

**SOME REFLECTIONS ON BIRDS
IN SANSKRIT LITERATURE**

A Thesis submitted to the
TILAK MAHARASHTRA VIDYAPEETH, PUNE

For the degree of
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(SANSKRIT)**

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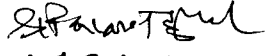
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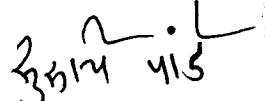
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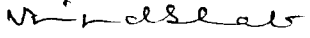
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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis "SOME REFLECTIONS ON BIRDS IN SANSKRIT LITERATURE" is a result of my own research. The interpretations put forward are based on my own reading and understanding. The references, books and articles I have made use of are acknowledged at the respective places in the text or under notes.


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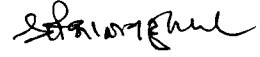

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FORM - A

CERTIFIED THAT the work incorporated in the thesis
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submitted by Suruchi Pande was carried out by the candidate under my
supervision. Such material as has been obtained from other sources has
been duly acknowledged in the thesis.



S. S. Bahulkar
(Guide)



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INTRODUCTION

From ancient times birds have aroused fascination in humans due to their ability to fly. The power of their wings created a feeling of awe. Birds and their eggs served as food. Birds were kept as pets, were trained as messengers and they were involved in magico-religious ceremonies, including sacrificial rituals. But beyond this aspect from the point of view of utility, people had affection as well as fearful reverence, as they felt that birds had a sense of mysterious powers. Birds were looked upon as otherworldly beings!

Humans were attracted towards the beautiful form of the birds, their magnificent colours and a variety of calls. A wonderful world of birds filled their mind with aesthetic delight and reverence. Birds like the eagle, the swan or the peacock were associated with divine forces or deities. They were attributed the divine qualities that were imaginary or exaggerated or even sometimes based on misunderstanding. No country is exception to this. We find bird lores, folklores in every part of the world. Some birds like the owls were considered as birds of ill omen or some birds like the woodpecker or the Indian Roller were believed to be oracular and auspicious ones. Birds were depicted in the Indian religious texts like the Vedas, epics like the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* and also in sacred texts of other religions, the *Holy Bible*, the *Kūran*, the *Avesta* and so on.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* was composed by the sage Vālmīki. He saw a pair of sweet-voiced krauñca birds, engrossed in the loving gestures of their courtship. A hunter struck down one of the birds by his arrow. The male fell dead and the female lamented piteously. The sage was horrified and deeply moved to see this scene. He uttered a curse on the hunter. He found that the curse he uttered came out spontaneously from his mouth in the form of a verse; that it was a creative composition endowed with overwhelming feeling of sorrow. He was then inspired and composed the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In the words of Leonard Nathan, “--The sage is astounded. He has invented something new out of very old materials: compassion, rage and grief -- Vālmīki, the father of all poets is also the first known birdwatcher, and it is his śloka (poetry). Thus was *Rāmāyaṇa* born as a result of Vālmīki’s outrage, making poetry out of human passions.” (Nathan, 2000: p. 294).

Human figures with bird wings or bird headed man appear in both Eastern and Western culture. For example, in Egyptian “Papyrus” there is a falcon as sun-god. These birds symbolized spirituality. Thus we find artistic motifs in all cultures.

Birds are not only important for us because they give us delight and liveliness to our environment, they are helpful to us in maintaining the health and cleanliness of our environment. Growing population, industrialization, urbanization, hunting, trapping and use of pesticides have bad effects on avian life. In a way, humans are speeding up a rate of extinction of species. It is therefore important to encourage a campaign to save birds, our environment and promote a ever-lasting conservation. We can contribute to this noble work through various disciplines and one of such disciplines is ‘ethno-ornithology’. It is a study of birds along with their socio-cultural study. It is important

to spread the message of conservation to the masses in simple words and in a friendly manner. Here the ethno-ornithological approach helps us. People are attracted when a scientific information is provided with a touch of culture, useful and meaningful traditions, heritage, ancient wisdom that enabled our ancestors preserve natural resources, trees, animals, birds with utter devotion and veneration in the most informal and uncomplicated way.

The study of culture and of ancient human values should aim to create love and respect for the animate and inanimate world and should honour the freedom of all. It is always important to remember these words:

“Set the bird’s wings with gold
and it will never again soar in the sky.”

(Tagore 1979; p.49).

References to Birds in various Cultures

All over the world we find mythological stories, folktales and religious concepts related to birds. Greek mythology and Egyptian mythology have dominated the ancient European culture. Here I have tried to compile images of some of the birds, occurring in ancient European, Egyptian, Celtic, Nordic, German, Australian, Swedish, Austrian, Italian, Bosnian, African, Chinese and Asian legends.¹

DOVE

In the Greek mythology dove goes with Venus and Aphrodite. Venus is symbolized by the dove that draws her flower-studded chariot through the air. It is believed that Venus was the dove itself once upon a time. Aphrodite is the goddess of spring and lovemaking. She is drawn in a chariot to which doves are harnessed. Dove usually represents love. Spring is the season when the male dove shines in his finest feather and looks ardent in his courtship.

