PAÑCATANTRA: AN ALLEGORICAL METHOD OF NARRATION

Allegory is an expressive style that uses fictional characters and events to describe some subject by suggestive resemblance. It is a form of extended metaphor, in which objects, persons and actions in a narrative are equated with the meanings that lie outside the narrative itself. The underlying meaning has moral, social, religious or political significance and characters are often personifications of abstract ideas as charity, greed or envy. Thus an allegory is a story with two meanings, a literal meaning and a symbolic meaning. In the symbolic meaning, the characters and events are used to symbolize a deeper moral or spiritual meaning.67

Allegories are forms of imaginative literature or spoken utterance constructed in such a way that their readers or listeners are encouraged to look for meanings hidden beneath the literal surface of the fiction. A story is told or perhaps enacted whose

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details- when interpreted- are found to correspond to the details of some other system of relations (its hidden, allegorical sense).

Many forms of literature elicit this kind of searching interpretation, and the generic term for the cluster is allegory; under it may be grouped fables, parables, and other symbolic shaping. Allegory may involve either a creative or an interpretive process: either the act of building up the allegorical structure and giving 'body' to the surface narrative or the act of breaking down this structure to see what themes run parallel to it.

Nature and Objectives

Allegory and Myth

The fate of allegory, in all its many variations, is tied to the development of myth and mythology. Every culture embodies its basic assumptions in stories whose mythic structures reflect the society's prevailing attitudes toward life. If the attitudes are disengaged from the structure, then the allegorical meaning implicit in the structure is revealed. The systematic discipline of interpreting the real meaning implicit in the structure is revealed.
The systematic discipline of interpreting the real meaning of a text (called the hermeneutic process) plays a major role in the teaching and defense of sacred wisdom, since religions have traditionally preserved and handed down the old beliefs by telling exemplary stories; these sometimes appear to conflict with a system of morality that has in the meantime developed, and so their 'correct' meaning can only be something other than the literal narration of events. Every culture puts pressure on its authors to assert its central beliefs, which are often reflected in literature without the author's necessarily being aware that he is an allegorist. 68

Allegory, as the basic process of arousing in the reader or listener a response to levels of meaning, provides writers with the structure of fables, parables, and other related forms. By awakening the impulse to question appearances and by bringing order to mythological interpretation, allegory imparts cultural values. A measure of allegory is present in literature whenever it

68 Ibid., p.6.
emphasizes thematic content, ideas rather than events. Generally, the allegorical mode flourishes under authoritarian conditions. Thus it found sustenance during the age of medieval Christendom, when Christian dogma sought universal away over the mind of western man. As such, allegory was a means of freedom under conditions of strong restraint. In general, realism, mimetic playfulness, and the resistance to authority tend to counteract the allegorical process, by loosening its stratified forms. Nevertheless, through allegorical understanding, the great myths continue to be reread and reinterpreted, as the human significance of the new interpretations is passed down from one generation to the next. The abiding impression left by the allegorical mode is one of indirect, ambiguous, even enigmatic symbolism, which inevitable calls for interpretation.\(^{69}\)

**Fable**

Fable is short, simple forms of naive allegory. The fable is usually a tale about animals who are personified and behave as

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though they were humans. The device of personification is also extended trees, winds, streams, stones and other natural objects. The earliest of these tales also included humans and gods as characters, but fable tends to concentrate on animating the inanimate. A feature that isolates fable from the ordinary folktale, which it resembles, is that a moral—a rule of behavior—is woven into the story.

Fables tend to personify animal characters—often giving the same impression, as does an animated cartoon. It have a root in preliterate oral cultures, and both are means of handing down traditional folk wisdom, and tend toward detailed, sharply on served social realism (which eventually leads to satire).

Fables appeared early in India, but it is impossible to determine whether they are older or later than the Greek. Undoubtedly there was mutual influence from very early times, for indirect contacts between Greece and India (by trade routes) had existed long before the time of Alexander the Great. In the form in
which they are now known the Greek fables are the older, but this may be an accident of transmission.

