INTRODUCTION

Ever since the first story-telling impulse was found in the Vedas, the narrative as literary form and social practice has best described the various cultures and traditions of India. As a part of the oral tradition, the narrative has developed more as performance amidst the Indian people. Both the stories as well as the occasion of story-telling brought the people together, and so it does now. Different stories are meant for different occasions. Each story was originally performed and received in the oral form, and so, even when they were later written down, like the Jatakas, the relationship between the story, the narrator and the audience, and the occasion of narration has remained an important principle in the organization of the tales. From the mini narratives in the dialogue-form found in the Vedas, and the stories in the Upanishads, the Itihasas and the Puranas, Kalidasa's Mahakavyas (court epics), Yogavasistha, to the fable-narratives of the Jatakas, the Panchatantra (and its various recensions, including the Hitopadesha), the Brhatkatha and the Kathasaritasagara, the Indian narrative tradition shows a remarkable diversity of form and content, and historical-cultural significance. The Indian narrative has in fact progressed in tandem with the progress of communities and cultures of India and vice-versa.

Before going to discuss the Indian fable-narratives, which is the subject matter of this thesis, it would be appropriate to historically trace the development of the Indian narrative traditions, both in terms of form and content. As far as the form of the narratives is concerned, the Indian theorists like Bhamaha (6th century A.D), Bhoja (11th century A.D) and Vishwanath (14th century A.D) have defined the various genres of narrative and also described the sub-categories of each genre that might help us to identify the genre of the fable-narratives. “However, the long, continuous tradition of
literary theory has led to a profusion of terminology, and this creates the interpretive problem of defining each term unambiguously to distinguish it from others.1

Broadly speaking, the Indian theoreticians have described three genres of narrative: (a) Katha, (b) Akhyayika, and (c) Akhyana, which together make up the Akhyana-jati (‘class of narratives’2) The first conceptual term, Katha, encapsulates a thoroughly imagined narrative (Prabandhakalpana), either in prose or verse, and is limited in its length and reach. Akhyayika is a narrative in prose, and uses, for its content, materials from the tradition or history, and it could either be narrated in the first person, or let a narrator relate someone else’s story. Akhyana is a narrative based on legends or myths, for example, the narratives in the Vedas that form the context of the hymns, like the narrative of Yama and Yami, Agastya and Lopamudra, and Jabali Satyakama. The Ramayana is classed as an Akhyana, based as it is on the legendary lore of the Rama as the scion of the Raghu race.

As evident, Katha and Akhyayika are different on two accounts: (a) the former is a work of fiction, while the latter is based on history, and (b) the former could be either in verse or prose, whereas the latter is a prose narrative. Though Dandin contends there exists no difference between the two forms of the Indian narrative, Bhamaha points out few more differences apart from the above two. Bhamaha says that in the Akhyayika, the hero has to give the accounts of his own deeds, whereas in the Katha, the narrative should not be narrated by the hero himself but by someone else3.

Going by all these theoretical enumerations, the Indian-fable narratives could be put in the category of the Katha, but since they are closely connected to the history of the times and the prevalent discourses then, they also share elements of the Akhyayika. This much for the formal category of the Indian fables.

2 Ibid.
Equally important it is to see the Indian fable-narratives historically develop over centuries in terms of their content. Now, the presence of rich and ever-evolving narrative traditions in India can be ascribed to the ontological status of kathavachan (story-telling) in our culture. The story, as a ritualistic performance, has always had an autonomous existence, independent of its performers and the world outside it. Such a relationship between the narrative and the elements outside it comes directly from the relationship that existed between the human mind and the language, in the Indian tradition. Language itself came to the ancient Indian mind as story. The Vac or Sabda was no empty mould for the meaning but, actually, meaning itself that came in the narrative form. 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”.

In the Indian narrative, there is found a close relationship established in the Indian mind between the word and the world—the word as encompassing the divine and the human world. The Lord itself is the ‘Word’ and then it is the ‘Word’ that encompasses our being, our world, and our consciousness: “I will deliver this Word so that she will produce and bring into being all this world.” It is this relationship between the word and the world that subsequently shaped the relationship between the narrative and the event. It is in the narrative and through it that we constitute our relationship with our families, our societies, our consciousness and our histories. Like the eternal word-principle, Sabd-brahma, the narrative is seen as the self-contained structure that can relate to and explicate the world at large, as is evident in the Brahmanas. Much before Roland Barthes, in his Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives, deconstructed the subject-centered narrative of the West, making it a ubiquitous domain that constitutes all knowledge, the encrypted narrative in the Brahmana texts had evolved, not authored by god or any human agency but as primordial enunciations: the Vedic narratives are apaurusheya —the primordial mystery comprising in herself the three worlds of time: past, present and future. The Vedic narratives stand in themselves as important theoretical challenges.

