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**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

## Eco-philosophy of Indian classical fables

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**Abstract** - Indian classical stories may be told simply, yet their ideas are profound. It helps to shape our society to validate cultural assumptions and beliefs. As the stories have a strong influence on the conceptual frameworks of the community, they can also alter the human understanding of the natural world. But in recent years, humans have distanced themselves from nature. The anthology of Panchatantra (Sanskrit language) and Jataka tales (Pali language) is offered in this study as a valuable discourse for developing ecological consciousness among the people which is suitable for both children and adult literature. Academic circles in India have adopted the environmental approach to literary works, which is an active field on the international stage. “Today, Eco Sophy is a large and multidisciplinary field of study that creates a broad spiritually-specific theory of the natural and social conditions of humans on Earth and in space”. Some writers have studied the representation of ecology in ancient and modern literature. Nevertheless, to the best of this applicant's knowledge, there has been no comparative research on the development of ecological consciousness in Panchatantra and Jataka stories.

**Keywords:** biocentrism, comparative study, eco-philosophy, nonhuman, text analysis

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### INTRODUCTION

The 21st centuries have an imprint on the anthropocene by accelerating the global ecological crisis. Ecological literacy belongs to knowledge and comprehension of the relationships between humans, other creatures, and the living environment. American academician, William Rueckert, created the term ecocriticism from the phrase ecology and critique in his work “*Literature and Ecology*.” Researcher Ramaswamy in his study stated that “Directly or indirectly, every book teaches something about locations, species, interconnections, and resource utilization” (Ramaswamy, 2019, p. 15). The select tales are passed down through generations and serve as role models for the general population. As the stories have a strong influence on the conceptual frameworks of the community, they can also alter the human understanding of the natural world. There

has been no scholarly study of the two great tales *Panchatantra* and *Jataka* stories through the lens of “eco” disciplines to see how they can help people live better lives and how they can be used to think of animals other than humans as emotional beings.

“The term ‘eco philosophy,’ or ‘ecosophy’ refers to a philosophy of ecological harmony or balance. The purpose is to study a variety of perspectives on human-Nature events and interrelationships” (D.Sravana Jyothi, 2020). Some authors consider the notion of eco-philosophy to be synonymous with “ecosophy” Lately, Russian academics incorporated the concept in the theme lexicon on the ecology of human existence, evolved in 2020 as part of a research, demonstrating that “today, Eco Sophy is a large and multidisciplinary field of study that creates a broad spiritually-specific theory of the natural and social

conditions of humans on Earth and in space” (Neveleva and Solomko, 2020). Aldo Leopold published *The Sand County Almanac* in 1949 to show that ecology is a part of human life. This book popularized the phrase ‘Think like a mountain’ which shows that people are a component of the biosphere and are aware that this means they have duties to other living things. Both ideas spark long-term interest in the environment (Telan, n.d., p. 282). “The Deep Ecology necessitates a return to the monistic viewpoint, the original connection between humans and the ecosphere, a perspective like Indian philosophy, particularly the Advaita theory” (Ramaswamy, 2019, p. 9). Author Naess described the concepts that serve as a foundation for the Eco Sophy frameworks: they are the non-human has intrinsic value, biological diversity, and only kills for essential needs (Naess, 2007). Other academics have identified the following eco-philosophy-specific forms that they recommend be incorporated into instructive programs about the environment: the ecology of humanity, philosophy of ecology, humanistic ecology, ecological philosophy, and philosophy of ecological crisis (Rani A, 2017).

