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She also has interest in literature and has done Kannada pravesha, Kaava, Jaana, Ratna exams conducted by Kannada sahitya parishad Karnataka. She has learnt Junior and senior level Karnataka Classical music and loves to sing and know the meanings of classical songs in all languages. Her love for knowing the Stories and hidden meaning of symbolism in mythological representations of Animals and Birds originates from here.



BIRDS IN INDIAN MYTHOLOGY

Conservation through Stories

Madhura Murthy M N

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**CENTRAL ACADEMY FOR STATE FOREST SERVICE
COIMBATORE**

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*Dedicated to the Nurturing Force of
Nature, my Father Netra Murthy M N
and my Mother Baby. S.*

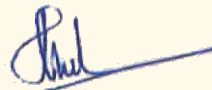
FOREWORD

"Birds in Indian Mythology" – Conservation through stories, is a captivating exploration of the avian world's profound significance in Hindu mythology, folklore, and cultural heritage. By examining the mythological and cultural significance of birds, "Birds in Indian Mythology" offers a unique window into the spiritual, philosophical, and artistic traditions of India, along with Scientific information about Conservation of different bird species, inviting readers to discover the hidden depths and meanings behind these enchanting creatures.

This book is a unique blend of Scientific information and interesting stories with symbolism. It is a mirror to the History rich tradition of conservation efforts we as Human beings undertake. I commend the author for her meticulous research and engaging narrative.

May this book inspire readers to cherish the feathered wonders of Nature, follow our rich tradition of conservation and to become stewards of their precious existence.

Best Wishes,



V. Thirunavukarasu, IFS
APCCF & Principal
CASFOS, Coimbatore

PREFACE

Conservation of animals and Birds have always been integral part of our culture, time immemorial. This can be seen in the form of mythological stories of our culture, epics, songs etc. We can try to trace the cultural significance of different species through looking into stories about them in our Culture, Mythology and their Mythical symbolism. Also, these stories can be interpreted to trace their Ecological significance.

I remember my mother telling stories of Jatayu to me and my brother as bedtime stories. Not only that, everytime we saw Brahmani kite, we were asked to close our eyes and make a wish, as she believed it is Garuda, Vehicle of lord Vishnu. Everytime we saw a white barn Owl, my mother used to tell me that it is symbol of Prosperity, as it is symbol of Lakshmi. As a forester, as I got to know about ecological Significance of Birds, these stories, beliefs and symbolisms make more sense to me and I found these stories interesting and worth telling.

Once we understand the ecological significance of these avian figures, we should also make up our mind to take steps in the right direction to conserve them and their Habitat. So, along with Mythological stories, I have also made an attempt to take a look into current conservation status in the book.

This book is my humble attempt to make people fall in love with Birds and revoke the devotion towards their conservation. Because we human beings never destroy the things we love.

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The completion of this booklet on “Birds in Indian Mythology – Conservation through stories” has been a labor of love and a journey filled with discovery, divinity and collaboration. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the individuals whose contributions have been essential in bringing this project to fruition.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Principal, CASFOS, Coimbatore Shri. V Thirunavukarasu and Course Director, Shri Anisha Kalkoor, M. for encouraging and motivating me to come up with something substantial related to my area of interest. I would like to thank all the faculties for shaping me in such a way so that I could develop an inclination for a specific field. I also extend my gratitude to Editorial committee of CASFOS Coimbatore for their guidance and proof reading.

My gratitude extends to family members for their unwavering support and encouragement which has been a constant source of motivation and inspiration. I also thank my friends for being supportive.

Last but not the least, I extend my heartfelt thanks to the Winged friends, Birds themselves. Their beauty, divinity, resilience, and ecological significance serve as a reminder of the importance of conserving them for our future and future generation.

Madhura Murthy, M.N.