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5 Ibid
statements, as is the case later with other stories like those in *Panchtantra* and *Hitopadesha*.

The orally transmitted *Vedas* are apparently hymns, lyrical in form and devotional in content, but there are many hymns that interiorize the narrative structuration, as the story of friendship and enmity between Varuna and Vasistha in *Rg-Veda* 7.88. The sequence of slyly suggested events and the use of dialogue between the two characters contain the seed for the fuller development of a more elaborate narrative art in later times. There are wonderful little narratives embedded in the *Rg-Veda*, for instance, in the accounts of Yama and Yami, Agastya and Lopamudra, Puruvarasha and Urvashi etc. In the subsequent ages of the Indian literary history, many of these little narratives have been reworked into extended forms in the *Upnishads* and *Aranyakas* and even in the court literature and the plays of Kalidasa.

The *Arthavada* section of the *Brahmanas* explicates the rituals and various rules of conduct by suggesting forms which seem to pre-empt the various literary genres that developed later like *itihasa*, *purana*, *Katha*, etc. This narrative form stands out for its compact structure, with rarely any additional vocabulary. One reason for this compactness of form could be its formulaic nature. The contents of the ritualistic message had to be expressed orally, and so the formulas served as an aid to memory. In other words, *Brahmanas* successfully systematized the modes of narrative dissemination that later was to culminate into the aphoristic form of *Sutra*, in which a mass of details was compressed within a minimum number of words.6

The gradual evolution of the Indian narrative down the ages has never been bereft of the corresponding developments in the Indian philosophy. *Kathavachan*, story telling, has been a common practice, which is still popular in the Indian society, for persuasive teaching of both the individual and the community as a whole. The Indian ness of the narrative in India lies in its discursive dimension. And its literary scope encapsulates the

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epistemological function. Ever since the Rg-Vedic times, narrative has evolved as the most viable mode of knowledge dispersion. The Vedic hymns, the Upanishads, Brahmanas and the Aranyakas have given a serious educative function to the mythic narrative. The word 'myth' in the context of early Indian narratives does not signify an unreal imaginings of past but operate well within the scope of the real:

In India a fabular mode of consciousness is inseparable from the epistemological mode. The mythic narrative is, therefore, used to disseminate knowledge. The mythic is different from the mythical since it is a disseminative mode, while the later has a connotative association of 'non real'.

So, the narrative is not circumscribed within the aesthetic domain; the narrative, on the other hand, utilizes strategies to promote the Purusarthas – the four ends of life: Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. “The merit of a literary composition is determined in a significant way by which of the four ends of life it promotes.” For the purpose of knowledge-dissemination, the narrative negotiates between philosophy and the community. The story is viewed as an autonomous and legitimate mode of thinking, a mode alternative to the intellectual and abstract theory making. The tales function both as primary knowledge statements and also as the illustrations of theoretical statements as is the case with the Upnisadic and the Buddhist narratives, and also with the Panchatantra, the Yogavasishtha and the Jatakas. Therefore, Indian poeticians stress upon the relevance of philosophy to literature, and make it important for the writers to be well versed both in Loka and Shastra. The narratives are composed so that “the meanings of the knowledge-texts (the Vedas) can be expounded and its validity comprehended.”

In the study of the narrative as an epistemological mode in India, there are paradigm shifts to be seen at different stages of Indian history that ushered in new traditions of

7 Ibid.
8 Kapoor, Kapil. “Buddhism and Literature: Philosophy, Narratives and Jatakamala”. Keynote Address at a National Seminar on Buddhism and Literature at Benaras Hindu University, Varanasi, 2005
9 Mahabharata, (I.267-68)
narrative, as for instance, the Pali Buddhist narrative tradition (the Jataka) as against the Upnisaic tradition:

India's oral tradition lends itself to wide-ranging story telling: the upnishadic akhyanas, the Pali Buddhist narratives, the encyclopedic Mahabharata, with innumerable sub-narratives, the Puranas, the fables of Panchatantra and its recension the Hitopadesha, the strung narratives of Kathasaritasagara, folk retellings of the legends and myths, the romantic and heroic narratives of the folk traditions in the dialects of Indian languages—it is a vast and vital treasure house of stories.  