The fable was apparently first used in India as a vehicle of Buddhist instruction. Some of the Jātakas birth stories of the Buddha, which relate some of his experience in previous animal incarnations, resemble Greek fables and are used to point a moral. They may date from as far back as the 5th century BC, though the written records are much later. The most important compilation is the Pañcatantra, a Sanskrit collection of beast fables. The original has not survived, but it has been transmitted (via a lost Pahlavi version) as the mid 8th century Arabic Kalilah wa Damnah, Kalilah and Damnah are two jackals, counselors to the lion king, and the work is a frame story containing numerous fables designed to teach political wisdom or cunning. From the Arabic this was translated into many languages, including Hebrew, which version John of Capua used to make a Latin version in the 13th century. This, the Directorium humanae vitae (‘Guide for Human Life’), was the chief means by which oriental
fables became current in Europe. In the fables of Bidpai, animals act as men in animal form, and little attention is paid to their supposed animal characteristics. It is in this respect that they differ most from the fables of Aesop, in which animals behave as animals.\textsuperscript{70}

**Allegorical Method ofNarration in *Pañcatantra***

The didactic and sententious note which prevails in classical Sanskrit literature cannot fail to strike the student. It is however, specially pronounced in the fairy tales and fables where the abundant introduction of ethical reflection and proverbial philosophy is characteristic. The apologue with its moral is peculiarly subject to this method of treatment.

A distinguishing feature of the Sanskrit collections of fairy tales and fables which are to a considerable extent found mixed together is the insertion of a number of different stories with in the frame work of a single narrative. The characters of the main story in turn relate various tales to edify one another or to prove the

\textsuperscript{70} Suresh Babu & M.V Vishnu Namboodiri, *Folklore Prabandangal*, Kerala Folklore Academy, Kannur, p.272.
correctness of their own special views. As with in the limits of a minor story a second one can be similarly introduced and the process further repeated, the construction of the whole work comes to resemble that of a set of Chinese boxes. This style of narration was borrowed from India by the neighboring oriental peoples of Persia and Arabia, who employed it in composing independent works. The most notable instance is, of course the \textit{Pañcatantra}.\textsuperscript{71}

The framework of the first book entitled "Separation of friends", is the story of a bull and a lion, who are introduced to one another in the forest by two jackals and become fast friends. One of the jackals, feeling himself neglected, starts an intrigue by telling both the lion and the bull that each is plotting against the other. As a result the bull is killed in battle with the lion, and the jackal, as Prime minister of the latter, enjoys the fruits of his machinations. The main story of the second book, which is called "Acquisition of Friends", deals with the adventures of a

\textsuperscript{71} Arthur. A. Mac Donal, \textit{A History of Sanskrit Literature}, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, 1\textsuperscript{st} ed., p.312.
tortoise, a deer, a crow, and a mouse. It is meant to illustrate the advantages of judicious friendships. The third book, or "The War of the Crows and the Owls", points out the danger of friendship concluded between those who are old enemies. The fourth book, entitled "Loss of what has been Acquired", illustrates, by the main story of the monkey and the crocodile, how fools can be made by flattery to part with their possessions. The fifth book entitled "Inconsiderate Action" contains a number of stories connected with the experiences of a barber, who came to grief through failing to take all the circumstances of the case into consideration.

The book is pervaded by a quaint humour, which transfers to the animal kingdom all sorts of human action. Thus animals devote themselves to the study of the Vedas and to the practice of religious rites; they engaged in disquisition's about gods, saints and heroes; or exchange views regarding subtle rules of ethics; but suddenly their fierce animal nature breaks out. A pious cat, for instance, called upon to act as umpire in a dispute between a sparrow and a monkey inspires such confidence in the litigants,
by a long discourse on the vanity of life and the supreme importance of virtue, that they come close up in order to hear better the words of wisdom. In an instant he seizes one of the disputants with his claws, the other with his teeth and devours them both. Very humorous is the story of the conceited musical donkey. Trespassing one moonlight night in a cucumber field, he feels impelled to sing, and answers the objections of his friend, the jackal by a lecture on the charms of music. He then begins to bray, arouses the watchmen, and receives a sound drubbing.

