”

As apparent, Vyasa is not the author but only the recitor. And, as is evident form this quotation, even the mini narratives, the fables in the Mahabharata are recited by Bhishma or Vidura form the folk, neither created by them nor by the narrator of the work as a whole.

Likewise, if we consider Vishnu Sharma as the author of the fables, in the sense of a creator, what about the narratorial voice that narrates Vishnu Sharma himself and the fables attributed to him in the text? The Panchatantra fables are not an expression of the stories created by an author for a specific audience, the princes. In fact, both the narrator and the immediate listener are only of the many instances of the narration of the fables in specific situations. This is attested by the fact that quite a few fables from the text have come form the Jatakas and many other sources, which questions in another way the authorial purity of the work. The issue of intertextuality related to this is discussed later. Hence, the Panchatantra, in all its versions and adaptations, is a typical instance of the Indian text that is primarily about the circulation of the text itself, regardless of the individual existences of the author or the reader.

In terms of the language brought from the postmodernist theory, the fables are primarily about creating an opening where the authorial subject continuously disappears. In the Panchatantra, there is an impression as if Vishnu Sharma is the composer, but in the

Hitopadesha, Narayana becomes the compiler and Vishnu Sharma the narrator. But even the narrator’s responsibility is taken away from him as there are several narrators all the time entering through the fabric of the text. For instance, in the first book, from Vishnu Sharma to the fox-brothers Damanaka and Karataka to the Sparrow, Titibhi, the narratorial position is constantly shifting, thereby making the fixed position of not only the author but also the narrator problematic. Michel Foucault in the beginning of his essay, What is an Author?, says

The coming into being of the notion of “author” constitutes the privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy, and the sciences. Even today, when we reconstruct the history of a concept, literary genre, or school of philosophy, such categories seem relatively weak, secondary, and superimposed sanctions in comparison with the solid and fundamental unit of the author and the work.\(^{5}\)

In the Indian tradition, there is no such “privileged moment of individualization” encountered. The fable-narratives in the Jatakas might seem close to an assertion of an individual author, the Buddha, whose individuality might appear to have dominated the form and the reception of the stories in the Indian culture. But even in this case, there is no question of identifying the single most important narrator-author, the Buddha. As it has been discussed in chapter one, for more than 800 years, at least from the 3rd century B.C to the 5th century A.D, when Buddhaghosha gave the Jataka its final shape, there has been no need to bring the signature of the Buddha’s individuality for the dissemination of the fables. In fact, ironically it was the excessive freedom of the stories away from the influence of the author-narrator that made it important to give a tangible shape to them. Again, the concern was not that they should be compiled so as to conform exactly to what the Buddha had said, but in order to prevent the distortion of the Dhamma they were compiled during the last of the various Buddhist councils. But even after they were written down, the texts have been more active in the oral form.


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The Buddha narrated the fables in the form of the oral tradition, and, it is well understood that in India all the saints who teach morals in form of the stories are considered themselves as vehicles of the already existing knowledge. There is no impression generated that the narratives or the discourses come from the Self, even if it is the Self of the Buddha or, say, Guru Nanak. The knowledge as a structure is beyond them, and they become only the medium to bring the knowledge to the masses. It is a part of the Indian popular lore that once a yogi asked Guru Nanak ‘who is your guru’, at which Nanak replied the Word is the Guru and the mind attuned to the Word is the disciple. Likewise, the Taittiriya Brahmana states, ‘All the Gods, the celestial spirits, men and animals live in the Word. In the Word all the worlds find their support’.  

As the Jataka fable starts, the narrator- Buddha makes it clear that he is only making known the already existing historical narrative from the past, about which the disciples and the other listeners are unaware but which does already exist apart from him. In the Lakkhana-Jataka (No.11), the Buddha begins the narrative in the characteristic Jataka convention:

Once upon a time in the city of Rajagaha in the kingdom of Magadha there ruled a certain king of Magadha, in whose days the Bodhisatta came to life as a stag. Growing up, he dwelt in the forest as the leader of the herd of a thousand deer. He had two young ones named Luckie and Blackie. When he grew old, he handed his charge over to his two sons, placing five hundred deer under the care of each of them. And so now these two young stags were in charge of the herd.

As is apparent, the narrator here not only provides absolute objectivity by roping in the reference to the king and the milieu, but also makes it very clear that what he is narrating is not his conception, but only a mere narration of an experience from his earlier life, which is unknown to those who lack such divine vision. It is the history which is presented as the narrative. When he ends the narrative, he again makes it clear that he is not inserting anything to dominate the already existing historical narrative:

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6 Quoted in Raimundo Panniker. *The Vedic Experience: Mantramanjari*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd. II.8.8.4

Such was the Bodhisatta's welcome to his son; and after living to a good old age, he passed away to fare according to his deserts.\(^8\)

But the question is, if the narrative as a story or as a discourse exists independent of the author in the Indian tradition, then why is the reference to author-narrator as a vehicle of narrative-dissemination important? Samuel Beckett nicely expresses it when he says, "'What does it matter who is speaking,' someone said that 'what does it matter who is speaking'?". The same indifference to the question of the author is to be found in the Indian texts.

