CHAPTER VI

The beast symbol found in the Somadeva’s Kathāsaritsāgara

The Kathāsaritsāgara or the “Ocean of streams of Stories” is another famous fable work written by Somadeva. In fact, the Kathāsaritsāgara is a work of ornate poetry that combines all the excellences of popular poetry in a certain sense, with the excellences of ornate poetry. The work is a different version of the Kashmirian Brhatkathā. The beast stories of Somadeva are the same as we find in the Pañcatantra, the Hitopadeśa, the Tīntrakhyāyikā and the Pañcākhyanaka. But some exception in the case of the stories of the Kathāsaritsāgara is the story of the ungrateful woman, the lion, the golden-crested bird and the snake falling in to a big well. It is an interesting story in the Kathāsaritsāgara where the hypocrisy of woman is shown through comparison with other animals. In this story a woman, a snake, a lion and a golden-crested bird fell in to a well. There was a certain man of noble soul, who was an incarnation of Bodhisattva. He tried to lift them out of the well. He dropped a rope of grass in to the well and drew them all four up out of the well. All these creatures became the ascetic’s friend. Then, being exhausted with hunger and thirst, the ascetic first thought of the lion on one occasion. The lion came and fed him with the flesh of deer. Bodhisattva gave him the permission to depart, and the lion became a Vidyādhara went to his own region. Again, the golden-crested bird gave him jewels and became a young
Vidyādhara prince, and went through the air to his own world. But the put him in prison with the help of the queen. At last the snake rescued him from the prison and became a young hermit. This story clearly shows that though a lion is a ferocious beast by nature and a snake is dangerous for man, these lower animals do not harm the benefactor like ungrateful men. Man alone can betray a man for wealth forgetting the past benefit rendered to him by another person.

In the *Kathāsaritsāgara* beasts play a significant role in several stories, one of which we have discussed above. The lion, the jackal, the monkey, the hare, the alligator, the tortoise, the mongoose, the ass, the elephant, the cat, the mouse, the porpoise, the frog, the boar, the deer and the ox play a significant role of great practical significance in many stories. However, we are already acquainted with most of the beast-characters of the *Kathāsaritsāgara* in earlier works. The author has merely retold the stories of beasts found in the works mentioned above. The symbolical significance of these characters and the practical importance of the relevant characters and stories have been critically discussed in previous contexts.

Most of the fables of the *Kathāsaritsāgara* are borrowed from earlier works of fables like the *Tantrākhyāyikā*, and the *Pañcatantra*. There is hardly any new material for our present discussion except the new names found in the fables. It may be mentioned here that the author of the *Kathāsaritsāgara* rewrites the fable of the monkey and the wicked porpoise.
where the name of the monkey is changed into Valimukha.

The author utilises the monkey fables of the *Tantrākhyaśyikā* and the *Pañcatantra* like the monkey and the porpoise, the fickle monkey removing the wedge from a parted wood⁴, and monkeys and the cataka birds³ nicely for his purpose.

There are, however, some new beast tales of elephant, monkey, boar, jackal, crocodile and crab are found in the *Kathāsaritsaṅgara*

**Elephant, jackal story:**

Somadeva in his *Kathāsaritsaṅgara⁶* shows the jackal as a low and fickle natured animal. *Brahmasiddhi*, a hermit, was going out to find food, but having been unable to find any for sometime on account of bad weather he was about to return, when a male elephant, furious on account of its separation from its female, rushed towards female jackal to kill it. When the hermit saw this he become compassionate for the jackal. He turned the female jackal in to a female elephant by means of his magical power, to please both. Then the male elephant, beholding a female, ceased to be furious and became attached to her and so the jackal escaped death. Then, as the male elephant was roaming about with the jackal transformed in to a female elephant, it entered into a tank full of the mud, produced by the autumn rains, to pluck a lotus. The elephant sank in the mud there. But being unable to more it remained motionless. When the female elephant, that was a jackal before, saw the male in this distress, she went off and followed another male
elephant. Suddenly, at that time the elephant’s own mate, that he had lost, came that way in search of her spouse. The noble creature seeing her male sinking in the mud, entered into the mud of the tank in order to join him. At that moment the hermit Brahmasiddhi came that way with his disciples and was moved with pity when he saw that pair. And he bestowed by his power great strength on his disciples and made them extricate the male and the female from the mud. In this story, the female jackal behaves like an infidel woman deserting her husband in distress. Even animals, if they are of a noble strain, do not desert a lord or friend in calamity, but try to rescue him from it. But for those women who are mean, fickle and without any loyalty to the husband can behave otherwise. Thus, the female jackal turned elephant is a symbol of such women of a vile character.