With abundant irony and satire the most various human vices are exposed, among others the hypocrisy and the avarice of Brahmins, the intriguing character of courtiers and the faithlessness of women. A vigorous popular spirit of reaction against Brahman pretensions here finds expression and altogether a sound and healthy view of life prevails, forming a refreshing contrast to the exaggeration found in many branches of Indian literature.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., pp.114-115.
The most widely known work of allegorical literature of Indian origin is perhaps Pañcatantra. It is a collection of stories arranged in five groups, each group of stories intended to illustrate the application of one major rule of practical wisdom. The title refers to these five tantras or rules presented not in discursive prose but in parables with birds and beasts as characters. Like cartoon figures they highlight the outstanding features, while there is no attempt at deeper psychoanalytical portrayals. To invest inanimate objects as well as non-human creatures with the capacity to feel, think and speak probably stems from the animistic or atavistic beliefs of early times. That moral ideas could be more effectively presented in terms of the activities of birds or animals operates at the root of most of these animal fables, and Indian narrators have fully exploited the potential of the animal fable for intellectual and moral communication. Because these cautionary tales must speak to readers of all ages.
Pañcatantra teach a general principle of conduct by presenting a specific example of behavior. Thus, to define the moral that "People who rush into things without using judgement run into strange and unexpected dangers", 73 Pañcatantra—the traditional "father" of the fable form told the following story:

There was a certain city in a certain country.
In a grove near the city a merchant was having a temple built.
Each day at the noon hour the workers would go to the city for lunch.
Now one day a troop of monkeys came upon the half-built temple.
There lay a very long log of wood. A carpenter was trying to saw it through. A wedge was thrust on the top.
There the naughty monkeys began playing their tricks. They went up the roof, up the treetop, and played with every tool that was lying there, when the workers had gone out to lunch.
One monkey went to the wedge in the log. "What is this"? He said, "Let me pull it out and see this tool".

73 Ibid., p.274.
He caught the wedge with both hands. He started to pull it out. He could not pull it out but he worked it loose. He tried again and again.

By trying again and again, he succeeded. The monkey was successful. But he did not see the danger. He did not see that his hand had entered the split of the wood. As the wedge came out, the hand of the monkey was caught in the split wood. He cried with great pain. Other monkeys shouted for help. They did not know what to do. At last the workers came and set the monkey free. But his hand was broken. It had become useless forever. The doctors had to cut it off. So the monkey lived the rest of his life with one hand.

Therefore, the lesson is "Do not meddle with the work of another. Always mind your own business. Do not burn your fingers in another's fire".

The moral is embodied in the plot of the fable, an explicit statement of the moral need not be given, though it usually is. Many of these moral tag lines have taken on the status of proverb because they so clearly express commonly held social attitudes.
The *Pañcatantra* fables emphasize the social interactions of human beings, and the morals they draw tend to embody advice on the best way to deal with the competitive realities of life. "Every man's metaphor" for cunning and cruelty, appear often as characters in fables chiefly because, in the human world, such predatory cunning and cruelty are able to get around restraints of justice and authority.\(^{74}\)

In the introduction to the Penguin edition of Viśuśarma's *Pañcatantra*, Chandra Rajan highlights the popularity and influence of the work. The *Pañcatantra* has not only been enormously popular as an entertaining (and instructive) work of fiction, but also had great influence on world literature as no other work of Indian literature. Arthur Macdonell points to its 'extraordinary influence on the narrative works of the whole middle ages' in Europe. And to the enrichment it brought into the literature of those languages in which versions of the work were made.\(^{75}\)


The use of the frame story that established the reason for collecting a group of stories, and they also include embedded tales, separate stories within the larger stories, as well as groups of boxed tales, in which one of these embedded stories generates another. The implication is that without stories we cannot make sense of what happens to us; stories propagate stories; one tale may not only call forth a new one but also prompt the recollection of an earlier event. And also the emphasis on moral values, the introduction of sub tales, the element of soft satire, and above all the lively presentation of animal characters are important features of the allegorisation attempted in *Pañcatantra*.

The characters are enormously influential. Their speech representation is very notable feature. There are two ways of rendering speech; diegesis or indirect speech and mimesis or direct speech. The characteristic feature of diegesis is that 'the author himself is the speaker and doesn’t attempt to suggest that any one but himself is speaking'. In mimesis on the other
hand, the author tries to create the illusion that it is not he who speaks. Thus the dialogue, monologue direct speech in general would be mimetic. In *Pañcatantra*, these two types of speech representation are presented. Firstly author tells the story, gradually he narrates stories through the suitable characters, and so chains of stories are created.