All these narratives mark major transitions in the history of the Indian thought. The attempt, in this research work, is to analyze the discursive roots and the sources of the Indian fable-narrative tradition, among other issues.

A narrative tradition must not be seen only in itself, but also a larger understanding has to develop, as to how an emergence of a narrative tradition in a period contributed to the overall tradition, and also how older narratives continued not only to influence the content and style of the next generation narratives, but were even circulated with modifications, that the distinctiveness of the culture and milieu produced.

India's narrative traditions offer diverse developments. For instance, "...The line of narratives from the Upanishads to the epics shows a shift of concern from knowledge (Jnana) to devotion (Bhakti). But somewhere along the line, the Pali Buddhist narratives also foreground action (Karma) which then becomes a part of the epic-ethics as well."  

For instance, the Jataka tales postulate a definite break in the relationship between philosophy and narrative and narrative and ethics. In the Jatakas, “it is the human concern for the other that is postulated and validated as practical philosophy.”

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10 Kapil Kapoor, “Buddhism and Literature: Philosophy, Narratives and the Jatakamala.” Keynote Address at the National Seminar on Buddhism and Literature at Benaras Hindu University, Varanasi, 2005
11 Ibid
12 Ibid.
So, the *Pali Buddhist* narratives, containing the experiences of the *Bodhisattva*, trace an improvement in the various *Margas*, or paths of living postulated by the Indian thinkers by positing *Karma* as against *Jnana* and *Bhakti*. The narratives prior to the appearance of the *Jataka* tales make *Moksha* as their goal. The *Upanishadic* stories, for instance, discovered, in *Satyakama* of *Chandogya Upanishad* and *Naciketa* of *Kathopanishad*, a concern with personal salvation to be attained through knowledge (*Jnana*). These aspects of Indian philosophy and thought that influenced the narrative performance came for radical overhauling later when the *Bodhisattva* postulated not *Jnana* but *Karma* as the path of life, not personal salvation (*Moksha*) but *Nirvana* and the welfare of all (*Lokasamgraha*) as the goal of life, and human reason, the *Atiprasna*, the real experiences of suffering as more important than the metaphysical intuitions.

The fable-narratives found late in the *Pancatantra* and the *Hitopadesa* contribute yet another important dimension to the rich Indian narrative tradition, where *Niti* (policy) evolves as the third important strand influencing the thought, content and style of narration.

This doctoral study has for its subject matter the fable-narratives contained the *Jatakas*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Yogavasistha*, the *Panchatantra* and its various recensions including the most popular the *Hitopadesha*, and a major preoccupation is the ideologies or the worldviews found in these narratives. And hence, it was important to trace the philosophical background of these narratives, here. At the same it must be admitted that it is difficult and not proper to make a sweeping remark about the philosophical bases of such voluminous texts like the *Mahabharata*, because of the sheer diversity of the narratives found in them. However, it is assumed that the fable-narratives, in general, foreground discourses of different nature. The narratives taken together make a distinct tradition within the vast gamut of the Indian literature:

- Unlike the other types of Indian poetical works, in this narrative literature the tendency is not to sketch only the stereotyped figures, but we meet here quite often several types of people—in fables men in the guise of animals—that exhibit a distinct physiognomy. And these men are barely
virtuous kings or bold warriors, or beautiful princesses full of love, and venerable priests, as in the
epic and mostly also in the drama too, but they are also people from other spheres of life...  

The fable, as a distinct genre of narrative, has already been described as approximate to
the Katha and Akhyayika. It can be further said that it is a small narrative no longer than a
short story, so structured as to point out a moral or a discourse. The discursive aspect of
the fable is a major area of research covered by this study. The fable has also been a
popular genre in the West since the early periods of the history there. The earliest
preferment for the fable came from Plato himself who preferred a fabulist to Homer:
"Plato excluded Homer from his Republic and gave Aesop a place of honor, hoping that
the young would absorb fables along with their mother's milk...since one cannot at too
early an age acquire a love for wisdom and virtue."  