The liver turned monkey:

There are several stories of monkey in the *Kathāsaritsāgara* which appear in earlier works. But in one story an infidel married woman reduces her lover into a monkey by means of incantation. She carries the monkey to a distant place in a tour where it is attacked by wild monkeys, and abandoned by the woman. A wild elephant throws the monkey into an ant-hill where it remains buried for a long period. it was finally rescued by a benefactor after some years. The monkey in this story is a symbolical character. It typically represents those wicked lovers of others’ wives, who are like a monkey or even worse than a monkey. The story suggests that such
wicked people with the character of monkey should reap the reward of their action.

**Boar:**

Somadeva in his *Katha saritsagara* presents an interesting story of a holy boar⁸ who earns virtue by sacrificing his body to a lion. The story says that in a stormy weather a hungry lion with its mate and cub came to the cave where the boar was lying asleep. The lioness presented her body to the lion to remove his hunger with the cub. The noble boar woke up and heard their conversation. So, the boar offered its body to the lion family for removing their hunger. At first the cub ate some of the flesh of the boar and then the lion itself began to eat all, but still the virtuous boar did not die. But the lioness, exhausted with hunger, died in the cave. Then the lion left the cave with its cub. At this juncture the boars’ friend a monkey which lived in that cave, woke up and went out and seeing the boar reduced to such a condition, was very sorry and wanted to do something for the boar. The boar wanted to recover its body and also resurrect the lioness, because the lioness would satiate her hunger by devouring the boar. Then the god of justice appeared in bodily form on the spot and turned the boar into the chief of the sages. The monkey was also turned in to a sage due to the boar’s prayer. Here, the boar is a symbol of those holy virtuous persons who do not refrain from self-sacrifice for the benefit of others.

The above story of the pious boar like that of the pious doves⁹
of the *Mahābhārata* is a purely religious story, and the pious boar preaches
the doctrine of self-sacrifice.

Crocodile—thesaviom (Makara)

In a story of the *Kathāsaritsāgara* of Somadeva a crocodile also makara plays a significant role as a benefactor of aquatic animals. This crocodile is a substitute of the intelligent crab of the *Pañcatantra*. The story says that a wicked crane tried to eat up all fish and also the crocodile living in a lake. But like the intelligent crab of the *Pañcatantra*, the crocodile also killed the crane and saved the dwellers of the lake. The benevolent 'makara' in this story represents those ready-witted people who can take a correct decision through their presence of mind is save a difficult situation.

**Crab, the adviser:**

In one story of *Kathāsaritsāgara* again, a crab advises a crane to put a number of fish in a row right from the hole of a mongoose to the hole of a menacing serpent as a means of killing the croba. The story occurs in the *Hitopadeśa* also. But this advice became fatal for the crane family, as the mongoose ate up the young ones also of the crane.

The adviser crab in the story is the representative of those short-sighted advisess of a man. However, good such advisers may be, they invite a great danger to their friends unconsciously through their thoughtless advice due to the lack of farsightedness.
Reference note:

1. "Really the Kathāsaritsāgara is a work of ornate poetry that combines all the excellences of popular poetry in a certain sense, with the excellences of ornate poetry, such as must have been the Kashminian Brhatkathā."

"HIL” Vol-III p.354.

2. “Story of the grateful animal and ungrateful woman”


4. “Story of the monkey that pulled out the wedge” Ibid. Bn-X, Chapt.-LX, p.28.


7. KSS


9. Mb., Śāntiparvan, ch-143-147.


13. Hito., Bn-IV (Sandhi) Story no-4 pp. 10-12