In this way of narration, we can see that a lot of changes in the characters and their course of conversation. For example, the lion is represented as the symbol of king. So his roles and dialogues are very powerful. And like the cunning jackal is the representation of minister and so his dialogues are very cunning and tricky. The lions, monkeys, mice, and jackal stand in for in human beings trying to live together. In a story to bring the attention of an audience all the commands and orders should be in the “direct speech”. Other wise, we did not get the proper feelings and emotions from the conversations. Thus in the oral

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tradition, the previous history of society is presented through this way of narration.

The monkey, the Jackal, the Crow, the Crab, the Crane, the Hare, the Owl, the Camel, etc; provide models for characterization even in modern realistic fiction. Only the names of humans are to be substituted in place of the animals, Chandra Rajan adds: "The variety of characters, the diversity of opinions expressed by them and the constant interaction of narrative and discourse made the Pañcatantra a densely textured and layered text. Behind all this diversity, however, is the presence and voice of the ancient story-teller who sits at his loom, weaving all the richness spread before us. He provides the thread of unity", perhaps we could add that Viṣṇuśarma being an internal narrator is very much a character, so that there has to be an external author who created all the internal narrators like Viṣṇuśarma and also all the listeners.77

77 Ibid., p.XIII.
Pañcatantra is perhaps the allegorical narrative or parable par excellence in world literature. Like the Purāṇa, it is outside time or history, and is universal in its significance. The characters, human or animal or inanimate, are not tied down to any geographical location or historical period. The Itihāsa has roots in national history, but the allegorical narrative is different from the Itihāsa in this respect. These cautionary tales must speak to readers of all ages. They are not fictionalized versions of something that actually happened, but of what might happen any time.

By using birds and beasts as characters the tales are conceived as universal possibilities. Like the animation movies of our time, these characters become animated at the touch of the author’s imagination. Like live puppets, they answer to the motivations provided by the author. These stories are meant to provide nidarśana, and are not to be taken as historical happenings. They are like experiments conducted in a laboratory to show how certain things operate. It is perhaps the universality
of appeal of these stories that led to their immense popularity across the continents. It is true that the stories of *Pañcatantra* are closely welded together so as to form a single entity. This fact is reinforced by the conclusion of the tales under the fifth *tantra*.

And here ends the work known to the world as the *Pañcatantra* and by its other name of *Pañcopākhyāna*, a treatise on the art of living wisely and well. This work on polity, composed by the celebrated Viśṇuśarma, consisting of stories linked by wise and good sayings of a good and true poet aims to be of service to others here in this world, and to lead the way to the world of external light, as the wise and the learned declare.\(^7^8\)

The tales in *Kathāsaritsāgara* do not appear to have this kind of cohesion, although Śiva is presented at the beginning as the narrator. The stories are mainly meant for entertainment; but the tales in *Pañcatantra* are contrived in such a way as to provide moral edification to the princes. The *Pañcatantra* tales are down to earth, earthy, with little scope for the operation of the divine or

the supernatural. The moral lesson in each tale gives cohesiveness to the narration. In *Kathāsaritsāgara* too, we have tales within tales and emboxing of tales, but the continuity of narration has no guiding non-fictional concern. The tales of *Pañcatantra* are more closely linked than even the *Jātakas*, and are practically free from any fundamentalist religious orientation. There is more of practical worldly wisdom of a secular nature.

Interlocking of tales or mixing of stories are the special features of *Pañcatantra*. The end of a story is an introduction of the next story. Each tale ended with a question like what is next? Or how can possible it? It is asked through the characters. This method is seen in *Purāṇas* and *Itihāsas*. For example:- *Vaiśambhāyana uvāca, Bhīṣma uvāca* and the like.

