CHAPTER I.

Introduction: Aim and Purpose of this Study.

This study attempts application of the standards of literary form to the animal fable. It focuses attention on two representative and influential works of the hoary past, namely, the Panchatantra and the Fables of Aesop, the origins of whom are uncertain. By comparing them, it will attempt the abstraction of the literary characteristics of the animal fable. The studies of these two are independently available, though most of them belong to the nineteenth century oriental scholarship. Since the main corpus of the available criticism belongs to this tradition, the study, though literary, will take into account the findings of the German and English scholars and will comment on them. Some recent scholars like Stith Thompson have employed the methodology of structural anthropology for evaluation. Interesting as these studies are, they clearly fall outside the scope of this study. Nevertheless, wherever some of their findings are relevant, we have employed them, but generally, at least, kept them at the back of our discussion here.

It may be asked how a study of myths in non-English classical languages can be a subject for a doctoral study in English literature. It will be recalled here that scholars like Gilbert Murray and even T.S. Eliot have written on literary forms available in non-English languages. Secondly, a whole school of criticism described by the general term, myth criticism, is emerging in English in the works like Hero with Many Faces.

(1) Literary genres are studied, in terms of their content, thought, and attitude, as well as by their method, manner, and style

(2) Study of the tendency in the modern world to revert to ancient forms of writing
There is a trend in India to study either Indo-English writers or those Anglo-American writers who wrote about India. This is a healthy sign and shows greater concern for relevance. However, this trend is circumscribed by the numerical smallness of serious writers answering to that description. This study is only a small step further in the direction of relevance.

This study is made with a view to applying the machinery of English literary criticism to these representative animal fables. This literary concern is incidental rather than central to the nineteenth-century oriental scholarship. Such a concern is now being considered as a responsibility of the Indian student of English literature. It is true that every literary work of art has stylistic and tonal features derived from the language in which it is written. However, the structure of the literary genre could be conceptually abstracted for literary comparison. If this is not true, then great literary critics who have written on this question right from Aristotle to Kenneth Burke will have to be denied the status of critics.
This does not mean that form and content are separable. Caution is necessary in a study like this not to give an impression that inseparable one modifies the other. The intent of this study is limited - to study the animal fable as a literary genre - by a study of the two ancient masterpieces. The aim is thus limited to studying the animal fable as a literary genre. It is a useful study. The errors and deviations inherent in genre criticism have been excluded here. The main weakness of genre criticism is that it becomes obtrusive in criticising contemporary or new works of art in terms of pre-conceived notions about its genre characteristics.

It may be suggested that since modern writers have ceased to write animal fables, such a study does not serve any purpose. In reply, it can be pointed out that the animal fable is not so extinct as is believed. Aesopian tradition is still continued in the colour comics of Walt Disney's Mickey Mouse and His Friends and that of Hanna Barbera. In the twentieth century, James Thurber has written Fables for our Time. Further, the aim of criticism is not to alter the course of creativity but to evaluate a work of art. Nor have the readers lost interest in the animal fables.
The other limitations of this study must be pointed out so that no misgivings arise. The aim of comparative criticism is to help recreate the total literary situation, whose visible crystallisation is a work of art. However, the time of either Aesop's Fables or the Panchatantra cannot be pinned down with any certainty. Therefore, the reconstruction of social history by comparing the two is not aimed at. But a general description of that state of culture or ethos which makes animal fables possible has been attempted. If animal fables are no longer written, what is missing in our environment which makes it obsolete? Occasional emergence of the animal fable such as the Animal Farm or Walt Disney comics, is a symptom of a certain ethos. What is the difference between an ordinary animal fable and a satire? What factors rendered its emergence a natural process? What phenomenal changes gave it its perfect form at a time when writing was not known? What exactly is the relation of the narrator of the tale and the later writer who recorded it? All these are fascinating themes. Though nothing can be stated with certainty, we can guess a few things from the textual evidence. However, the Panchatantra retains some characteristics of the oral tradition before it — repetition and list of heroes etc. The boxed structure of the Panchatantra and the isolated simple stories of wisdom of Aesop naturally are an index of the length of time from the first rough
makings of a tale and its subsequent sophisticated form. When writing was a difficult and a rare art, the need for optimum effective economy, it may be conjectured, conditioned the crystallisation of a tale narrative. These situational necessities govern the fermentation of an animal fable.

The boxed pattern clearly indicated using a loose story as an aid to memory for the professional story-teller. The loose narratives of a teacher teaching royal pupils through stories, an entire political or behavioral science, require a curriculum of memorised pattern of situations illustrating them. The boxed pattern has often been described as baroque in nature comparable to medieval architecture. But it might have issued from humbler motives and necessities.