The author-function, to use Foucault's term, is invoked in the Indian tradition only as a signifier, a name, to tag the narratives with. It is made very clear in the beginning of the Panchatantra that Vishnu Sharma is not the author, in the sense of a creator. He is the one who has mastered the discourses of the Upanishads, the Puranas and the Dharmashastra. He is the one who knows the codes that govern these discourses, and can represent them in narrative form. He is an expert knower rather than an author. To go back to Foucault, "even when an individual has been accepted as an author, we must ask whether everything he wrote, said, or left behind is part of his work".\(^10\)

In the Panchatantra, Vishnu Sharma is given the name of an author only to achieve materiality for the text. There is an explicit statement that everything that he narrated, in fact, came from the discourses which were already said by many other thinkers before him. In a characteristic Indian manner, Vishnu Sharma, in the beginning of the text, disowns so to say his copyright over his textbook material and attributes the contents to many who have uttered the discourses before him:

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\(^8\) Ibid., p. 36  
\(^10\) Op cit., p.265
The author also offers obeisance to proto-sages Manu, Brahatspati, Shukracharya, Parashar, and his son Vyasa, sages Chanakya and other who laid the ground rules for continuance of society. It is made known that the text is only a rearrangement, in narrative form, the discourses already existing, as uttered by the various thinkers of the Indian tradition.

Similarly, the Buddha functions more as a signifier/name for the narratives around which the stories could be arranged. He does attribute legitimacy to the narratives, but not as the one who created them but as the one who simply narrated them:

The story was told by the Master in the Bamboo grove near Rajagaha about Devadatta...Devadatta, through failing to carry the Five Points which he had pressed for, had made a schism in the Brotherhood and had gone off with five hundred Brethren to dwell at Gayasisa... the Master, knowing this, called the two chief disciples and said...

This theoretical position of describing the Buddha or Vishnu Sharma just as another narrative device is not much distant from some of the recent researches in the West on the Greek literature. As our texts, the Greek texts are also difficult to pin down to a single author. In the introduction to a recent translation of Odyssey, Thomas R. Walsh and Rodney Merrill puts forth a simple question, “What is meant by the name Homer?” Some critics argue that Homer simply functions as a figure of speech in the text. To quote Andrew Bennet,

This difficulty in thinking about the ‘first’ poet in the European literary tradition is a consequence not just of a lack of records but of the very status of the poet in the oral culture in which he is or they are understood to have worked... every performance in the oral epic tradition constitutes a new composition, that every performance is unique, and that at the same time every performance is also embedded within the tradition.

14 Ibid.
This is exactly the case with the Indian texts, as ours has also been predominantly an oral tradition.

This whole debate around the author began to surface in the West with Barthes’ landmark essay, *The Death of the Author* (1967), because of an anxiety to break free of constraints imposed by the Self/Other dichotomy. An act of reading in that tradition is a contest between the reader and text, and hence an allergy to the so called authorial oppression in the acts of reading a texts. “The author in this model not only ‘owns’ the text but owns guarantees, originates, its meanings, its interpretations”. Hence, Barthes and other postmodernists have made an effort to liberate the text from the authorial prison-house:

... *The Death of the Author*, then, abolishes authorial voice, eliminates voice as origin and source, voice as identity, unity...by describing the modern author as ‘scriptor’ and displacing the meaning from the author to the text, Barthes is able to argue that readers will be liberated from the oppressive control of authorial consciousness and critical guardianship.

A reference to the *Panchatantra* makes Barthes’ notion of the ‘scriptor’ pretty clear. Vishnu Sharma is no more than a ‘scriptor’, a go-between the different knowledge-texts (on culture, polity, art and administration) and the masses. At best, he is the illustrator; a skilled knower who could illustrate the knowledge of these disciplines through narratives. The position being the originator is never his, but in any case, it has never been a privileged position in the Indian tradition.

This brings us to the related issue of the dynamics of textual interlinking in the Indian fables. The various fable-texts, as discussed in chapter one, were in wide circulation in and around the 3rd century B.C, and hence there is a great deal of overlapping of the textual space evident in the case of some of the fables. This whole issue can be discussed in the context of the theory of intertextuality as found in the contemporary theory. Intertextuality, as a theory, talks about the cumulative formation of the various texts of a culture or cultures in general.

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15 Ibid., p.15
16 Ibid, 12-15

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Julia Kristeva is the first theorist who coined the term intertextuality in her essays, *The Bounded Text* and *Word, Dialogue, and Novel*, both of which were first published in 1969. By intertextuality, she means “...to indicate that a text (such as a novel, a poem or historical document) is not a self-contained or autonomous entity, but is produced from other texts. The interpretation that a particular reader generates from a text will then depend on the recognition of the relationship of the given text to other texts”. She discusses literary texts in terms of two axes: a *horizontal axis*, which connects the author and reader of a text, and a *vertical axis*, which links the text to other texts. Now, there are several codes that unite these two axes, which are shared by all the other texts. For reading any text, therefore, an understanding of the codes of other texts is equally important. Kristeva asserts that “every text is from the outset under the jurisdiction of other discourses which impose a universe on it”.