The *prastāvika* or prologue describes the initial situation, not so dramatic as that of *Pañcatantra*. The opening of the first story reminds one of the openings of the *Purāṇas* or the *Itihāsas*, how the narrator and the listeners are seated comfortably before the narration begins.
After the princes were seated comfortably at the back of the palace, Viṣṇuśarma said to them by way of an introduction:

'The wise their moments spare will spend
In an intellectual recreation.
The foolish do that time expend.
In vice, or sleep, or recrimination.
For the recreation of your highnesses, therefore, I will tell you the marvelous tale of the crow, the tortoise and the others'.

'Tell us, sir!' Exclaimed the princes. 'Listen', said Viṣṇuśarma, 'now begins Mitralābha or the winning of friends, of which this is the opening verse:

Lacking means, of money bare,
But clever and the best of friends.
The crow and tortoise, mouse and deer,
Did speedily attain their ends.'

'How did that happen?' asked the princes.
Viṣṇuśarma said:

'There is a great silk-cotton tree by the side of the river Godāvari. Birds come there from all directions to roost at night. Once, as night was ending and the Lord of the Lilies, the moon, was about to set, a crow named Laghupatanaka or quick flight woke up and saw a trapper drawing near, like death personified. Observing him, the crow thought uneasily, 'the day has begun with an unlucky sight in the morning itself. Who knows what other disagreeable things this portends.' Deeply agitated, he followed the trapper, for

Many a difficult situation,

Boding grief and full of fear,

Afflicts the fool with no preparation,

But not those who have taken care.

Furthermore, and this is a must for all those who seek the pleasure of life:

Remember, as from bed you rise,

That mighty danger lie in wait,

Like illness, grief, your own demise:

Today, who knows, which is your fate?
Meanwhile the trapper had scattered grains of rice on the ground, spread out his net, and positioned himself in hiding. By and by, the bait was noticed by a king of the pigeons named Citragrīva or Spotted Throat, as he came cruising the sky with his family. "How is it possible", he told the other pigeons who were tempted by the sight, 'that rice grains should be scattered here in this desolate forest? We should first consider this. I do not see any good in it. The lure of the rice will lead us, in all probability, to the same fate as,

The traveller who, from greed of gold,

In a muddy mire fell,

And trapped there by the tiger old,

Was killed and eaten, sad to tell.'

'How was that?' asked the pigeons. Their king recounted.

This leads to the second story- The Traveler and the Tiger, told by the king of the pigeons- emboxed in the opening story which was started by Viṣṇuśarman himself.

The closure of the entire book also has a charming effect:
'Tell me', said Viṣṇuśarma, 'what more shall I relate to you?'

'By your grace we have come to understand the affairs of state in all their aspects', the princes replied.

'we are very happy indeed'.

'if that is so', said Viṣṇuśarma, then may this too come to be:

May peace and joy forever be

With all the kings in victory.

May good men be free of woe

And glory of the virtuous grows.

May ministers always bear

On there breasts that mistress fair,

Good policy, to constantly

Kiss the face; and may there by

Every day, for one and all

A great and happy festival

As long as dwells the lord with lunar crest,

With in the mountain maidens warm embrace;

As long as Lakṣmi gleams on Viṣṇu's breast,
Like lightning's flash in monsoon clouds apace;

As long as shines great Meru's golden peak,

A flame whose very sparks are like the sun;

So long may this concourse of stories speak
to men. It was by Nārāyaṇa done.

Furthermore,

To Dhavala Candra, Victory!

An illustrious prince is he,

Through his efforts, this collection

Was writ and put in circulation'.79

Allegory is a form of fictional narrative that is still employed by modern writers. When real names are used, real situations are described, and contemporary events find a place in the narration, the allegorical model within may be obscured but an intelligent reader can detect the basic structure inside the realistic frame. Postmodern narratives often carry a parable strain within them.

79 Ibid., pp.81-83.
By introducing beasts and birds who act as people would, the stories become allegories which provide moral instructions through amusement. This deep insight together with an abiding social awareness conferred on the authors of these books of stories a keen sense of realism and an almost uncanny power of penetration into people's actions. Thus they were able to sum up the social experience of their own and other ages.  

These stories thus have much to offer us today. The multi-minded person, the human being, and to discern the maladies of our own society, if would be helpful to pay attention once more to our storehouse of the wonderful tales and fables from ancient India.

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