But the refinements of the boxing pattern seen in the Panchatantra must be accounted for in the existence of a professional teacher. Baroque art might have other impulses, but its development in the art of structuring can only be the outcome of a hereditary profession perfected from generation to generation. Aesop's can be accounted for in the narrations of a clever slave resorting to the subterfuges of animal fables to bring home the bare truth to the aristocrat without giving rise to rancour. It may have greater spontaneity and inventiveness. But the professionalised irony as well economy of the Panchatantra...
clearly indicates a professionalism. In other words, it is possible to credit Aesop with the authorship of his fables. But we can say that Vishnusharma was a perfectioner of tales by many others who had gone before him, each modifying the respective tale, condensing it, adding to it style and suspense to the little tales.

The raw material handled by either Aesop or Vishnusharma and his predecessors assumes the existence of a system of stock animal characters, each invested with a certain human quality - Fox for cunning, the Hare for timidity, the Dog for fidelity and the Donkey for foolishness. Such a tradition of stock animal characters cannot be traced back merely to the rural life of settled agricultural existence, but rather, a life of forest dwellers, surviving by outwitting the animals. Hunters all over the world have this shortened description of the animal behaviour. It can be presumed that the animal character was born out of the most primitive hunting man's experiences.

There is no reason why the animal appearance and animal behaviour could have conditioned these stock characteristics. We can understand the ferocity of the Tiger, the kingship of the Lion, the cunning of the Fox and the stupidity of the Donkey, which probably was the earliest to be domesticated. But more elaborate allegories such as the old Lion tired of hunting and demanding that each
species send one victim for his daily nourishment is clearly the superimposition of an already political existence. The subject of such a story is to criticize a king, who is living on the tributes from his own subjects. The intended teaching is that the king should be active, because only through his own activity can he exist. No animal enters the mouth of a sleeping lion. Such a tale derives from not only a political existence, but one peculiar to India - the Mandala Polity in which Kautilya's Arthasastra and the Panchatantra are based.

When the principedoms proliferate, the princes make friends with an enemy's enemy to maintain the semblance of a terse balance and then attack neighbours to acquire territory. Already, the stock character of an animal has become part of the linguistic idiom and has inspired political allegory.

Therefore, a careful distinction has to be made between those tales born in primitive experience and the tales which indicate a more developed political or civic life.

But a Lion is not always wise - he is outwitted by a Hare, not noted for its cleverness. The stock character if often transgressed, altered and reduced to represent some special quality, which it itself represents. A free character is thus born. It is individualised and plays a peculiar role for a particular situation. The Crocodile
in the Panchatantra, is first shown to be clever enough to receive the Monkey, but gives himself away by talking boastfully. The Monkey invents a characteristic of its species – it leaves its heart on the top of the tree. And the foolish Crocodile takes him back to the bank of the river and lets him jump to his tree. He is fooled. It is totally a human drama of bourgeois existence.

In other words, we cannot stop short at going to the origins of the stock animal characters. Once they become a linguistic habit, and more individualised, human, social and political characteristics adhere to them. They begin to represent human types.

It is here that the main beauty and spell of the animal tale lies. It makes the animal tale a genre, a human drama. The jungle life becomes exterior; the situation is human. It transcends the stock allegorical attributes of the respective animals. It is as genre that the animal fable is still alive in the colour comesae enjoyed not only by children but by adults also.

This is the first step toward releasing the animal fable from its fixed meanings and taking it to the level of a literary form. But here we must admit of a severe limitation. Though freed, still we cannot compare the animal fable with modern fiction with its modern complex human characters, such as the ones created by George Eliot or Henry James. That kind of complexity is outside the scope
of an animal fable. It is no use expecting an animal tale indulging in internal monologues of a Mrs. Bloom. All that has happened is one type has been replaced by another; the stock animal species type has been replaced by the social or individual type. These social types can be summed up into a few groups: friend, enemy, enemy with evil intention trying to befriend, and friend in his frankness looking like an enemy, etc.

A well meaning friend may not be able to help a person because of the person's own stupidity. The two Cranes, in the Panchatantra, decide to take a Tortoise from a dead lake to another more pleasant one - as an act of friendship. They hold a stick between their beaks and the Tortoise hangs to the stick holding it in its mouth.

The Tortoise is amazed by the beauty of the aerial landscape and exclaims something. Before its poetical words are uttered, it has slipped down to the ground and is smashed to jelly. The aim of the story is that even friends cannot help a fool. But here, the foolish Tortoise assumes a quality more than a confirmed fool such as a Donkey.

The other poetic overtones and ironies spring up by the very concentration of the character. The birds belong to the air; the Tortoise to the earth. Even a temporary flight makes the Tortoise giddy with intoxication.
Its return to earth - its own nature - is with such an impact that it can no longer survive. The good intentions of the birds have come to naught, because they contravene the nature of the Tortoise.