### Review of literature

Researcher Lesley in his paper discussed “the birth of Eco philosophies or philosophies that emphasize ecocentric principles” (Le Grange, 2015, p. 303). Researcher Naomi Appleton explored the depictions of bad animals in *Jataka tales* through the role of Devadatta in his article, and he concludes that we can learn a lot about ourselves from animals (Appleton, 2019, p. 8). Author Anjo Rani in her research, explains how the *Jatakas* and the *Panchatantra* influenced the short stories the Odia writer Manoj Das wrote (Rani A, 2017). Scholar Nivedita Bhattacharya in her article discusses the eco-centric elements of *Panchatantra* and accomplishes that teachers and parents should emphasize these elements to help children develop an awareness of the environment, she discussed *Panchatantra tales* from an eco-centric (green reading) perspective (Bhattacharya, 2019, p. 50). Yet, no academic research has compared the *Panchatantra* tales and *Jataka stories* from an eco-philosophical perspective.

### MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research was conducted using a text analysis comparison from the viewpoint of eco-philosophy in Indian classical literature *Panchatantra* and *Jataka tales* through textual analysis. According to McKee in the year 2003, “textual analysis is a method for gathering knowledge about how other humans interpret the world” (McKee, 2003). The select ancient Indian classical texts are read from an ecocritical viewpoint to evaluate whether human beings are good or harmful to nature (nonhumans). The “ecosophy encourages people to be kind and care about others. In this process, consumption should be limited within the limits of the environment, so that everyone on Earth can have social justice and a high standard of living” (Bhattacharjee and Sinha, 2021).

### Knowledge gap

Many studies have been conducted on the themes of translation, and feministic viewpoints by academicians and practitioners on the chosen narratives of Panchatantra tales and Jataka tales. There is limited research on the association between eco-critical perspectives, therefore the selected book has yet to be investigated in this field. So, the viewpoint of the eco-philosophical theme is considered as a research gap that is going to be implemented in this research. And the goal is to create a good discourse to counter dominant narratives that harm nature (animals) and inspire future generations to live sustainably.

### Overview of the Vedic and Buddhist Tales

Oral education is the transmission of knowledge from one individual to another via narrative. This is how most ancient Indian texts were maintained, generation after generation. It has always been a powerful tool for preserving information throughout India’s civilization’s history. India’s folklore heritage is one of the world’s largest living oral tale traditions. “The Vedic text *Panchatantra* and Buddhist fables *Jataka* were educational in nature and, as a result, maintained much value for youngsters” (Ramaswamy, 2019, p. 17). Both fables played a significant part in the lives of young Indians, it remains to have the same educational importance in elementary school and is read as bedtime stories in several Indian families within and beyond India. Due to the changes in time, the tales are now being transformed into animation and finding audiences outside of India.

The term Panchatantra can be broken down into its parts, *Pancha*, and *Tantra*. Pancha means five and Tantra implies technique or strategy; hence, it was composed to teach the five techniques of “Politics, Public Administration, and Nitisastra” (Rajan, 1993). It contains elements of amusement, knowledge, creativity, and logical reasoning. Teachers, students, and parents can all benefit from utilizing all these factors. It was written in Sanskrit around 200 B.C, along with other animal fables like *Jataka Tales* and the *Hitopanishad tales*, which were meant to entertain and educate young minds.

“Panchatantra is not only a collection of moralistic stories it is also the collection of tales within a story, a style of storytelling that effectively interests the reader. The outcome is the transmission of morality and profound ideas without preaching” (“From Hastinapur to Canterbury,” n.d.). The tales of *Panchatantra* are regarded as examples of wise behaviour. As Vishnu Sharma only had six months to train the ignorant princes, he wanted to ensure that they knew the basic rules of good behaviour, such as how to recognize people, make friends, choose political appointees and servants, deal with conflict with tact, and smartness, and live in peace and harmony. King “Amarshakti ruled the ancient Indian kingdom, and his three sons were uninterested in school, so, the king was concerned about their education and future of his heirs. One day, he asked his ministers about this, and the prime minister recommended Pandit Vishnu Sharma (a learned Brahmin). Vishnu Sharma

pledged to educate the princes within six months” (Kulkarni, n.d., p. 200). In India, “between 300 and 500 B.C., historians and other academics discovered that tales and animal fables were recited to educate students within six months. This collection of tales is called the Panchatantra” (Olivelle, 1997).