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1. JATAYU – The Vulture

An Insight into Vulture in our Culture

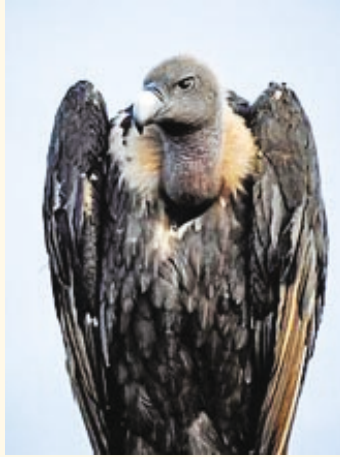


Fig.1: The white-rumped vulture

Mythology

In the Ramayana story, there is mention of two vultures Jatayu and Sampati. Jatayu tries to save Goddess Sita (wife of Lord Rama) from Ravana. When Ravana was abducting Sita, in Pushpaka Vimaana, Jatayu, being a bird, heard the cries of the Sita and confronted Ravana and went on to try and resist him. In the fight, the mighty Ravana used Chandrahasta (his Sword), he fought Jatayu and chopped off the wings. He was badly injured as a result of this valiant effort. When Lord Rama came searching for Sita, Jatayu was still alive, holding his life and told important information about the abduction of Sita by Ravana and the direction he went. This information provided by the dying Jatayu was important in the turn of events and the War that followed.



Fig.2: Painting depicting Jatayu's efforts to save Sita

The second most famous vulture in the Hindu epics is Sampati. We run into him midway through the Ramayana, after the demon king Ravana has made off with Lord Rama's wife Sita and when Rama has sent a search party to South India. The searches ask Sampati about Sita and with his divine vision he tells the directions where Ravana has kept Sita. There is no long mention of Sampati in Ramayana, but only a short mention.



Fig.3: Painting of Jatayu with Rama

In Chadayamangalam, around 50 km north of Thiruvananthapuram, on a hilltop, Rajiv Anchal and his team have carved out a 70 ft tall Sculpture of Jatayu to memorialize the sacrifice of the bird hero as per the legends of Ramayana. This has turned out to be a world class ecotourism destination also.

The Sculpture of Jatayu is designed in a way, that it depicts the magnanimous nature as well as the pain and agony the bird went through as he fought there. This work of art is dedicated to 'Women's Safety and Honour' in commemoration of the effort that Bird Jatayu made to protect the honour of Sita in Ramayana.



Fig.4: Jatayu statue at the Jatayu Earth Centre in Kerala

Not only that, in Parsi community, dead bodies are left on Towers of Silence, as feed to Vultures. The Parsi tradition, holds earth, air and water as sacred and human body after death should not contaminate them even after death. They do not bury, cremate or dispose of bodies, as they believe this would contaminate those elements, instead scavengers feed on their bodies. This system has worked well in ancient times but,

over the time, vultures have declined to an extent that this is posing serious problems for the Parsi culture.

About species

Vultures are large, magnificent raptors, i.e. they are Birds of prey. They are often referred to as nature's own disposal system due to their scavenging Nature. They soar, fly in circles high above the Earth's surface. They use the rising air currents to maintain their elevation and fly high. They feed mostly from carcasses of dead animals. India was home to large numbers of vultures, so much that they were part of our stories. They play a crucial role in the ecosystem by removing rotting meat that would otherwise spread disease.

The absence of vultures will affect the Ecological and bio diversity balance and distribution of other scavenging species, such as feral dog populations and crows. Feral dogs and crow population have increased massively, posing many disease risks such as rabies, infections to poultry & domestic birds, etc.

Major cause for the decline of Vultures

Diclofenac, an anti-inflammatory drug administered to livestock, like cattle, proved to be fatal to vultures.

People administer poison (especially rodenticide zinc phosphide) to cattle to facilitate removal of the hides and when Vultures fed on such carcasses, they die.

Toxic pesticides for birds such as organochlorines, monocrotophos and organophosphates and carbofuran as carbamates, etc are being biomagnified, bioaccumulate and they kill them. Different bird related diseases also affect them.

Transmission of a disease among birds occur in the crowded groups. Even climate change cause Mass vulture deaths, during the hot summer months (April-June) in various parts of India and Pakistan.

India is home to 9 species of Vultures and IUCN status of them is as below:

- ▲ **White rumped vulture (Critically Endangered)**
- ▲ **Slender billed vulture (Critically Endangered)**
- ▲ **Long billed vulture (Critically Endangered)**
- ▲ **Red headed vulture (Critically Endangered)**
- ▲ **Egyptian vulture (Endangered)**
- ▲ **Himalayan Griffon (Near Threatened)**
- ▲ **Cinereous vulture (Near Threatened)**
- ▲ **Bearded vulture (Near Threatened)**
- ▲ **Griffon Vulture (Least Concern)**

