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**Universal Archetypes, Localised Morals: A Comparative Study of C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* and the *Panchatantra***

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**Abstract**

Archetypes, as conceptualised by Carl Jung, are universal narrative figures that recur throughout various cultures, religions, and literary traditions. Thus far their meanings change as they are adapted into specific cultural and moral structures. This paper examines how archetypal patterns in the ancient Indian *Panchatantra* and C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* operate within distinct pedagogic and theoretical frameworks. While the *Panchatantra* employs archetypes – particularly the trickster, the wise guide, and the fallible king – to impart *nīti*, a practical wisdom, Lewis reinterprets similar figures within a Christian theology in which moral principles are derived from religious obedience, redemption, and divine authority. The trickster, for instance, functions in the *Panchatantra* as a cautionary figure whose deception is a lesson to children to choose prudence and virtue over temptation. However, in *Narnia*, trickster-like figures often represent moral deviation from Christian doctrine and serve to reinforce the spiritual consequences of disobedience. By comparing selected *Panchatantra* stories with key episodes in *Narnia*, the study demonstrates that while archetypes remain structurally stable, their cultural interpretations diverge significantly. This cross-cultural analysis highlights how universal narrative structures are continuously reshaped to align with the ideological, religious, and ethical nuances of the cultures that govern them.

**Keywords:** Archetypes, Pedagogy, Christianity, Panchatantra, Narnia

**Introduction**

Children's literature draws from the archetypal theory of collective unconscious propounded by Carl Jung, yet the meaning of these archetypal figures changes depending on cultural contexts. The *Panchatantra*, an ancient Indian collection of animal fables, presents archetypes through the pragmatic lens of *nīti*, where judgement and wit shape moral progress

(Ryder 5; Olivelle xiii). C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, however, adapts Christian doctrine of faith and righteousness against temptation and trickery, emphasising a moral view rooted in spiritual obedience (Manlove 87; Ward 41–43).

Both texts employ animals to stand for human traits—talking lions, monkeys, crocodiles, beavers, and more—yet their moral purpose differs. In the *Panchatantra*, animals signify human virtue and folly, serving as voices of judgement, strategy, and practical survival. In *Narnia*, animals communicate spiritual responsibility, moral positioning, and divine order. These differences champion Jung's idea that archetypes are universally common in structure but culturally specific in interpretation (Jung 42).

This paper attempts to examine how commonly shared archetypes are expressed differently across cultures, using two culturally different texts—the ancient Indian text *Panchatantra*, which teaches *nīti-śāstra* as a guide for life from early childhood, and the Western Christian allegory, C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, which centres on spiritual morality—to show how children's literature imparts culturally specific knowledge using universal narrative forms. Through a comparative study of three stories—"The Monkey and the Crocodile," "The Blue Jackal," and "The Lion and the Bull"—from the *Panchatantra*, and selected episodes from *The Chronicles of Narnia*, this study shows how children's literature imparts culturally specific moral values using shared archetypal structures.

### **Review of Literature**

Carl Gustav Jung describes archetypes as "primordial images" and "psychic residue" of repeated ancestral experiences inherited by the human psyche through the collective unconscious. His work *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* lays the foundation for archetypal criticism in literature, including children's narratives. Jung asserts that while archetypes are universal in form, their meanings depend on cultural interpretation (Jung 42), a concept that encourages comparative study of the *Panchatantra* and Lewis's *Narnia*.

Studies on the *Panchatantra* emphasise its didactic and political nature. Arthur W. Ryder (1925) highlights its purpose as a handbook of *nīti*, intended to cultivate practical wisdom and strategic intelligence in young readers (Ryder 5). Patrick Olivelle (1997) extends this understanding, noting that moral assessment in these fables is determined by consequences rather than absolute ethical categorisation (Olivelle xiii–xiv). Recent comparative study (A. K. Ramanujan 1991) adds that Indian animal stories reflect a world where morality is shaped by social behaviour, strategy, and the negotiation of power rather than religious judgement, establishing "political and social cunning" as an essential skill for survival (Ramanujan 104). These scholars show that the *Panchatantra* teaches worldly virtues instead of metaphysical morality, though most analyses remain confined to Indian cultural or folkloric contexts.