This theoretical postulation is quite in consonance to the Indian fables, and other narrative of the Indian tradition. In fact, intertextuality applies more to an oral tradition than a written tradition, because in the oral tradition the texts are always already on a move in every single act of reading or performance. As discussed in chapter 2, the narratives of the Indian fable have never been frozen by the written word. The Indian folklore has developed the popular stories in various Indian vernaculars by adopting the stories from the fable composition like the *Panchatantra, Hitopadesha, Jatakas* and the like. And these adaptations or adoptions have never been an academic activity, performed by deliberate minds. But indeed, there has been a natural process of assimilation between different cultural texts of India. How can we perhaps account for the presence of narrative motifs from a *Panchatantra* fable in the folktale of a certain region unless there has been a natural process of negotiation among the various Indian narratives? Thus the Indian fable and non-fable narratives are highly intertextual, which “may be understood

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as the thesis that no text exists outside its continuing interpretation and reinterpretation.\footnote{Ibid., p.198}

It would not be possible unless the oral form of transmission of the Indian fables made them operate simultaneously as an interactive field. It is very interesting to note how a single narrative found in the \textit{Jatakas} could do rounds both in the \textit{Mahabharata} and the \textit{Panchatantra} as well as in the modern Indian folklore, with varying meanings and implications. It goes on only to show that narratives co-exist in the oral tradition that facilitates a higher degree of textual exchanges. Having said that, this argument comes very close to Roland Barthes' formulation of a 'Text', which he compares with a 'Work', in his essay \textit{From Work to Text}:

\begin{quote}
The Text is not to be thought of as an object that can be computed...the work is a fragment of substance, occupying a part of the space of books (in a library for example), the Text is a methodological field...the text is a process of demonstration, speaks according to certain rules (or against certain rules); the work can be held in hand, the text is held in language, only exists in the movement of a discourse (or rather, it is Text for the very reason that it knows itself as text)...\footnote{Roland Barthes, “From Work to Text”, Stephen Heath ed. \textit{Image-Music-Text}. London: Fontana, 1977. p.156-57}
\end{quote}

Exactly this is how we understand that the Indian fables expand their methodological field by encapsulating various spheres of textual exchanges and performance. La Fontaine does not at all exaggerate when he says, in a preface to the second collection of his fables, that a greater part of his work he owes to the \textit{Panchatantra}. This is not simply a case of conscious borrowing- that is how a written tradition works- but a case of textual codes entering different spheres of culture.

As discussed in the chapter, the research findings of Theodor Benfey confirm the common textual sphere of the Indian fables. There are many instances of the narratives of the \textit{Jatakas} and the \textit{Panchatantra}, especially, criss-crossing one another’s textual contours. It is on the evidence of intertextual connections that Benfey claims the \textit{Panchatantra} to be a Buddhist work. One another indicator of the fables’ freedom from
the composer and its free life in the site of texuality is that with time, as various versions of the *Panchatantra* came up, the intertextual connection became more prominent. The fact the insertion from the *Jatakas* is to be found in the Syriac version of the *Panchatantra* goes on to show that the journey of a text over time is fraught with relations with the other texts of the culture.

Clear intertextual connections can seen among the *Jataka* fable No. 361, the frame narrative of the Lion and the Bull in the first book of the *Panchatantra* and the modern folk narrative included in Walter Skeat’s *Fables and Folk-Tales form an Easter Forest*, as discussed in chapter 2, in a different context. However, the use of narrative in all these texts is not simply a case of simple borrowing. Though, critics believe the *Jataka* fable is the original source, the fable in the other two texts are not naïve adaptations. The modern folk-tale, as collected by Skeat, is different from the Buddhist *Jataka* in the sense that the Jackal is not accepted in the friendship of the Lion and the Bull. Likewise, in this modern tale, it is the Lion who kills the Bull by his roar, whereas in the *Panchatantra*, the Bull’s roar made the Lion scared to self-decimation. The fable found in the *Panchatantra* differs from the modern folk fable in the sense that the Lion and the Bull are not friends before the appearance of the Jackal on the scene, and only the Bull is killed in the fight. Again, a variant in which the estrangement is not successful is to be found in the *Jataka* 361.

So, intertexuality is not about one text being borrowed from another text. It is equally not about the one text being influenced by another text:

> [t]he concept ... has been generally misunderstood. It has nothing to do with matters of influence by one writer upon another, or with the sources of a literary work ... It is defined in [Kristeva’s] *La Revolution du langage poetique* [1974] as the transposition of one or more systems of signs into another ... ‘Any signifying practice is a field (in the sense of space traversed by lines of force) in which various signifying systems undergo such a transposition’

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Hence, intertexuality has not anything to do with matters of influence of one writer upon another, or with sources of literary work; it actually involves the components of a textual system, for instance the motifs found in the fables. The whole process is defined in *La Revolution du Langage Poetique* as the transposition of the system of signs into different textual systems, which gives birth to new articulations all the time, a new development of systems. In the *Bounded Text*, Kristeva, again, argues that in the textual space of a given text many utterances from other texts meet and neutralize one another.