-A case study of rescue of Cinereous Vulture



Fig.5: Picture of Cinereous Vulture

Cyclone Ockhi, hit Tamil Nadu in 2017, caused immense devastation, significantly disturbed the migratory movement of numerous birds including vultures. A cinereous vulture (*Aegypius monachus*), one year old, got left behind and was stranded at Asaripallam, close to Nagercoil, in Tamil Nadu's Kanyakumari district. The vulture was rescued by the Tamil Nadu Forest Department and treated by veterinarians nicely. After that it was kept under the care till the year 2022, in the Udayagiri Biodiversity Park in Udayagiri, Nagercoil. Experts had built an aviary at Udayagiri near Nagercoil. Expert committee suggested that it would be appropriate to release the bird in North India, as in South India these species are frequently not found. They decided upon Bikaner's Jorbeer Garhwala Conservation Reserve Forest for this purpose based on the report of WII, because of feed availability.

Ockhi was then transported from Kanyakumari to Chennai by road and then to Jodhpur via Delhi by an AIR INDIA flight in Nov 2022. It was fitted with GPS Transmitter for follow up and released to wild.

The vulture survived but subsequently killed in Road accident.

Conservation initiatives done by Government

- ▲ To conserve vultures, National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) has approved an Action Plan for Vulture Conservation for the year 2020-2025.
- ▲ Vulture Conservation Centres are being established in Uttar Pradesh, Tripura, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu etc. Also, Vulture Safe zones are being established. At least one vulture-safe zone in each state is being planned. 4 centres at Pinjore (Haryana), Bhopal

(Madhya Pradesh), Guwahati (Assam) and Hyderabad (Telangana) are planned to be Vulture rescue centre.

- ▲ A system to remove a drug from veterinary use if it is found to be toxic to vultures by Controller General of India is being instituted, especially trials are going on to replace Diclofenac from Meloxicam and safe dose of drugs.
- ▲ Vultures Census are being conducted, involving forest departments, BNHS, NGOs and the public, to estimate the. A database on threats to vulture conservation including collision to structures and electric shock unintentional poisoning Etc is planned and compiled for better management.

Vultures are integral part of our Culture due to their Ecological significance. It is important to realize their importance and save them before they become extinct.

2. GARUDA– EAGLE

Bird on which Lord Narayana Ride

Name: Eagle or Crested Serpent Eagle

Sometimes Garuda figure is also associated with Bramhini Kite as well.

Garuda considered as vehicle of Vishnu.



Fig.6: Crested Serpent Eagle in flight



Fig.7: Bramhini Kite

Mythology

Garuda, according to Mythology is Birdlike figure with enormous strength and power. His father is sage Kashyapa and Mother is Vinata. Garuda is described as the king of the birds, huge body, majestic Posture and beak. He is represented in a zoomorphic form, that is in Bird-man mixed form. Sometimes he is depicted in anthropomorphic form, that is Human like form with Birdlike features. Garuda is generally portrayed as a protector of good, with the power to travel anywhere in great speed, having great eyesight and vision, ever vigilant and enemy of Snakes and serpents.

In food chain also, Eagles normally eat snakes. This is beautifully explained in the form of story as to why Garuda or Eagles eat snakes. The story goes as below.



Fig.8: Garuda carrying Vishnu by Raja Ravi Varma



Fig.9: Garuda is found in Vishnu temples; above, in Belur, India.

Kashyapa Prajapati, great sage as per stories, had two wives Vinata and Kadru, who always used to Quarrel and jealous if each other. They wanted to have children and Kashyapa granted each of them a boon in this regard. Kadru asked for one thousand Naga sons, while Vinata asked for just two, but she wanted each of her son to be equal to all of Kadru's thousand sons. The Boon was granted. Later, as per boon, Kadru gave birth to one thousand eggs, while Vinata gave birth to just two eggs. After incubating them for many years, Kadru's eggs hatched and 1000 naga sons came out first. Vinata, then, seeing sons of Kadru, wanted to meet her children, hence broke one of her eggs urgently. From this egg, partially formed birdlike entity "Aruna" emerged. Aruna became angry with his mother Vinata for her impatience, and warned her to not break open the second egg, cursing her to be

a slave until his brother is born and rescued her. Later the Aruna become the charioteer of sun god.