Conversely, scholarship on *The Chronicles of Narnia* highlights its Christian moral vision. Colin Manlove (1992) explains Lewis's use of talking animals and magical landscapes as a structural device that shapes children's journey from innocence to maturity. The narrative emphasises ethical behaviour defined by spiritual virtue and obedience (Manlove 87). Scholars like Michael Ward (2008) identify the series as a Christian allegory centred on righteousness, temptation, and redemption (Ward 41–43). Such studies suggest that Western fantasy often conveys moral instruction through theological symbolism rather than practical reasoning.

While both traditions have been examined individually, comparative studies of Indian fables and Western Christian fantasy remain limited. Few scholars analyse shared archetypes such as the trickster and rulers to understand how moral values diverge across cultures. This study aims to bridge that gap by comparing the deployment of universal archetypes to demonstrate how each culture reshapes moral instruction.

### **Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative comparative textual analysis to examine how shared archetypes have different characteristics in two distinct traditions of children's literature. The research focuses on two primary texts: the ancient Indian *Panchatantra* (in A. W. Ryder's translation) and C. S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* (HarperCollins editions). Three representative stories from the *Panchatantra*—"The Monkey and the Crocodile," "The Blue Jackal," and "The Lion and the Bull"—are analysed alongside key episodes from *Narnia* that depict corresponding archetypal characters such as the trickster and the ruler.

The evaluation applies Jung's archetypal theory to identify recurring character patterns and then interprets them through culturally specific moral frameworks. For the *Panchatantra*, interpretations are grounded in *nīti*-based pedagogy, which analyses morality through design, consequence, and practical reasoning. Observations from *Narnia* follow a Christian moral lens, where ethical action is determined by obedience, divine authority, and spiritual truth. Rather than comparing plot or style, the method examines how similar archetypes are adapted to serve distinct educational purposes in different cultures. This comparative approach enables the study to evaluate structural integrity alongside the moral and cultural flexibility of archetypes.

### **Universal Archetypes, Divergent Morals**

Both the *Panchatantra* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* use similar archetypes such as rulers, tricksters, and guides; however, the moral teachings associated with each figure change according to the culture that bears it. Both texts use animals—"the majority of the actors are animals" (Ryder 23)—whether it is a talking monkey or a beaver, to impart knowledge to the reader. The ancient Indian fable, as Ryder writes, defines itself as "a *nīti-śāstra*, or a textbook of *nīti*. The word *nīti* means roughly 'the wise conduct of life'" (Ryder 5).

Here, actions are judged by consequences (Olivelle xiii–xiv), and there is no absolute good or evil. In the *Panchatantra*, animals symbolise human flaws, wit, craft, and practical life lessons.

*Narnia*, on the other hand, is rooted in Christian morality. Lewis uses animal symbolism, divine authority, spiritual guidance, sin, faith, and redemption as a moral foundation. Researchers note that *Narnia*'s moral universe is grounded around obedience, spiritual authority, and the contrast between good and evil (Manlove 87). Characters are judged based on their moral alignment with divine order, not practical wisdom. One text embraces divine intervention to define morality, while the other uses *nīti*, or practical wisdom, as a tool of teaching. This supports Jung's view that archetypes are universal patterns, but they survive by adapting to distinct cultures.

### **Trickster Archetype: Intelligence vs. Temptation**

The trickster archetype is found in both the *Panchatantra* and *Narnia*. The tricksters in the *Panchatantra*, such as the monkey in "The Monkey and the Crocodile," use wit and strategy to protect themselves (Ryder 54–56). In "The Blue Jackal," the jackal uses deception to elevate himself to kingship, showing how manipulation can succeed temporarily but eventually collapses (Olivelle 98–102). Similarly, in "The Lion and the Bull," the jackal minister deceives both king and bull, highlighting how intelligence can control power (Olivelle 112–15). These characters are often comic, clever, and morally ambiguous. Their trickery is not always inherently evil; rather, it is a way to navigate life. Their morality is flexible and circumstantial, teaching children caution, realism, and intelligence.