Therefore, the interdiscursive references found in the texts assume on the part of the readers prior knowledge about them. In the Indian fables, we are concerned more about the fable motifs which are constantly shared across different texts, because of the oral narrative practice. The motifs function more as signs, with shifting meanings, and therefore, we are not talking about the entire story being represented in different texts but the motifs and cultural meanings being transposed from one text to another. As for example, the Lion-Bull episode and its variant spread in different texts. The motif of the wild roar, for instance, enters as an important meaning-unit in *Singala-Jataka* (No. 152). In the *Panchatantra*, the Lion is horrified almost to death because of the Bull’s roar; in the modern folk-tale, it is the roar of the Lion that kills the Bull; in the *Jataka*, the roar of the Lion kills the Jackal. Now, all these texts exist in a simultaneous textual framework through the transposition of the roar-sign form one text to another. In the *Jataka*, it is the *Bodhisattva* who is born as the Lion, and uses the roar as a strategy to kill the Jackal, which his brothers failed to do:

...the Lion continued: “My brothers wanted to kill this Jackal, but knew not how to lay their plans cleverly; so they leapt up too quickly at him, and so came by their death. This I will not do; but I will make the Jackal burst his own heart as he lies there in the Crystal Cave.” So he espied out the path whereby the Jackal used to go up and down, and turning that way he roared thrice the lion’s roar, that earth and heaven together were all one great roaring! The Jackal lying in the Crystal Cave was frightened and astounded, so that his heart burst’ and he perished on the spot incontinently.

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This motif again transposes into the text of Sabbadatha-Jataka (No.241), where we come across the following passage, which describes the Bodhisattva:

So he tapped with his foot on the Lion which he sat upon to roar. And the Lion resting his mouth upon the Elephant's temple, roared thrice, without any matter of doubt. The elephants were terrified and dropped the Jackal down at their feet; they trampled upon his head and crushed it to atoms.

So, it is in fact the meaning-units that enter the different texts, and this particular motif, found in the Jataka, the Panchatantra and modern folk-tale, could be seen as an example of intertextuality in the Indian fables.

W. Norman Brown in his The Panchatantra and the Modern Indian Folklore gives an estimate of 3000 small narratives from India (contemporary India), Sri Lanka, Burma, Tibet and Malaysia that have developed over the centuries from early Indian tales found in the Panchatantra. This is a good indicator of the intertextuality that governs the development of the Indian narratives. Some of the fables change the characters as they enter different cultures but the motif as the meaning system is transposed without much change. As for example, the motif of rash killing of a loyal animal, where the Indian Mongoose becomes the Dog once the fable enters the narrative space of the European cultures, but the primary meaning that is to be communicated remains the same, though the ancillary meanings takes on different implications depending upon the new narrative contexts of each narrative.

Another indicator of intertextuality of the Indian fables is the presence of references and quotations from the various knowledge-texts that re-form themselves in the new narrative contexts of the fable-narratives. For example, the Chankaya verses that have been discussed in chapter 2. Now, most of the Chanakya verses and those in the Mahabharata have been absorbed in the Indian society in the form of proverbs, and their entry into the text of the Indian fable endorses Kristeva's view that "any text is constructed as a mosaic

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23 Ibid. Book II. p. 170
of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another.\(^{24}\) Thus, the Indian fable-narrative is often 'plural', to use Barthe's term. We might take the following verses from Chanakya Compendia of Verses and the *Mahabharata*, (already cited in Chapter 2), and discuss the intertextual connections:

(a) Be not too straight, but look to the woods.
   Straight trees are cut but the crooked stand.\(^{25}\)

(b) You should give up a man for a family,
   Give up a family for a village,
   Give up a village for a country,
   But sell out the world for yourself.\(^{26}\)

Now, the assimilation of these two verses in the *Hitopadesha* makes the fable-text 'plural'. In the poststructuralist/postmodernist sense the plurality of the text does not simply mean the presence of more than one meaning, as finding the Chanakya sayings or Kamandaka's verses in the *Panchatantra* would imply at an obvious level:

The Text is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an over crossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination. The plural of the Text depends, that is, not on the ambiguity of its contents but on what might be called the stereographic plurality of its weave of signifiers (etymologically, the text is a tissue, a woven fabric).\(^{27}\)

The Indian fable-text is dense with the presence of meanings that require readings at various levels. Though at various levels the quotations from the various knowledge-texts that are used by the fabulists are acknowledged but at times there is no clear statement on the origin of the source idea or motif.