After many years, the second egg hatched and Bird like entity Garuda was born. By then Vinata had become slave to Kadru as per the Aruna's curse. Garuda later demanded his brothers, Nagas, to free his mother. In return, the Nagas demanded Amrita (nectar of immortality) from heaven from Garuda. Garuda went to heaven and started a war against gods to get Amrita and defeated all of them, including Indra. He then took Indra's nectar vessel filled with Amrita and flew back to earth. Seeing this and abilities of Garuda, Vishnu himself came to Garuda, and asked him to be his Vehicle. Hence, Vishnu is called Garuda Gamana. Later, Devas requested that Garuda not give the Amrita to the Nagas as they might use it for not so good purposes. So, they planned. Garuda, as per plan, placed the vessel before them, and put condition to purify themselves before drinking the Amrita. During this course of time, the son of Indra took the vessel back. On returning, the Nagas were all defeated by Garuda.

This war between Nagas and Garuda, where Garuda eats all Nagas, i.e., Snakes, can be associated with food chain.

Garuda hence is sign of Impeccable strength and ability. Hence motif of Garuda is part of state insignia of India and many other countries as well. In forest department of Karnataka wildlife offence monitoring software is named after garuda as Garudakshi, owing to the sharp eyesight of the eagle.

In Hindu Temple and architectures, the Garuda is depicted in different Forms. Sometimes he is Eaglelike figure with Vishnu on the back and Snakes held in the legs.

Sometimes his wings are slightly open and in ready to fly position. Sometimes partially human form is combined with eagle like nose and Beaks. Sometimes he is shown with folded hands. When he is not carrying Vishnu, he is shown to be holding a jar of immortal nectar that is Amrita along with another pair of hands in namaskara posture.

Physical appearance

One of the beautiful species of Eagle, crested serpent eagle (*Spilornis cheela*) is a striking bird of prey, Medium sized Raptor species and is known for its distinctive, beautiful appearance and impressive sharp hunting skills. Characterized by its dark brown plumage, white-tipped wings, and a notable crest that can be raised or lowered, this eagle is often spotted perched on trees in forests, open woodlands, and grasslands. It primarily feeds on snakes, which constitute a large part of its diet, but it also hunts small mammals, birds, and reptiles. The crested serpent eagle's keen eyesight and powerful talons make it an adept predator, and its distinctive call adds to the rich symphony of sounds in its habitat. As a species that often prefers quieter, less disturbed environments, it plays a vital role in maintaining the ecological balance in its ecosystem.

Crested serpent eagles usually are monogamous, hence, pairs and remain in pairs throughout the year. Courtship displays includes flying and calling together.

Breeding interval- once yearly.

Eggs per season - 1 to 2; Breeding in Dry Season;

Average time to hatching - 35 days

Average fledging age - 2 months

Habitat and Geographic Distribution

In India, Crested serpent eagles can be found from the lower Himalayas to Kanyakumari and the Andamans, i.e most of the forested region.

They prefer the edges of forests and avoid thick forest areas so that they can fly high and effectively hunt. They can survive in various habitats like dry to wet forests, tea plantations, wooded savannas and mangroves. They need trees for perching and making nests. Crested serpent eagles can be found at altitudes of approximately 1900 m.

All raptor species, are facing significant challenges that threaten its very existence. The primary danger is the relentless habitat destruction caused by deforestation, agriculture, and human settlements.

Moreover, the eagle's habitat and food sources are being further compromised due to the impacts of climate change. Rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, and unpredictable weather events pose additional risks to the survival.

India is a signatory to the Raptors Memorandum of Understanding (Raptors MoU) of the Convention for Migratory Species of the United Nations Environment Program. As a signatory state, India has been actively involved in preparation of Multi-Species Action Plan for Conservation of Vultures, Eagles etc. and is taking active steps for protection of these species.

3. ULUKA- OWL



Fig.10: Vehicle of Goddess Lakshmi



Fig.11: Vehicle of Goddess Lakshmi

Owl is considered as Vehicle of Chamunda, a form of Durga. ULUKA is also known as Vehicle of Goddess Lakshmi in Bengal.

Mythology

In Hindu mythology, specifically, Indian born owl or owl is considered as vahana or Vehicle of Lakshmi. Lakshmi is goddess of Richness and Prosperity and Owl signifies the intelligence and wisdom hence it is symbolism that intelligence carries richness. Even, Alakshmi, Sister of Lakshmi, who stands for poverty and Strife, has Owl as her vahana. This shows that intelligence used in good way brings richness whereas if used in wrong way brings difficulty in life.