There is a formidable lineage of fabulists in World literature that have been influenced
by the Indian fables, like Aesop, Phaedrus, Hyginus, Jean de La Fontaine, Ivan Krylov
and others. Interest in the fable cannot be dismissed as old and outdated as both the
contents and forms of literature so written address some of the key questions facing the
contemporary humanity. And again some of the most popular works like George
Orwell’s Animal Farm or Vikram Seth’s Frog and the Nightingale show what great use a
writer can make of the fable-narrative in different genres, which certainly shows greater
adaptability of the fable-genre, in being fused into novel, poetry and drama alike. James
Thurber’s Fables of Our Time and Walt Disney’s Micky Mouse and His Friends put to
rest any doubt regarding the continuing relevance of the fable-narrative.

Not only the fables, but many other small narratives also originated in India and then
moved to other parts of the world, and became a part of human culture there:

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13 Maurice Winternitz, A History of Indian Literature. Translated from the German by Subhadra Jha. Delhi:
Motilal Banrasidass, 1977, p 332-33
14 Quoted in Walter De La Mare, ‘Introduction’ in Animal Stories. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1972,
p. 30

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So far as my instructions go, I should be prepared, within certain limits, to hold a brief for India. So far as the children of Europe have their fairy stories in common, these--and they form more than a third of the whole--are derived from India. In particular, the majority of the Drolls or comic tales and jingles can be traced, without much difficulty, back to the Indian peninsula. 

Even the movement of the Indian stories to the foreign shores has been an important area of research in the 20th century. Critics like Franklin Edgerton have studied especially how the Indian fable-narratives reached the different parts of the globe and got assimilated in the local literatures of the different countries.

In the first chapter of this study, the textual scholarship of the Indian fables, especially the *Panchatantra*, is looked into. It is extremely interesting to trace the origin and development of this text, which itself seems like a story. It is to the credit of the vast popularity of the Indian fables, that ironically the various Indologists had to reconstruct the lost text on the basis of its many versions. The Indian fables also reached to different countries as individual stories. In other words, apart from the translations of the entire fable-compositions, in some cases individual fables were also taken to other countries. Some of the fables in Korea and Malaysia, for instance, originated in the *Panchatantra*.

The textual history of other fable compositions is also very interesting. In fact the *Jatakas* would be the only composition of its kind in India that was put to writing, because it was thought the texts might be lost in the oral tradition. Not exactly lost, but since the *Jatakas* are of religious importance, they are a part of the religious discourse of the Buddhists, it was thought that unless the narratives were put to writing, there might arise the risk of corruptions of the stories, and the teachings would not remain as they were narrated originally by the Buddha. So, in the various Buddhist Councils, the *Jatakas* were eventually committed to writing. However, the narratives were still very much a part of the oral tradition; they were integral to the folk imagination. The textuality of the *Mahabharata* is also significant as it reflects the oral traditions of India. It is interesting

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to note that the *Mahabharata* fables are a much later inclusion, and therefore suggest how the epic continued to grow for a very long time.

However, it is just one of the many issues explored in the first chapter. One of the chief aspects of this chapter is the discussion about the various fable compositions in terms of a tradition, ranging from the *Jatakas* to the *Hitopadesha*. There are also discussions about how each composition has progressed over centuries of developments, and how the fables came to be a part of the bigger texts like the *Mahabharata*. Though, all these compositions, the *Jatakas*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Yogavasistha*, the *Panchatantra* and *Hitopadesha* foreground their own philosophy, their own discourse, there are linkages to be established as well. For example, many of the fable compositions share each other's stories. The frame-narrative of the third book of the *Panchatantra*, about the war between the owls and the crows, comes from Ashwatthama's experience under a tree after the defeat of Duryodhana in the *Mahabharata*. Again, the narrative about the pair of hospitable doves in the *Panchatantra* is same as the narrative in the *Shanti Parva* of the *Mahabharata*. Further, the remnants of the Lion and the Bull story of the *Panchatantra* are to be found in the *Jataka* No. 361.

Though they may share a few narratives, the ideologies proposed by the different fable-compositions are generally very different. This is a unique thing about the Indian fable tradition. Though, even historically, most of the fable-narratives across these compositions proliferated almost simultaneously, during the same time, from about 3rd century B.C onwards, they, in most cases, subject the narrative to the overall discourse of the respective composition. The *Jataka* fables are based on the idea of the *Bodhisattva* as discussed in the first chapter. The *Panchatantra* fables again are meant for political instructions of the princess referred to in the same chapter.