The poetic overtone is the highest that an animal fable can achieve. The limitation imposed by its brevity also has its compensating advantages. Even the kindness of the Cranes turns in effect to cruelty unconsciously because they have taken the Tortoise into an environment which does not belong to it. Such a quality has the justness of George Eliot. Silas Marner has lost his gold, but he gets back the golden locks of an orphan child, lying on the place where he had hid his gold. The girl was burden to her mother; but she fills the vacuum in Silas' life. The only difference between the 'justness' of the Tortoise story and that of Silas Marner, is probably the crudity of the animal fable. Its symbolism is unconscious; George Eliot's is conscious. But probably, this might be interpreted as its strength. The brevity of the animal fable leaves much ground for the reader's imagination, which is an advantage.

This crudity is a part of the robust common sense underlying the animal tale. Quite often, a modern reader is likely to be repelled by the preachiness of the animal tale. This is a special problem which needs some elaboration.
The terms 'Tantra', 'Yukti' and 'Kast' are used with a wide spectrum of connotation in India. From 'policy' upto 'morality' they vary according to context. Quite often all the meanings co-exist. The lesson or 'moral' of a Panchatantra story has nothing to do with an ethical imperative. The tales glorify the 'clever' animal which survives by outwitting the covert enemies. This secular moral - "Be wise and live", "Outwit your enemies" - cannot be described as an ethical imperative. In fact, ethics is a system of imperatives. The imperatives of "Tantra" presuppose a world full of competition and the survival of the fittest. Here, nature is red in tooth and claw. It is a world of crooks, cranks and foolish men. The good man is asked to be clever too. He may be excused if he is not good, but suffers immediately if he is not clever.

There could be several explanations for such a fierce competitive ethos. The easiest one is that this ethos is of the court, for the court and by the court. In this sense, it is closest to Machiavelli's The Prince. The very king survives only by his wit because he is surrounded by the cheats, flatterers and exploiters; and his enemies are waiting just outside the door. The setting of the Panchatantra may warrant such an ethos.

But, by and large in India, the general ethos supports this vision of life. Indians seldom underestimated the role of the wicked men. They knew that men of the highest
ethical sense live and should be praised. But they make
fun of wickedness. India did not have the modern relativism.

"Those are good men who sacrifice self-interest
for others. Those are idlings who think of others while
serving self-interest. Those are bad men who destroy
others' interest for their own good. As for those who destroy
others without any motive - we don't know what to call them."

So said Shatruhari, a much later poet. Evil is recognised
in India, but is not accorded a metaphysical or fundamentalist
value. Wicked men should be and can be defeated by good
men through their cleverness. No good man should make
a fetish of his goodness. He must win in the service of his
goodness, or else he is a fool deceived by this goodness.

This is the shishta or a gentleman's philosophy. any name?

Therefore, this kind of didacticism does not
make offence to art. It stimulates art. It accepts the clash
of interests in the phenomenal world and refuses to be
cramped by ethical or abstract imperatives. Whether this
is true of all Indian works or not, it is certainly true
of the Panchatantra. It is also true of the Rastkhatan,
when Shri. Aurobindo translated it as "A Century of Life"
and not as "A Century of Maxims."

The anti-didactic principle of art promoted
by Oscar Wilde ("Art is amoral") is not relevant to this
didacticism. This is not anti-life. It teaches the art of life rather than a system of ethics. It is empiricism of the purest kind in whose favour didacticism has been criticised by some modern writers. It cannot be violence to the aesthetic pattern underlying art.

On the other hand, the maxim which overtly occurs at the conclusion of each story serves an aesthetic purpose of rounding off and no other. The witty maxims found at the end of Walt Disney animal fables serve the same purpose.

The boxed pattern weaves a story within a story. Often the embedded story has another embedded in it. The introductory stanza is clearly intended to be an aid to memory. The story which acts as the medium and the embedded story might often act contrastively and the conclusion is postponed till the two embedded stories are over. If this is baroque form, it should also be remembered that is a highly cultivated baroque. Comparatively Boccaccio and Chaucer look simpler. At any rate, while the tales are told, it is clear that they are not too eager to rush to their conclusion. They can afford the luxury of an intervening embedded tale with a different moral. The *Panchatantra* luxuriates in these wise maxims, taking and throwing them away for a functional purpose of art and no more. It is a recital rather than improvisation.
It is a recital of the 'shishta (geneleman) talk. Besides this, we have to consider what may be described as 'animation', a phrase used by visual artists. The dialogues and descriptions economically created the maximum animation. The animals become alive through their witty, angry, polite and suggestive talk, however meagre. No dialogue with this moral of economy could have created verisimilitude. Therefore, for its purpose, its brisk prose is the best suited medium.

In other words, within its limitations, the animal fable answers all the descriptions of fictive art along with its special characteristics.