As we all know, Owl is nocturnal. Owl is blind in the bright day. This symbolises the danger of extreme wealth and prosperity can bring. There is always possibility, where a person can go blind in lavishness of wealth and forget the

righteous path to be followed. Also, Owl being nocturnal often signifies that we should be holding on to our sight of wisdom even in darker times. It is also said that a wise person on seeing an owl with Goddess Lakshmi realizes the dual nature of wealth and its splendour. For such a person, the owl is the symbol of wisdom of spirituality and temporary nature of life. Also, in Kannada, Barn owl is called Halakki and its voice is considered as reassurance of the talks preceding their call, in Kannada they use “Halakki nuditaite” phrase to tell fortune as well.

On the occasion of Deepawali, misguided by malicious Tantriks (occultists), some often indulge in ritualistic sacrifices of the owl in hopes that such rituals will bring them good luck and wealth. Some hope they will take away Lakshmi's vehicle by killing the owl, which will force Lakshmi to stay in their homes always and bring prosperity.

While the logic behind the ritualistic sacrifice of the owl may sound ludicrous to some; The reality remains that such ignorant beliefs and myths lead to an increase in trafficking, poaching, and harming of owls during the time of Deepawali. These sacrifices begin on the days preceding the festival of lights that are dedicated to the worship of goddesses like Lakshmi or Kali.

Across diverse Indian cultures, owls are sometimes feared or venerated, despised or admired, considered lucky or unlucky, and wise or foolish. In Kannada they use “GOOBE” as slang word to call out foolish person. Owls, owing to their unique and different body features and mysterious qualities are surrounded with too many superstitions and myths. Some people consider spotting Owl as good luck and some people consider call of owl as warning. Hence, Owls have special

place as motifs in the Jewellery and artifact market.



Barn owl is the sacred Vahana (mount) of Goddess Laxmi [Photo (C) Wildlife SOS/Akash Dolas]

Fig.12: Picture of Barn Owl



Owl mementos sold in Varanasi, Hyderabad and Kolkata

Fig.13: Different Artifacts having Owl as Motif

Conservation Status

Owls are mostly nocturnal birds of prey, feeding mainly on small mammals, but also feed on insects and small reptiles. With fluffy and soft plumage, it is known for its Silent flight and diurnal roosting. Owls are monogamous, and there is little sexual dimorphism.

Owls Habitat varies from deserts to forests, and includes human habitations like buildings, tress in parks etc as well. However, despite their abundance they are not easily seen as most of the species are nocturnal. Owls can turn their 360 degrees. i.e. right round to look behind.

Owls are fascinating nocturnal hunters, primarily feeding on small mammals, birds, and insects. Their diet varies depending on the species and habitat; larger owls may consume rabbits or rodents, while smaller ones might target insects or small reptiles. Equipped with exceptional night vision and acute hearing, owls silently swoop down on their prey, often swallowing it whole. They later regurgitate indigestible parts, such as fur and bones. Owls in India are protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972, Especially Andaman Barn Owl and Common Barn Owl is listed under Schedule I of the Act.

Thus, any trapping, killing and trade in these species are strictly prohibited and subject strict penalties depending on the species.

The species are also listed under the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) agreement for protection. Unfortunately, these statutes have not deterred people from utilizing owls covertly for the greedy purposes.



Fig.14: Picture of Captured Spotted Owlets

TOP 5 OWL SPECIES TRADED IN INDIA

Based on the report published by Wildlife SOS

Rank	Species
1	Rock Eagle Owl
2	Brown fish Owl
3	Dusky Eagle Owl
4	Collared Scops Owl
5	Mottled Wood owl

Principal Indian states and territories where Owl trade takes place

Rank	Species
1	UP/MP
2	West Bengal
3	Delhi
4	Gujarat
5	Rajasthan and Bihar

4. SARUS CRANE – THE SYMBOL OF LOVE & MARITAL FIDELITY

The sarus crane (*Antigone antigone*) is tallest of the flying birds considered a sacred bird in many parts of India, It is also the state bird of Uttar Pradesh. The name comes from Sanskrit term “sarasa” which means “bird of the lake”. That is because the Sarus cranes are found in wetlands, marshes, and grasslands. They are mostly found in India, Nepal, and parts of Southeast Asia. In India, they are commonly found in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, and Assam.