The bird is by its nature and habits is supposed to be the symbol of love. Gentle disposition of the dove may have helped the earliest Christians to make use of the dove as a symbol of peace and goodwill to men.

Mournfulness in the cry of the dove has made it a symbol of mourning.

WOODPECKER

In the European legends, the woodpecker is the bird of Mars because of his blood-red hood and eyes are like planet mars. Analogies between drum, woodpecker and thunder god are found. According to the sounding of this nature’s drum, weather forecasts and the chances of chase and war were predicted. The woodpecker was thought to be the knower of hidden treasures and was believed to have a mysterious affinity with fire, the rain and the thunder god.

In German legends, the woodpecker appears as a magic bird.

CUCKOO

In the Greek mythology, Zeus took the form of the cuckoo bird and flew to his sister Hera. The parasitic behaviour of the cuckoo family was observed. Cuckoo was famous as a prophetic bird. The Swedish peasants believed that the calls of a cuckoo (like ‘gok’) suggests some consequences according to the directions. For example,

North : nor-gok sorg-gok (sorrow bird)

South : sor-gok smor-gok (butter bird)

East : oster-gok troste-gok (consolation bird)

West : vester-gok basta-gok (best bird).

The unlucky, awkward character attributed to the cuckoo has left a trace in many languages. The word 'awke' and 'awkward' are supposed to be derived from 'gowk' and 'gawk'.

In Pollem, a place near Thiex, on 21st August a 'cuckoo court' was held. Husbands who are deceived by their wives assembled in this court and at the end of the function, the last married man in the village was thrown in the water.

The cuckoo was believed to be the symbol of fertility. In Lithuania, the dance of a cuckoo dance was known.

PEACOCK

In the Greek mythology, a peacock was associated with Hera. The chariot of Hera or Juno was said to be drawn by a peacock.

In Europe, calls of a peacock was believed to be suggesting bad omen.

In a Javanese myth, a peacock was supposed to be a guardian at the gate of paradise and he ate the devil.

OWL

An owl is belived to be ominous in many parts of the world. Owl as an evil omen and owl as a lure are the two phases under which a harmless and the most useful bird is known all over the world.

In Greek mythology, the owl is associated with Pallas Athene. It is usually considered as the women's bird and sometimes also used in the Greek language as a synonym for 'woman'. Words for a small owl are feminine in the most European languages.

Greek mythology has a story of a beautiful girl called Nyctimene (the night) who came on the earth. Because of her sinful act, she was ashamed and hid in the jungle. She was turned into an owl by Pallas Athene. Pallas was the deity of night. An owl is thus connected to the wise goddess. She could see in the dark to carry off men's souls.

An owl is a useful bird for the grain fields and for this reason it is symbolized as 'immortal bird'. Due to its nocturnal habits and startling cries, a bird is known as a 'corpse bird', a 'death owl', a 'sorrowing mother' etc.

In Austria, Greece and Italy it is an amusing pet. The way owl kills his prey was appreciated and thereby it was made as the symbol of warrior goddess.

The Creek priests carried a stuffed owl as the badge of their profession. It was believed that owl's cry frees from fever or if an owl is seen near the house, the delivery of a pregnant woman becomes easy.

In German folktales, witches and cruel stepmothers appear in the form of an owl.

EAGLE

From ancient times the eagle has impressed man due to his marvellous flight, audacity and superb aloofness. He was thought to be the king of birds. In the European

mythology an eagle seems like the phoenix, emerged from fire. It was believed that an eaglet which was not able to look at the sun without a blink was killed by his parents for not being capable to survive.

In Greek mythology the successor of Hebe (daughter of Jupiter and Juno), was Ganymede- a trojan boy. He was carried off by Jupiter who came in the disguise of an eagle. Zeus also said to have come in the form of an eagle.

In the Celtic mythology Taliesin was a prophetic poet and a shamanistic seer. He appeared as an eagle. This is the bird that is often selected by the shamans on their spirit flights or trace journeys to the other world. An eagle's gold nimbus symbolized as an eagle.

In many cultures like Bosnian, Ostiaks, it was supposed to be inauspicious to kill an eagle and the trees were regarded holy on which eagles had nests.

The Apaches believed that there were spirits of divine origin in the eagle. Luonnotor, a primal goddess grew restless in the heavens and slipped into the cosmic sea, where she drifted until an eagle built a nest on her knee. When she accidentally upset the nest, its egg broke and formed the earth, the sky, the sun, the moon and the stars.