The Buddhist *Jataka Tales*, a group of didactic tales, have been a source of enjoyment for Buddhists in numerous countries for centuries. The Buddha’s teachings are also transmitted through this tales. Buddha addresses the aims of the philosophy of nonviolence in his discourse on the essence of ethical behavior, which is not to kill or damage any living being. Jataka is a narrative regarding Buddha’s actions in previous incarnations. According to Buddhist belief, Buddha was a bodhisattva in past lives who gradually modified his nature by having birth in various wombs and so under his religious activity until he attained enlightenment and became *abhisamuddha* (gained the highest wisdom). Buddha guided his pupils to salvation by knowledge of a prior vision. All past instances were accumulated to create the foundation of the Jataka.

In the year 2017, the researcher, Finnigan examined “Buddha Stories depicts ecological knowledge with Buddhist sutras appropriately. The stories inspire individuals to value and respect nature and all living organisms inside ecosystems” (Finnigan, 2017), author Kyi and kyi stated that “The Jataka are the pillars of human civilization. A more intelligent and better human environment will arise if everyone adopts and applies these moral ethics” (Kyi and Kyi, 2020, p. 124). In other words, the Jataka is a highly rich type of literature about the life of the bodhisattva who has become Buddha. He trains his followers and imparts his wisdom via stories of his past incarnations. At the same time, there are different interpretations concerning the number of tales, as different writings contain references to different Jatakas. In the context of Pali Buddhism, the term Jataka has acquired a specific connotation. The Pali-English dictionary defines Jataka as the title of a book having 547 stories told in verse (Mukhopadhyaya, 1991), B. Hodgson, however, asserts that the epic Jataka-mala of Nepal consists of 565 narratives (Sarkar, 1981). As there are differing opinions regarding the precise number of Jatakas, so it is not possible to provide an exact count. In this study, we employ the Francis and Thomas translations of “Ancient Tales of Wisdom,” which is a collection of 114 stories.

### STRUCTURE OF PANCHATANTRA

The divisions primarily consist of dialogue, two primary characters in the fundamental frame story begin conversing with one another about an incident, and during their conversation, they impart some practical wisdom to one another. Even the characters from a different story begin a conversation and recount anecdotes to illustrate a lesson, the most notable aspect is that each tale has a morality or a concept of common sense. The term Panchatantra tales

refers to the five most effective tactics. These five tactics are known:

- Mitra-bheda: The Parting of Companions
- Mitra-lbha or Mitra-samprpti: Friendship Acquiring
- Kokolukiya: Concerning Crows and Owls
- Labdhapraṇāsam: Loss of Gains
- Aparakitakraka: Ill-Thought-Out Action / Hasty Deeds.

The initial tactic is Mitrabheda or the separation of friends. The narrative is about a bull and a lion king. It describes how they became partners and how they were future separated by a jackal. Two jackals named Damanaka and Karataka, serve as ministers for the Lion. This anecdote emphasizes the fundamental notion that ministers play a crucial role in determining what is best for their king at any given time. As his capabilities and limitations are unknown, they can present a friend to the king if they find it hard to fight with the king. When they see that their relationship with this person is not especially useful for the Monarch and the kingdom, they might create the seeds of confusion between the King and his friend to deftly separate them.

The second strategy is known as Mitrabha. This method is described to emphasize the significance of acquiring good friends. It emphasizes the principle that a person with wonderful friends will never experience defeat in their lifetime. This is the tale of four friends, a crow, a rat, a deer, and a tortoise, and how they assist one another in times of peril. The third tactic is known as Kokolukiya (Of crows and owls). The primary plot focuses on the animosity between ravens and owls. It describes how to approach foes with tact and prudence. It also suggests that you should rarely trust a friend who was once your opponent. Labdhapranash, the fourth technique, signifies the loss of benefits. It states that individuals may lose the things they have previously gained due to their folly. The primary plot begins with a conflict between a monkey and a crocodile. And the final strategy is Aparakitakraka, which denotes rash or ill-considered actions. The story concludes that you should never act rashly, as this will result in irreversible loss. The plot revolves around a businessman and a foolish guest at his home, whose hurried actions result in the deaths of some monks.