Fig.15: Sarus Crane

Appearance

1. Large size: The Sarus Crane is one of the tallest birds in the world, reaching heights of 5-6 feet (1.5-1.8 meters).
2. Grey and white plumage: Adults have a predominantly grey body, with white wings, neck, and head.
3. Red crown: A distinctive red crown on the head, which is visible during breeding and courtship displays.
5. Black secondary flight feathers: Visible during flight, these feathers contrast with the white primary feathers.

Habitat

1. Wetlands: Sarus Cranes inhabit wetland ecosystems, including marshes, swamps, and shallow lakes.
2. Grasslands: They also occupy grasslands, agricultural fields, and irrigated areas.
3. Freshwater habitats: Rivers, streams, and wetland edges are essential for their survival.
4. Coastal areas: In some regions, they can be found in coastal wetlands, estuaries, and mangrove forests.
5. Agricultural landscapes: Sarus Cranes often forage in agricultural fields, particularly during the non-breeding season.

Mythology

In Hindu mythology, the bird is associated with Lord Brahma, the creator of the universe. According to legend, the bird's red head is said to be a symbol of Lord Brahma's creative energy and hence associated with prosperity. It is commonly

believed that the Sarus cranes pairs for life, hence the death of one partner leads to the other partner to die as well. Hence it is considered to be symbol of love and marital fidelity. The sarus Crane is recognized in India and legend says that the poet Valmiki, Author of famous religious text Ramayana, cursed a hunter for killing a Sarus crane and was then motivated to write the epic Ramayana. (Rana and Prakash, 2004, Sunder and Chaudhary, 2005).

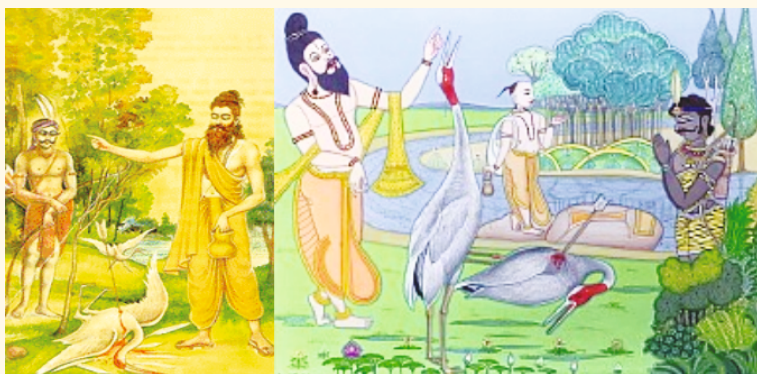


Fig.16: Valmiki cursing the Crane Hunter

In Buddhism also, there is story about this bird and these are considered sacred. When the Buddha was very young (Siddhartha), one day he found an injured Sarus crane on the palace ground which was shot by his cousin Devadatta. Siddhartha nursed the wounded bird with love and care. When Devadatta found out that it was the bird he shot down, he wanted to own the hunt and demanded it back. Hence, they argued. Siddhartha won the argument by proving that “the life of an animal belongs to the person who rescued it, and not to the one who dispossessed it”. The Sarus Crane holds a special place within the ancient culture of Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha.



Fig.17: Sarus Crane in Buddhism

Conservation status

The Sarus Crane is listed in Vulnerable status as per the IUCN Red List, primarily due to Habitat loss and degradation, Agricultural expansion and intensification, Pollution and sedimentation and hunting and poaching.

The Indian government has established several protected areas, including the Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary in Uttar Pradesh and the Kota Wildlife Sanctuary in Rajasthan, to provide a safe habitat for the species. The Wildlife Conservation Society-India (WCSI) and the International Crane Foundation (ICF) are working together with local communities to promote sustainable agriculture practices, reduce habitat destruction, and prevent collisions with power lines.

Additionally, the government's Initiative for Conservation of Sarus Cranes has implemented measures to create artificial nesting platforms, monitor populations, and educate local people about the importance of conserving the

species. Community-led conservation programs, such as the 'Sarus Crane Conservation Programme' in Gujarat, also engage local villagers in protection efforts, helping to reduce human-crane conflict and promote coexistence with these majestic birds.

5. SHUKA- THE PARROT/PARAKEET



Fig.18: Rose ringed Parakeet

Parrots belong to the order Psittaciformes and comprise approximately 393 species. India is home to a vibrant diversity of parrot species, with approximately 15 species found throughout the country. Some of the most iconic and colourful parrots in India include the Indian Ringneck Parakeet, Plum-headed Parakeet, and the Alexandrine Parakeet. The Indian Ringneck Parakeet, also known as the "seven-coloured parrot," is a popular pet bird and is widely distributed across India. Other species, such as the Malabar Parakeet and the Nicobar Parakeet, are found in specific regions, including the Western Ghats and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Mythology

Shuka, is a Sanskrit word for parrots.