The epic of Finland 'Kalevpoieg' includes the word 'kalev' which means an eagle.

SWAN

In the Greek mythology the swan is associated with Apollo. It is believed that Jupiter (sometimes Zeus) approached Leda in the disguise of a swan.

Like these birds the falcon was another bird having tremendous cultural significance chiefly in Egyptian mythology. The sun god - Ra- represented as a falcon. Horus was a cosmic deity that was depicted as a falcon or with a falcon's head.

There are many other birds like the cock, the ibis, the goose, the magpie, the pigeon, the quail, the stork and the swallow that have peculiar importance in the European or Greek mythology. There appear mythical birds like the Thunderbird in the American and the African mythology. In the *Bible*, there are many references to birds. For example,

“And if his oblation to the lord be a burnt offering of
Fowls, then he shall offer his oblation of turtledoves,
Or of young pigeons.” - *Leviticus 1.14*

Some of the birds are described as inauspicious; eating their flesh was forbidden:

“And these ye shall have in abomination among the
Fowls; they shall not be eaten, they are an abomination,
The eagle, and the gier eagle, and the osprey;
And the kite, and the falcon after its kind;
Every raven after its kind;
And the ostrich, and the giant hawk, and the
Seamew, and the hawk after its kind;
And the little owl, and the pelican, and the vulture;

And the horned owl, and the cormorant, and the great owl;
And the stork, the heron after its kind, and the
Hoopoe, and the bat.” - *Leviticus* 11.13-19.

There are interesting references to the ostrich.

“The wings of the ostrich rejoice; but are her
Pinions and feathers kindly?
For she leaveth her eggs on the earth,
And warmeth them in the dust
And forgotten that the foot may crush them,
Or that the mild beast may trample them.
She is hardened against her young ones, as of they were not hers;
Though her labour be in vain, she is without
Fear;
Because God deprived her of wisdom,
Neither hath he imparted to her understanding.” - *Job* 39.13-17.

In the same chapter called ‘*Job*’, there are references to the hawk and the eagle, where it is said about the eagle’s nest, that,

“She dwelleth on the rock, and hath her
Lodging there,
Upon the crag of the rock, and the strong hold.” - *Job* 39.28.

In the ‘*Song of the Songs*’ (2.140), there is a reference to the dove that lives in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the steep place. It is said,

“Like a swallow or a crane, so did I chatter;
I did mourn as a dove; mine eyes fail with looking upward”.- *Isaiah* 38.14.

An interesting reference to the partridge is found in the *Bible* (*Jeremiah* 17.11), where the bird is said to rear the chicks which “she hath not brought forth.”

An eagle is referred to in many contexts, for example,

“And say, Thus saith the Lord God: A great
Eagle with great wings and long pinions, full
Of feathers, which had divers colours, came
Unto Lebanon, and took the top of the Cedar.” - *Ezekiel* 17.3.

The pigeon is compared to the soul or spirit and when ‘the wrath of God is seen an owl and a raven start residing near people.’ (*Bible; Isaiah* 34.11).

In the ‘*Koran*’, it is said that the “holy spirits stay in the bodies of green bird and their nests are hanging to the throne of the Allah.” (*Sahiha Muslim* 4651).

In the Asian context there are innumerable stories about birds. In the Rāmāyaṇa in Laos, there is a story of a woman who came in disguise of a crow to disturb sage Svamita (Viśvāmītra). This crow was killed by ‘Fa Lam’ (Rāma) and ‘Fa Lak’ (Lakṣmaṇa).

In the Jaina Rāmāyaṇa named as *Padmapurāṇa*, there are poetic references to birds. For example, it is said that for an owl the sun was like the ‘Tamālapatra’ (Parva 1. 1135-4011).

The ‘*Gurugranthasahib*’ of the Sikh religion contains many references to the

birds. It is said: “by repeating the name of god, one meets the god who is beyond the names or Japa. The Pudana bird repeats ‘Tuhi Tuhi’ - you are you are. One can attain god by becoming the bird (vyomacārī - one who wanders in the sky), the ‘Anala’ bird continuously flies in the sky.” (*Sainchi* 1, 14/84).

This was a review of bird depictions in various cultures of the world and in India. The references given above throw a light on the deep understanding and observation of ancient people.

Birds in Indian Culture

Like the other cultures in the world, Indian culture also pays attention to the birds and their relation to the human life. We come across numerous references to birds in the Sanskrit literature right from the Vedas, in connection with religious practices. There are descriptions of birds, their habits, their ways of behaviour and the role they play in mythology, art and architecture and so on. There are certain beliefs and superstitions about the birds peculiar to the Indian ways of thinking. For example, in western countries a pigeon is considered to be a bird representing peace, while in Vedic times it’s arrival, or it’s sitting on the top of the house is regarded to be a bad omen.