### STRUCTURE OF JATAKA TALES

Each Jataka story must consist of five parts: (1) Paccupanna vatthu, (2) Atitavatthu, (3) Gatha, (4) Vedyakarana, and (5) Samodhana. (Roy, n.d.). Here are the explanations of these five parts:

- The following is the narrative of the present, according to *Paccupanna Vatthu*. Buddha offers advice to his disciples after attaining Parinirvana by relating the narrative of his previous birth to the current condition, just as a person engages in various activities based on his or her current condition and through such actions, a person is led toward nirvana, but his or her evil deeds destroy him or her. The Buddha illustrates his advice with instances of real people’s behavior based on real-world situations.

- *Atitavatthu* is a story about the old days in which Buddha tells how, as a bodhisattva, he traveled a long way to become a Buddhist. This is the most exciting topic, which is about the first birth.

- *Gatha*: These are verses that the Buddha spoke after he attained enlightenment. These verses are also the Jataka's seeds, or what gives it life. The words in these verses are so old that it does not seem wrong to say that they cannot be read. We can guess that these verses were mostly used orally before they were written down. People could learn from them by listening to what they had to say.

- *Veyyakarana*: That is an elaboration of the verse or verses. People often explain the verse by taking each word into account.

- *Samodhana*: This is how the characters in the past story are linked to the ones in the present story, in which the Buddha needs to be the hero.

Since the beginning of time, the Jataka stories have been used to teach moral lessons through the characters in each story, who show a virtue or universal truth in a certain situation. The Jataka stories not only convey moral teachings but also demonstrate how morals operate and how people can evolve as individuals. Each narrative is based on a true incident and shows how a character's strong sense of fairness aided him or her in that scenario. By explaining a Jataka content, we can confirm that the Buddhist faith is nothing but the ethical or ethical detoxification of an ordinary person, i.e., an inner purification that also certainly makes society well. And the Jataka text shows that it can explain the Buddhist religion just as clearly as any other portion of Buddhist literature. In every Jataka story, the Bodhisattva is the main character and has the best and most important role. He thinks that the Jatakas show how people's morals clean up or improve over time.

This diegetic tales is not just a story about Buddha's past life experience, but also a story about how each person can clean up themselves with morals. The story is told in a very clear way that is easy for the average person to understand. Jataka stories are a true reflection of the bodhisattva's path to purification, with the Buddhist belief that you can do good by doing good things. So, it can be said that the Jatakas show simply what the Buddhist religion is all about.

## ECO-PHILOSOPHY IN SANSKRIT TALES

The human-animal relationship is a major concern, but the lives of nonhuman animals are jeopardized when they are accorded little autonomy. In recent years, their sufferings have been ignored. The scholar Bhattacharjee exclaims "recent animal cruelty cases, such as the death of a pregnant elephant in India with a fruit loaded with explosives and the slaughter of a pregnant cow in a similar manner, demonstrate how cruelty to animals may be rhetorically justified. The term "animal" is pejorative when applied to humans to distinguish ourselves from nonhuman creatures" (Bhattacharjee, 2020) showing how humans mistreat "human minorities and nonhuman species" (Berry, 1997). These actions promote inequality and injustice, making

them unsustainable. Since most Western philosophical studies have frequently overlooked the natural world and human values, those methodologies that highlight eco-centric standards have just been described as eco-philosophy. Book I from Panchatantra Tales begins with the "Frame story: Lively and Tawny" (Bull and lion), in which the jungle setting is described and the lion is depicted as ruler of the kingdom. In addition to this, in the year 2020, scholar Mike. E claims to argue that "Lions keep things in order, just like kings do. A king keeps the peace by making rules and punishing people who do not follow them. A lion keeps things even by killing some other animals. If there were not any lions, antelope herds would overrun the savannas and eat up all the grass. Everything has some kind of effect" ("WHY ARE LIONS KING OF THE JUNGLE?" n.d.).