In contrast, Lewis's trickster characters have a different moral purpose. The White Witch deceives Edmund with false promises of power and pleasure, leading him away from the truth (Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* 120–22). Uncle Andrew misuses magic despite warnings and becomes morally corrupted (Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew* 35–38). Shift the Ape manipulates Puzzle in *The Last Battle*, imitating Aslan for selfish means (Lewis, *The Last Battle* 34–36). These tricksters embody temptation and the danger of sin. They draw children away from Aslan's absolute moral law and stand for deceit and spiritual deviation. Following them means being led away from Christian truth.

Thus, the same archetype teaches intelligence and caution in the *Panchatantra* but obedience and moral vigilance in *Narnia*. The shared archetype is interpreted differently in Indian and Western cultures.

### **The King or Ruler Archetype: Fallible vs. Divine Authority**

In the *Panchatantra*, kings—often depicted as lions—are powerful but deeply fallible. They act on impulse, rely on misguided advice, or make decisions driven by emotions. In "The Lion and the Bull," the lion king is manipulated by the jackal minister, illustrating the dangers of misplaced trust (Olivelle 112–15). In other stories, rulers act rashly

or

misinterpret situations, teaching children that authority figures can also be wrong. These fables warn readers about the dangers of unchecked influence. The moral is political and realistic: rulers must be wiser than their advisors, and subjects must stay alert to power play. In *Narnia*, kingship is spiritually ordained. Aslan, the divine king, is perfect and serves as the moral axis of the narrative (Manlove 90). Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy do not rule because of their political skill but because they are spiritually called to serve truth and justice (Lewis, *Prince Caspian* 210–12). Leadership is not political; it is framed within sacred Christian morality. Thus, the *Panchatantra* teaches political realism, while *Narnia* teaches spiritual hierarchy. One focuses on practical leadership, the other on sacred leadership—two different moral meanings attached to the same archetype.

### **Moral Universes: Panchatantra vs. Narnia**

The contrasting moral frameworks of each text shape every archetype. The *Panchatantra* operates within a pragmatic and flexible moral universe that reflects human society with its flaws and virtues. It emphasises realistic judgement and strategic thinking (Olivelle xiii). A clever action is praised if it ensures safety or success. It teaches readers the importance of survival, wit, and alliances. There is no fixed law of good versus evil; actions are judged through consequences.

*Narnia* is a world shaped by Christian theology. It is governed by obedience and spiritual truth. In *Narnia*, morality is absolute and based on doctrines of good, evil, temptation, and redemption (Ward 41–43). It has a strong moral binary. Characters are judged on spiritual parameters: the absolute good embodied by Aslan versus the absolute evil represented by the White Witch. This contrast proves that archetypes are universal patterns, but each culture reinterprets them according to its moral identity.

### **Conclusion**

This comparative research between the *Panchatantra* and C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* proves that although archetypes are universal patterns, their meanings take on different forms to resonate with the concerned culture's morality. In the Indian fables of the *Panchatantra*, figures like the king and the trickster function within the pragmatic framework of *nīti*, where intelligence and judgement bear the consequences of actions (Olivelle xiii; Ryder 5). Animals carry human traits to instruct children in navigating life by developing judgement, caution, and decision-making skills.

In Lewis's *Narnia*, the same body of archetypes reflects the Christian tradition of divinity and moral sensibility. Good and evil form the core elements of children's psychological development. It warns readers that straying away from moral truthfulness and right conduct can lead them towards temptation, resulting in separation from spiritual divinity. Morality is direct obedience to Aslan's virtue of righteousness (Manlove 87; Ward 41–43). Deception and rulership are viewed as religious downfall or holy obligation instead

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of political reality.

These differences reflect Jung's assertion that archetypes exist because they are adaptive narrative tools. The two moral universes serve different educational roles: one prepares children to learn through practical reasoning, and the other instructs the importance of religious faith and ethics. Therefore, common archetypes may persist across diverse cultures and time zones, but their meanings adapt to the culture that rehearses them.

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