Shuka is considered to be a great sage. There is a part in Bhagvata where he imparts sacred teachings of Lord Krishna

to King Parikshit which reveals the essence of Bhakti and the eternal principles of dharma.

In Mahabharata, Shuka is portrayed as the son of the sage Vyasa. Shuka's birth is said to be unique and mystical, as he emerged from an egg after his mother, Vatika who was an Apsara and had taken the form of a beautiful parrot. From his birth itself, Shuka was able to repeat and recite the Mahabharata word to word. Shuka's ability to mimic human speech is symbolic of the idea that wisdom can be found in unexpected places. Shuka's role in the Mahabharata revolves around his interactions with various characters where he serves as a spiritual guide and advisor, giving profound teachings on dharma, karma and the nature of reality.

Parrots are considered the vehicle (vahana) of Kamadeva, the Hindu god of love. Parrots symbolize beauty, colourful life, and vibrant energy. Parrots are associated with love and passion, as they are known to mate for life.

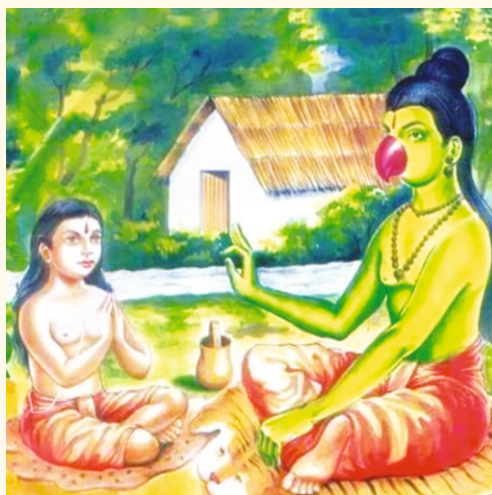


Fig.19: Painting of Sage Shuka

Parrots are also Associated with Goddess Meenakshi. A parrot adorns the right shoulder of Goddess Meenakshi and is believed to impart knowledge of 64 art forms, i.e., Lalita kalas to her.



Fig.20: Photo of Goddess Madhurai Meenakshi, with Parrot sitting on her Shoulder



Fig.21: Picture Kamadeva with Parrot as Vehicle

Hence, owing to the beauty, Parrots are often depicted in Indian art, particularly in temple carvings, paintings, Jewels and miniature paintings.

All in all, since Parrots have beautiful colour and quality of mimicking, Parrots act as symbol of Prakruti or Feminine energy and also symbol of intelligence and wisdom.

Parrots or Parakeet – Difference

Parrots and Parakeets are both members of the Psittacidae family, but they differ in size, shape, behaviour, and characteristics. Here are the key differences:

Size: Parrots are generally larger, ranging from 12 to 40 inches (30-100 cm) in length. Parakeets, also known as budgies or budgerigars, are smaller, typically 7-8 inches (18-20 cm) long.

Beak Shape: Parrots have larger, stronger, curved beaks. Parakeets have smaller, more tapered beaks.

Plumage: Parrots have brighter, more vibrant feathers. Parakeets have more subdued, often green and yellow feathers.

Tail: Parrots have longer tail, while Parakeets have shorter tails.



Fig.22: Pictures of longer tailed Parakeet and shorter tailed Parrot

Where as in Mythology, there is no differentiation between Parrots and Parakeets.

India is home to 11 parakeet species, of which, only one is a true parrot, the Vernal hanging parrot.

1. **Rose-ringed parakeet** (*Psittacula krameri*): Most widely distributed of all species, easily identified from its rose-coloured collar which is prominent in males.
2. **Alexandrine parakeet** (*Psittacula eupatria*): Inhabits most parts of India, listed as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List.
3. **Malabar parakeet** (*Psittacula columboides*): Endemic to the Western Ghats, set apart from others for its blue plumage.
4. **Plum-headed parakeet** (*Psittacula cyanocephala*): Named after males' maroon-red head; females have a greyish-blue head. Can be spotted in parks, forests, and agricultural lands.
5. **Blossom-headed parakeet** (*Psittacula roseata*): Similar to the plum-headed parakeet, except for paler colouration on the head. Native to Eastern India; nests in tree holes and cavities.
6. **Slaty-headed parakeet** (*Psittacula himalayana*): High-altitude resident of Himalayan regions of India and neighbouring countries
7. **Gray-headed parakeet** (*Psittacula finschii*): Inhabits northeastern parts of the country, listed as Near Threatened by IUCN.