\(^{25}\) Ludwik Sternbach, *Chanakya-Niti-Text Tradition*. Hoshiarpur: Visveshwaranand Vedic Research Institute, 1963-64. Chankya Verse. 6.5

\(^{26}\) Ibid. Chanakya Verse. 1.7

Hence, the reader might acquire a prominent position in delving out the intertextual connections which are embedded. The idea of the frame narrative of the third book of the *Panchatantra* has come through the *Mahabharata*. The *Panchatantra* text though apparently does not mention it, but in the poststructuralist interpretation of the fable, we might delve out the signifying system of the *Panchatantra*, which has modified the ethical standpoint of the *Mahabharata* fable while co-opting its narrative resources. As already discussed in chapter 2, the fable in the *Mahabharata* and the *Panchatantra* belong to two entirely different world-views. The fight between the owls and the crows as witnessed by Ashwatthama does face ethical questioning but not so is the case in the *Panchatantra*. What is important in terms of theory discussed is that like this particular instance, there are various places in the Indian fables where references from the other texts are not at all acknowledged but depend upon the reading activity to delve out not the source of the fable but the intertextual performances of the text that the reader is interpreting:

The intertextual in which every text is held, it itself being the text-between of another text, it is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find the ‘sources’, the ‘influences’ of a work is to fall in with the myth of filiations; the citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read: they are quotations without inverted commas 28.

There are different citations from the *Sastras* on different aspects of polity and practical living in the *Panchatantra* and the *Hitopadesha* which are anonymous and yet they make the authority of the Sastras visible in the narrative.

This leads us to another aspect of postmodernist poetics as reflected in the Indian fables, which is about the decentring of narrative. A fable never attempts a kind of totalization of the narrative elements by subjecting them to a single paradigm. In other words, at different occasions a narrative flow is broken, decentred and diversified to accommodate various discourses. This is a very important element in postmodernism as written by

28 Ibid., p.160
Linda Hutcheon in her *A Poetics of postmodernism*. Its typical case can be seen in the *Panchatantra*, where the fables, in the middle of the narrative, would put on halt and pick up a passage from Chanakya or Bharat Muni or Narada and then again come back and complete the narrative process.

Such decentring is because of the pressure of the discourse on the narrative which makes it important to bring the portions from the discursive texts into the narrative framework. Most of the time the narrative is diversified with the inclusion of the poetic passages that bring a discourse, which though related to the narrative often grow independent of it. For instance, in the third fable of the third book, we come across a story about the Rabbit and the Elephant. Now in the middle of the narrative, the structure breaks to accommodate a discourse given by Manu:

> For his own protection the king should, without a second thought, abandon the land that provides him comfort and is full of harvestable land and capable of rearing animals... in times of peril, one must amass wealth...  

Instances like this make the Indian fable an eclectic assimilation of diverse narrative threads. The use of verse is very prominently present in these narratives. In fact *gathas* (verse) appear quite frequently in these narratives, often breaking the narrative flow but contributing important thoughts to the story.

The discursive use of the *gathas* (verses), as discussed in chapter 3 in detail, is another aspect of the Indian fables that takes them closer to another postmodernist theory associated with the name of Mikhail Bakhtin. His views expressed in the essay, *Discourse in the Novel*, is more relevant to this context. In this essay, Bakhtin discusses on the questions of literary genres in terms of his famous concept of dialogic form. In a broader sense, he discusses the relationship between language and discourse, and argues that language as a form of social communication always include more than the speaking subject the voices of the immediate listener and other individual and social voices. And

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hence, language is always, at least the language as operative in the society, dialogic. To enumerate on this, he makes a distinction between prose and poetic forms used in literature, and contends that the language of novel (prose) is dialogic whereas the poetic language is monologic.

In other words, he contends that prose is centrifugal, as it is related to history and connects to the other social voices, whereas poetry is centripetal; it is primarily about a self-contained language that draws only on itself to attain an autonomous aesthetics:

The poet is a poet in so far as he accepts the idea of a unitary and singular language and a unitary, monologically sealed-off utterance. These ideas are immanent in the poetic genres with which he works... The poet must assume a complete single-personed hegemony over his own language...there must be no distance between the poet and his word.

Poetry found in the Indian fables functions quite contrary to Bakhtin’s formulations. May be because it is primarily a folk poetry, or poetry as a part of a prose narrative, that too of the fable, so it operates as a social discourse. May be Bakhtin’s views are about poetry more complete as an art form, rather than poetic utterances. But, whatever be the case, poetry in the Jatakas and the Panchatantra assume a very prominent discursive form. In fact, it is more social, and more dialogic than the prose.

In fact, it is poetry which brings the narrative back to the social sphere of the readers from the imaginative world of the animal characters. In the Jatakas the complete discourse of the story is described in explicit terms in the form of poetry, as for instance in the following passage from Kharadiya-Jataka (No.15), where the Bodhisattva born as the head of a herd of deer says he can teach only the able listeners:

For when a deer has twice four hoofs to run
And branching antlers armed with countless tines,
And when by seven tricks he’s saved himself,

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I teach him then, Kharadiya, no more.31

It is in such poetic passages that the central message of the narrative is expressed, and moreover, often, these passages become an integral part of the folk so that the narrative itself is identified by the poetry contained in it. Hence, the distinction between prose and poetry as formulated by Bakhtin does not hold ground in the context of the Indian fables.