Carnivores are commonly represented as predators and as evil in popular culture. Yet, the lion in this story demonstrates that in the animal realm, one species care for another, just as humans do. But, in the human world, some people appear to be selfish and lack empathy. Lively meets Tawny (Bull and lion), and two jackals named Wary and Wily. This incident conveys the concept that wild animals welcome domestic animals to the book readers "You have arrived as his guest. Tell you what; you must meet him in brotherly affection; spend time with him; eat, drink, work, and play with him; and do things in one location as friends" (Rajan, 1993, p. 37). This narrative's positive themes will inspire a reverent view of the animal world in the listeners of this tale.

The next tale is "The Turtle and the Geese." This story describes how geese and a tortoise lived together and got along each other. One day, they were living in a lake that was drying up because of a big drought. They decided to flee from the lake and look for another one. The tortoise could not fly, though. So, the geese came up with a plan: the tortoise had to hold a stick in its mouth while the geese carried it. The only rule meant that the tortoise should not talk. If it did, it would fall off the stick and die. The tortoise said that it would be quite easy. But when humans on the way saw this strange set-up, they burst into laughter at the tortoise. He spoke up because he could not handle his worry. Making fun of others is not right but they consistently make fun of the animals. Here in this narrative, humans are shown as being destructive to nonhumans. As described in the excerpt:

*"What on earth is this cart-like object that those birds are carrying, flying? A confused hubbub, a hum of voices of a crowd gathered below rose to the skies. Hearing this, the turtle, whose hour of death was drawing near, rashly opened his mouth to ask, what are these people babbling? No sooner were those words out than the stupid turtle slipped off the support on which he depended and fell crashing to the ground. Immediately, those among the crowd who craved meat cut him up into pieces with sharp knives" (Rajan, 1993, p. 133).*

Researcher Jepson states that the “extreme and crucial manifestation of human authority over animals is the murdering of them. Massive numbers of animals are slain by humans for a variety of purposes, like meat, other products, and even for fun activities. Animals are also killed when they are considered a hazard, or when their owners no longer have the means or desire to care for them” (Jepson, 2008, p. 127). In most cases, the welfare of animals is not a concern that is given much thought by people. The humans in the narrative disturb the natural homes of various animals and then mock the animals for their behaviour.

The bond between a human and a serpent was portrayed in “The Serpent Who Painted in Gold.” Humans benefit from snakes because they eliminate unwanted rodents and insect pests from food supplies and crops. “Most people are afraid of them, particularly due to their bites and general characteristics” (Nonga and Haruna, 2015, p. 2). Once the Brahmana was kind enough to offer a cup of milk, the serpent was pleased and anxious to express his appreciation by offering a gold coin. One day, as he had to travel to a nearby city, he instructed his boy to do the same. But he “decided to murder the serpent and steal every coin” (Rajan, 1993, p. 306). Such a treatment to the serpent was humiliating.

*“He who shows no compassion for living things,  
Who Grabs instead that which seeks sanctuary  
Is certain to lose all that he possesses”  
(Rajan, 1993, p. 306).*

The lesson to be learned from the narrative is that all animals expect compassion from human beings.

### **ECO PHILOSOPHY IN BUDDHIST FABLES**

In the Jataka tale “The Ass in Lion’s Skin,” the ecological significance and value of all creatures are defined. A donkey wore a lion’s coating (skin) to frighten humans but was eventually captured. This action decreases its value and worth. Linking it to the idea of “deep ecology,” one must attempt to recognize the inherent value of all ecosystem-dwelling organisms. In addition, this story demonstrates how humans exploit nature to satisfy their greed. As stated in the text “As soon as the villagers learned that it was only an ass, they cudged him till they broke his bones and then went off with the lionskin. When the merchant appeared and found that his ass has come to grief” (Francis and Thomas, 2012, p. 115). For his avarice, the merchant subjugates and degrades wildlife (nature). The dominant discourse consistently disrespects animal pain.