8. **Nicobar parakeet** (*Psittacula caniceps*): Also known as Blyth's Parakeet, endemic to the Nicobar Islands, listed as Near Threatened by IUCN.
9. **Red-breasted parakeet** (*Psittacula alexandri*): Resides in forests of northern and eastern states of India, Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List.
10. **Long-tailed parakeet** (*Psittacula longicauda*): Extremely long central tail feathers displayed as it takes flight. Found in Andaman and Nicobar islands; listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.
11. **Vernal hanging parrot or Indian Lorikeet** (*Loriculus vernalis*): Found in southwest peninsular forests; blue patch on the throat in males, absent in females.

Parrots are among the most commonly traded, Species, globally and locally. A 2019 CITES analysis report states that 90% of all live birds traded were from the order Psittaciformes, which primarily includes parrots and Parakeets.

While habitat loss and degradation are the most serious threats to the birds, parakeets are gravely threatened due to illegal trade, because people want to keep them as pets.

Parakeets are protected in the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, Especially, Lord Derby's Parakeet and Red-breasted Parakeet are in Schedule I of WPA act. Trading such species invite serious legal penalties.

Despite such legalities, parakeets and many other birds are victims of this Wildlife trade. Poachers generally use nets and glue to trap these birds from the wild and then they are kept in horrific conditions without humanity. According to

TRAFFIC India, the Alexandrine parakeet is one of the highest illegally traded birds in India.



Fig.23: Parrots in Cage

6. CROWS – THE VEHICLE OF LORD SHANI

Crows are widely distributed across India, inhabiting various habitats, including Urban areas, Forests, Agricultural lands, Wetlands.



Fig.24: Picture of House Crow

Species found in India

1. House Crow (*Corvus splendens*) - Least Concern (IUCN)
2. Jungle Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*) - Least Concern
3. Eastern Jungle Crow (*Corvus levaillantii*) – Near threatened

Mythology

In Indian mythology, crows are associated with the god of death, Yama, and are considered messengers between the

living and the dead. According to legend, crows would carry the souls of the deceased to the afterlife, making them a symbol of transition and mortality. This association also led to crows being revered as guides for the spirits of ancestors, facilitating communication between the worlds.

In Hindu mythology, the crow is considered a sacred vehicle (vahana) of Lord Shani, the god of justice, time, and karma. According to legend, Shani Dev, known for his disciplinary and punitive nature, rides on the crow, symbolizing his association with darkness, mystery, Justice and the underworld.

The crow's black coloured plumage represents the darkness and negativity that Shani seeks to dispel, while its intelligence and adaptability reflect Shani's wise and discerning nature. It can be noted that Black colour in general absorbs broad spectrum of radiation compared to other colours. Hence, Black colour is used to depict that the Karma accumulation and culmination of Karma into reaction in our lives upon entrance of Lord of Justice Shani dev.

Being Shani's vehicle, the crow is believed to carry out his decrees, observing human actions and reporting back to Shani dev. This mythological association has led to crows being revered, respected and fed in many Shani temples across India, with devotees seeking to appease Lord Shani and mitigate his potentially harsh influences due to bad karmas.

In the Mahabharata, there is mention of a crow named Kaka Bhusundi, who is said to have lived through many Yugas and seen multiple cycles of creation and destruction. This wise and ancient crow character possesses great knowledge, wisdom and spiritual insight, and often depicted to share wisdom with other characters in the epic.



Fig.25: Picture of Lord Shanidev riding on Crow

The crows are Social Eaters. They call upon their friends whenever they find food. Even today if Crow calls sitting on the House, there is a superstition that there will be guests coming to house.

In many regional traditions of Hinduism, especially in Karnataka, crows are considered auspicious visitors, believed to bring good fortune, blessings and prosperity. There is practice of offering food, made in the name of ancestors, to crows during rituals and ceremonies, yearly at least once. This act is thought to please ancestors and it is believed that Ancestors come in form of crows to eat at homes. These kind of rituals ensures that almost everyone is involved in conservation of crows.

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