However his general views on literary prose is very helpful in the discussion of an important element of the Indian fable. Discourse Typology in Prose is an essay about the linguistic devices used in the literary prose, especially about the use of parody and dialogue. Bakhtin makes a significant statement in the second paragraph of the essay:

Despite the fundamental differences among them, all these devices have one feature in common: in all of them discourse maintains a double focus, aimed at the referential object of speech, as in ordinary discourse, and simultaneously at a second context of discourse, a second speech act by another addressee.32

Bakhtin makes a fundamental distinction between ordinary prose which makes a direct reference to one object, as its language operates within what he calls, “the bounds of a single monologic context”, and a literary discourse in which there are multiple levels at which language works, in which, for instance, a dialogue does not refer to someone or something directly but leads to another dialogue, another language. The language of the Indian fable, primarily because it uses so diversified material, is double-edged. A character, in some of the narratives, speaks to another character not about something but about another language. In other words, the texture of the Indian fables is replete with multiplicity of utterances. The narratives provide instances “of doubly oriented discourse”.33

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33 Ibid., p.286
The fourth story in the third book of the *Panchatantra* has already been discussed in another context. It serves well also to examine the polyphonic nature of this fable. In Bakhtin’s terms, the narrative, as many other fables found in the *Panchatantra*, constantly refers to myriad other discourses. To begin with we have the congenial friendship of Kapiljala the Sparrow and the Crow. However, their friendly dialogues more than referring to things of ordinary life and making any direct references, lead to other discourses of Mahrishis, Rajnishis and scriptures. This is again left undeveloped, the Sparrow disappears, and his abode in the hollow of the tree is occupied by the Rabbit. When the Sparrow returns disputes takes place and legal discourse is brought in. With their going to the Cat for legal advice, again discourse on *dharma* is roped in.

The point that is intended here is that all these varied discourses in the narrative are to a great extent independent of the other, one discourse becomes a cog for another discourse. There are multiple “speech acts” in the narrative and the few are extremely contradictory. It really is a challenge as how to analyze the multiple discursive strands in the same narrative communicated by various linguistic devices like dialogue and parody:

Inevitably there will arise the question as to whether, and how, heterogeneous types of word-usage may be combined within a single context. On these grounds, a whole set of new stylistic problems arises; problems which until now stylistics has failed to take into account. As concerns style in prose, it is precisely these problems that have a paramount significance.

A case of extreme heterogeneity of language used in the fable is the parody of the Buddhist concept of *ahimsa* and other religious precepts by the Cat, uttered in the religious language of the scriptures which essentially contradict her that dialogue with the Sparrow and the Crow where she talks about eating them. Whatever is the case, the point that Bakhtin puts across and which is reflected in the Indian fables is the presence of multiple discursive levels within the single narrative space, often including contending voices.

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34 Ibid.
Quite close to this issue is the analysis of the way the narratives structure themselves in order to communicate a set of meanings. A discussion of the Indian fable-narrative in the context of the Western narratology might be an interesting experience to explore the narrative aspect of the fables. Narratology has developed as a distinct school in the contemporary theory with a lot of influence on the way literature and other cultural forms are studied and interpreted in the context of their narrativity. Theorists associated with this field are all big names in contemporary Western theory- Claude Levi-Strauss, Vladimir Propp, Boris Tomashevsky, Tzvetan Todorov, Roland Barthes, Gerard Gennette, Seymour Chatman and others.

In chapter 2, it has been discussed that the Indian fables require double readings to reveal the inherent meanings under the facade of the fable form. The fable, as is obvious about its form, operate on the literal level of meaning and then on the metaphorical level. It is on the close second reading that the reader gets to comprehend the discourse immanent in the fable-narrative. This second reading amounts to the reading the narrative as whole, connecting the basic narrative to the discursive statements in form of the verses, and also checking the connections between the story and the frame-narrative.

The sixth fable in the last book of the Panchatantra, for instance, is about the friendship of the fishes Shatabuddhi and Sahasrabuddhi and the Frog Ekabuddhi. On the literal level, the narrative is about the unfortunate capture of the fishes by the fishermen due to their not heeding to the earlier advice of the Frog-friend to shift to some other pond as the fisherman were coming with their nets. On the second level the narrative exposes the contradiction between wisdom and blind knowledge, as expressed by using the passages from Chanakya in the story and by placing this story within the frame narrative that communicates the consequences of hasty action. The real intent of the text is communicated by the contradiction expressed by the following Chanakya verse

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There is no place in this world that is beyond the reach of the virtues of a wise man, as Chanakya destroyed the sword waving Nanda dynasty using his intellect.
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Even those places can be immediately accessed by the wisdom of a wise man which are in accessible even to air and light\textsuperscript{35}.

and what the Frog says to his wife seeing the fisherman carrying the two supposedly wise fishes with him

Oh dear! Look Shatabuddhi is being carried on the head and Sahasrabuddhi is hanging from the shoulder while I Ekabuddhi, one with a single virtue, is sporting here in clean water\textsuperscript{36}.