Indeed, the fable as a discourse is a major preoccupation of this study, and is explored in more detail in the second chapter. They narratives not only suggest the contemporary social, political, and religious thought by way of themes and situations but also cite directly from the knowledge-texts of the Indian tradition. That the knowledge-texts like
the *Arthashastra*, the *Natyashastra*, the *Nitishastra*, the *Mahabharata*, the *Mahabhashya*, the *Dharmasastras*, the *Mimamsasutras* and the like were so much part of the folk knowledge in the India of time of these compositions that the characters quite freely quote from these texts and discuss the issues contained in them.

Through the fable-narratives, a reader can establish not only the systems that governed the life in the courts but also the life of the common people. In the *Panchatantra*, there are references to community living, to legal disputes and the manner in which they were sorted out, as in the fable of the cunning Cat; there are references to the various principles of practical living. The fables also foreground the duties of the king and the state, the strategies adopted during war times, the relationship between the king and his subjects, among many other issues. In general, the discourse in the *Panchatantra* is described by the conceptual term *Niti*, which is very political in its implication, and amounts to attaining benefits and success through whichever but intelligent means.

The *Mahabharata* fables are again, as is obvious from the general nature of the epic, replete with various kinds of knowledge. But the dominant discourse is the political discourse. The fable of the Crow and the Swan in the *Karna Parva* and the Jackal and the Tiger in the *Shanti Parva* enumerate important political strategies and principles.

Quite interestingly, the fable is not about anything, it is that thing itself. The fable is the discourse. The *Jatakas* reveal an entirely different purpose with the fable. The same fable, whereas in the *Panchatantra* convince the ways that would bring comfort to the self, in the *Jatakas*, they foreground the *Dhamma* professed by the *Bodhisattva*. Each fable is based on one of the ten Buddhist principles. What is most noteworthy about the fables here is the ambience of religious knowledge that the telling of the tale creates.

If these fables deliberately push a political or religious agenda, they also make upfront their connection with the folk. It is really interesting to see that many of the fables contained in these compositions gradually became part of the regional Indian folk. It is equally a reading experience to note the similarities and differences in the folk-tales that
freely adopted from the fable-compositions. The second chapter discusses this issue with a few examples.

The Indian fable-narratives, if they communicate distinct ideologies, also demonstrate an uncanny use of the formalistic device of arranging the narratives. World literature got the device of frame-narratives from the Indian fable-compositions. It is remarkable how the *Panchatantra* manages to interweave a meandering series of narratives together with a perfect use of the framing device. Related with this is the connection between time, narrative and discourse in the Indian fables. Along with the issue of frame-narrative, the relationship between time and narrative, narrative and discourse and the device of mixing prose with verse (*Champu*) are discussed in the third chapter.

Time as a factor is very important in the integration of narrative units, especially in the *Jataka* fables. It is because the narratives make a progress across time. The shift from the present to the past and back to the present leads to a development of the notion of universal time, and the process of narrativity has to be discussed in this context. The relationship between narrative and discourse is again a major one in the *Jataka* fables, as also in the other fable compositions. In fact each story can be classified into narrative and discursive texts, as discussed in this chapter.

*Champu*, as a narrative device, is again the contribution of the Indian fable-narratives to the World literature, as writers still today continue to use verse at appropriate places in the prose narrative to serve various purposes. In the Indian fables, the verse is used not to heighten the emotions but as a discursive strategy by the narrators. The verse appearing in the narrative contains the entire intent of the story.

The fourth and last chapter attempts a more contemporary reading of the fable-narratives. It is important to analyze the fables in the light of recent Western literary theory, may be not so important. But again, to point out how the narratives are amenable to newer interpretations seemed an effort worth taking. The narratives are discussed in terms of the postmodernist and poststructuralist concepts of the author and the text, Bakhtin's
distinction between prose and poetry, and his dialogism, and the some of the issues taken up by the structuralist narrative poetics.

More special is the discussion of the issue of the authorship, which is also hinted by way of a passing remark at the end of chapter one. In the Indian tradition, authorship has never been an issue to deliberate over. Author is a simply a function in the Indian tradition, in the same way as Foucault calls him/her a function, a name to identify the texts. There is no issue in the narratives to identify the voice of the author. The narratives are in fact distinct system each, and the fact that the texts are a part of the oral tradition make them more distant from any hint of authorship.