In the next fable, “The Golden Goose” vividly depicts the current reality in which nonhumans are viewed as property and wealth. A mother attempts to disregard the pain of a nonhuman (goose) in favor of money and benefits. “Mother’s selfishness caused her to invite the golden goose to her, and when he arrived, she plucked his feather with both of her hands” (Francis and Thomas, 2012, p. 84). This Buddhist narrative will serve as a positive frame in the readers’ thoughts by highlighting the fact that people should

not view animals as resources, but as precious creatures. This story particularly promotes those who read or listen to be ecologically aware about the welfare of all organisms in ecosystems and also emphasized philosophy of kindness.

In the story, “The jackals spell” illustrates the environmental consciousness. Jackal confronted the monarch after learning a mantra from Buddha. But by the end of this story, the king and his counselors had decided to slaughter all animals and let the citizens of the kingdom consume “meat they could fresh, and the rest they dried and preserved” (Francis and Thomas, 2012, p. 150). Every year, dozens of animals are killed in India for eating by non-vegetarians or for clinical research in laboratories. But animal cruelty is “punishable under Articles 428 and 429 of the Indian penal code” (Service, n.d.).

But there are some stories that show that human beings are also kind to animals, “Speckle’s Captivity” is an example. Once a deer was a pet in the prince’s castle, and strangely, the deer spoke with the prince, allowing him to comprehend the animal’s emotions (remembering my own people), prince “then ordered his man” (Rajan, 1993, p. 258) and set free. Those who read or hear the story can learn that people can also understand how scared animals are and set them free. In this religious text, however, people can understand nonhumans and try to support them as well. Hence, Indian classical tales such as Panchatantra and Jataka stories are helpful discourses that really can help a person get in touch with a world that is bigger than humans. With the assistance of the stories in the book Buddha Stories, people can learn to care more about the environment. Young readers, who are the foundations of society, are the book’s main readers and audience. Children can learn lessons and values without being told directly. This can be done by reading or telling stories.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The tales of Panchatantra and Jataka inspire individuals to admire and respect nature and to respect all living organisms within an ecosystem. But in recent years, humans have distanced themselves from nature. Humans have modified global ecological patterns so extensively that their effects will be discernible in the environmental record to upcoming generations. Researchers Praveena and Raju in their paper titled “Lovelorn Gender and Nature: Revenge of the Scorned in Mahabharata” (2023) states that “biocentrism or ecocentrism helps to promote good feelings that will enhance human well-being and preserve the ecological equilibrium” (T and Raju, 2023). So, the first step in achieving this objective is educating children to respect and be friendly to nonhumans. Because most Humans beings are responsible for the suffering and killings of numerous animals. Measures must be taken to ensure the animals’ safety. Moreover, stricter environmental protection measures are required.

Nonhumans have the right to exist without suffering or fear, and we must assist when this right is infringed. Humans

attempt to love, support, adapt and speak for others. According to Stibbe states “People in environmentally destructive civilizations are worried about the influence their societies have on others, both human and non-human, close and far, as well as current and future generations” (Stibbe, 2014, p. 120). Researcher Shin elucidated that “Animals may not be as sophisticated as people, yet they are still greater than the worst type of man” (Michael Shin, 2019, p. 282). The interpreters of these two fables explained everything in a transparent and refined manner. God created both humans and animals as wonderful beings. Thus, show kindness to all living things and be surprised to feel compassion for them. “Be kind to all living creatures” (Ryder, 1949, p. 338). The results of this study show that several narratives demonstrated that people harm animals, while others demonstrated that people can respect animals and allow them to live by providing them with equal treatment.

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