It is the connection between the narrative units that brings out the narrative intent. The contemporary narrative theories are based on the various distinctions of the nature of what appears and what is embedded in the narrative structure. Most of the theories of the narrative are based on the two basic linguistic distinctions, langue and parole as developed by Saussure and competence and performance as developed by Chomsky, by which it is to be implied that the story is an abstract thing before it is articulated in the systemic world of the narrated text. Though, there are critics like Todorov who argue that there is no meaning, no structure possible to be identified before being articulated. However, more generally the theorist believe that any given narrative has a surface structure and a deep structure, to use Chomsky’s terms, and each has in his/her own way discussed this distinction.

For instance, Levi-Strauss in his The Structural Study of Myth analyses a myth-narrative as made up of units put together according to certain rules. He states that these units make up relation with each other on the basis of binary pairs or opposites, which give the basis of the structure of the narrative. This again shows a distinction between an apparent structure of the narrative and the structure hidden, the unraveling of which leads to new meanings. Drawing on Strauss’ method we can discuss the Indian fables, especially those in the Yogavasistha. At a deeper level the fable featuring the Crow can be interpreted using the concept of binary opposition. In the text the binaries of characters such as Crow/Cuckoo, Crow/ Crab, Rook/Owl, Crows/Cranes, and Cocks/Vultures could be interpreted, as between the first two in the following excerpt:

\textsuperscript{35} Panchatantra, translated by Vijay Narain. Delhi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Pratishthan, 2006. p.337
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.p.338
It is better for you O clamorous crow to rend ears of those with your cracking voice that are not tired with splitting the head of others with their wily verbiage.

The cuckoo associating with the crow, and resembling him in figure and colour, is distinguished by his sweet notes from the other; as learned man makes himself known by his speech in the society of the ignorant.  

The philosophical discourse of the text can be discussed by foregrounding the systemic arrangement of the narrative units on the basis of binary oppositions.

The systemic arrangement of narrative units is common to most of the contemporary narrative theories. Hence, the distinction between the raw structure available during a general reading and the systemic structure revealed during a structural analysis of the narrative is communicated by the use of synonymous terms by various theorists: fabula and sjuzhet by the Russian Formalists Propp and Tomasevsky, histoire and discours by the French Benveniste and Barthes and story and discourse by the English narratologist Chatman. In all these, the first term is a simple description of the fundamental events of a story in their actual chronological order, while the second term denotes the conscious rearrangement of the fundamental events of the story and involves complex shifting of the narrative units in terms of time, space and characters. All these theorists understand that each and every narrative has two levels of narrative arrangements. For instance, A.J.Griemases stresses on

recognizing and accepting the necessity of a fundamental distinction between two levels of representation and analysis: an apparent level of narration, at which the manifestations of narration are subject to the specific exigencies of the linguistic substances through which they are expressed, and an immanent level, constituting a sort of common structural trunk, at which narrativity is situated and organized prior to its manifestations. A common semiotic level is thus

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distinct from the linguistic level and is logically prior to it, whatever the language chosen for manifestation.38

He has reversed the two terms we are concerned with. The apparent level of narration is what is constructed by the text, is what is meant by sjuzhe/discours/discourse, while the immanent level is what is meant by fabula/histoire/story. In other words, the narrative theory focuses on the way the literary language develops a system for the narrative content in the process of writing. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan believes that "being an abstraction, a construct, the story is not directly available to the reader"39 Rather, the story is extracted from the world and is put into a narrative form for the reader to understand. But, at the same time, the story is not a "raw, undifferentiated material" but it has "its structured character, its being made of separable components, and hence having potential of forming networks of relations"40 According to Claude Bremond, "It is the words one reads, it is the images one sees, it is gestures one deciphers, but through them it is a story one follows; and it may be the same story"41

In the Indian fables we find that the narrative text does encapsulate the narrated event in its pristine form and develops it into a system. As put forth in the Western narrative theory, in the Indian fables the reading of the narrative text leads to an understanding of the core experience that is utilized, rearranged and narrated that gives the story its final form. We may illustrate this concept by picking up a fable-narrative for discussion. Vanarinda-Jataka (No.57) is a famous fable from the Jatakas, and it acquired even more fame as a Panchatantra fable, which later took it from the Buddhist fable-composition. This narrative is very commonly known as that of the Monkey and the Crocodile, the Monkey’s heart and the wish of the Crocodile’s wife to devour it.

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40 Ibid.
The *fabula/histoire/story* of the fable-narrative is that there lives a monkey on a tree on the bank of a river, a crocodile lives in the same river with his wife, the two become friends, the crocodile's wife insists before her husband that she would like to eat the monkey's heart, the crocodile tries to lay a trap for the monkey, and the latter outwits him. This is the core story/event. The fable-narrative develops this into a narrative text, and this process of transformation of core story into narrative text is what the primary interest of the contemporary narrative theory is. The core story (fabula/histoire) is transformed into a text by the use of narrative devices. It is interesting to note how the same core story is transformed differently into a text in the *Jataka* and the *Panchatantra*. There are major differences in the way both these compositions develop a similar core story into a narrative system.

In the *Jataka* narrative, the Monkey is none other than *Bodhisattva* himself. Therefore, it is but obvious that he would represent some Buddhist virtue in this narrative. The inherent requirement of this tale here is the presentation of that quality of the *Bodhisattva* that is to be seen in the Monkey, and hence that determines the way the narrative text is to be arranged. Let's see how differently the *Jataka* narrative and the *Panchatantra* narrative open. The narrator in the *Jataka* starts the narrative in this way,

> Once upon a time, when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the *Bodhisatta* came to life again as a monkey. When full-grown, he was as big as a mare's foal and enormously strong. He lived alone on the banks of the river, in the middle of which was an island...

whereas the *Panchatantra* fable starts in this fashion:

> There was a jambolin (rose-apple) tree on the shores of a sea. It was home to Raktmukha Monkey. Once an alligator Karalmukha arrived there. Raktmukha said: "You are our guest so savor these nectar-like jambolin."

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As we can see the narrative text opens differently in both cases, preparing for the different meanings they want to signify. As the Jataka fable is about the Buddhist discourse centered on the figure of the Bodhisattva, the narrative twists the core story and begins by giving a befitting introduction to the liveliness of the would-be-Buddha. One interesting thing to note is that whereas in the Panchatantra, the narrative text reconstructs the core event of the fable by establishing a friendship between the two, the readers find that the Monkey in the Jataka does not know the Crocodile at all. In fact, from the time the Monkey sees the Crocodile, in his deceptive form, he thinks about the way to outwit him. There is no previous friendship between the two which is constructed in the Panchatantra fable. The first time when the Monkey sees the Crocodile in the Jatakas, it is with apprehension:

So when he saw that, though the water stood at the same level, the rock seemed to stand higher out of the river, he suspected that a crocodile might be lurking there to catch him. And in order to find out the facts of the case, he shouted, as though addressing the rock...  

The difference in the structure of these two texts, based on a single core story, suggests that narrative system they seek to develop is in terms of something beyond the core story. In the Jataka fable, as unlike the Panchatantra fable, the narrative is arranged in terms of the Buddhist discourse.

There are other interesting developments in the narrative text of each fable. As pointed out we are able to suggest clearly the distinction between the two fundamental levels of narrative, as enumerated by the theorists of narrative, because we have the same fabula/histoire/story to deal with. In the Panchatantra fable, the narrative text develops a very close friendship between the Crocodile and the Monkey. Their friendship is so close that the Crocodile’s wife has to threaten her husband with suicide for convincing him to get the heart of the Monkey. Again the Crocodile’s wife wants to eat the heart of the Monkey, because she thinks that he after having eaten those jambolins he must be having

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a sweet heart, while there is no such context in the *Jataka* fable. In the *Jataka*, the Crocodile easily agrees to his wife's demand, as there is no friendship between the two.

Further, while the Monkey has a discussion with the Crocodile, in the *Panchatantra*, about his having left his heart on the tree on the bank of the river, there is no such conversation in the *Jataka* narrative, where we come across a statement spoken directly by the narrator to the reader:

> Now you must know that when crocodiles open their mouths, their eyes shut. So, when this crocodile unsuspiciously opened his mouth, his eyes shut. And there he waited with closed eyes and open jaws! Seeing this, the wile monkey made a jump on to the crocodile's head, and thence, with a spring like lightening, gained the bank.⁴⁵

The two fables construct their narrative units differently because they are committed to expressing different discourses. The narrative in the *Jataka* is subject to the following message, as uttered by the Crocodile:

> Whoso, O monkey-king, like you, combines
> Truth, foresight, fixed resolves, and fearlessness,
> Shall see his routed foeman turn and flee.⁴⁶

whereas, the pointed moral of the narrative that influences the construction of the text, in the *Panchatantra*, is that

> One not worthy of trust should not be trusted and even trustworthy cannot be trusted too much. The very fear arising out of trusting another can uproot you and destroy you totally.⁴⁷

Thus, these two different discourses are at the centre of the two fables, and, so, the narrative units of the core story are combined differently into the narrative systems of the two fables. One unique aspect of the narrative stylization which accounts for the way the

⁴⁶ Ibid.  
⁴⁷ Op.cit., p. 278
narrative text is constructed in the *Jatakas* is the alternative presence of mediated and unmediated narration.

As pointed out above, the narrative is either directly revealed to the reader or, on occasions, there intrudes the narrator with discourse markers such as, “For the story goes that...” or, “Now you must know that...” These discourse markers and the narrator’s perspective that they introduce often help in constructing the narrative text. Seymour Chatman, in his essay *The Structure of Narrative Transmission*, calls such instances of direct narration and the intrusion of the narrator’s voice as two distinct kinds of narrative presentation:

...kinds of narrative presentation which includes as its two subclasses *showing* and *telling* (always remembering that *narrative showing* is different from, say, theatrical showing). We can distinguish two broad categories, according to whether or not there is an explicit narrator, and if there is, whether his existence is obvious, that is overt, or covert.48

Indeed, it is the presence of the explicit narrator that influences the way the text is constructed. The explicit narrator performs two functions in the *Jataka* fable: one he/she validates the supreme quality of the *Bodhisattva* by making statements outside the purview of the core story, and second he/she co-opts the reader in the telling of the narrative.