We have so far taken a note of the mythological and cultural references to birds in various cultures of the world. Indian culture offers a unique place to birds which is mixed up with traditions, religious practices, pious acts of austerity and devotion. Mythology involves interesting stories regarding birds. There are various aspects of the study of birds in Sanskrit literature. References to birds are seen in all spheres of human life and on all planes. Here is a brief introduction to these enriching and prominent aspects of the study of birds in Sanskrit literature.

A) Oldest references

In this thesis an attempt is made to compile the names of and references to birds in the Vedic and Sanskrit literature beginning with the *R̥gveda*.

B) Birds and culture

i) **Mythology** - There are mythological stories explaining certain belief systems about auspiciousness or inauspiciousness of birds. For example, in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* of the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* and in the *Liṅgapurāṇa*, we find a story about a crow and how he was entitled to get his share in the funeral rites of humans.

ii) **Religious Tradition** - Traditionally, eating meat of some birds was prohibited. For example,

क्रव्यादः शकुनीन् सर्वान् तथा ग्रामनिवासिनः ।
अनिर्दिष्टांश्चैकशाफांष्टिष्ठिभं च विवर्जयेत् ॥

- Manusmṛti 5.11

“ One should avoid all carnivorous birds, so also these abide in those in towns, and beasts with solid hoofs not permitted (by this law), lapwings also.” (Burnell’s translation, p.112, reproduced here with a slight modification.)

The reason for such prohibitions is not explained in the *Manusmṛti*. In a way the prohibitions were helpful for the preservation of nature. In the *Dharmasūtras* there are punishments for unnecessary killing of birds. Texts like the *Bṛhatsamhitā* (53.120),

Kāśyapaśilpa (79.11) and *Viśvakarmāvastuśāstra* (4.20) prohibit the felling of tree where birds nest.

In India, women observe an observance namely 'kokilāvratā'. The female cuckoo is believed to be a form of Pārvatī - the consort of Śīva. In this observance, married women take food only after hearing calls of a cuckoo. If the calls are not heard, they go on fasting. The story behind this 'vrata' is given in details in the chapter on 'kokila'.

There are some birds like an eagle or a peacock that are believed to be the carriers or vehicles of gods and goddesses. An eagle is depicted as a vehicle of god Viṣṇu. In every temple of Viṣṇu we find image of a Garuḍa that is worshipped.

In the *Yajurveda* we find many references to birds that were offered to deities.

There are texts namely 'śulbasūtra' describing the geometrical arrangements of bricks for fire altars. Some of these arrangements are inspired from the birds. For example, Suparṇaciti, 'falcon-shaped fire altar'.

iii) **Superstitions and Augury** - There are various concepts related to some bird prevalent in the society. There are texts on the themes of superstitions, augury and consequences of sight of any particular bird. For example, sighting of a cāṣa or Indian Roller bird is supposed to be auspicious.

C) Birds in Sanskrit literature

i) **Etymology** - In Sanskrit literature we find references to explain how a particular word is formed. Such derivations are not always in accordance with the grammatical rules. For example, in the *Nirukta* (5.27), it is said 'vi' means a bird, 'irita' means to go. Antarikṣa is 'bīriṭa' i.e. a sky. Bīriṭa' means a sky where birds fly.

ii) **Lexicons** - We find references to the names, synonyms and descriptions of birds from the time of *Amarakośa* (2nd C AD).

iii) **Language of birds** - In the texts, such as, the *Mahābhārata*, *Liṅgapurāṇa* as well as the *Kathāsaritsāgara* we find references to the knowledge of peculiar language of bird calls which was called as 'rutajñāna'.

iv) **Comparison of beauty and maxims** - There are description of the beauty of birds and women, hairstyles of men, *Nyāya* or maxims. For example, 'kākadanta' means a 'crow's tooth'. This expression implies something that is impossible. 'Kākapakṣa' means 'crow's wing'. It is referred to the side locks of hair on the temples of young men (three of five locks on each side left when the head is first shaved and allowed to remain there, especially in persons of the military caste). (MW. p. 267).

v) **Birds in the philosophical context** - Images of birds were used in philosophical contexts. For example, in the *Brahmavidyopaniṣad* (verse 19) the soul (*ātman*) residing in the body is compared to the bird. The *Mahābhārata* says:

शकुनीनामिवाकाशे मत्स्यानामिव चोदके ।

पदं यथा न दृश्येत तथा ज्ञानविदां गतिः ॥

MBh. 12.174.19a

"As the footprints of a bird cannot be seen in the sky, as the footprints of a fish cannot be seen in water, like that the speed (depth) of the knowledgeable persons cannot be seen."

The *Mahābhārata* contains a story of god *Indra* who took the form of a golden bird.

(MBh.12.11.1-28). Elsewhere sage *Nārada* advised god *Indra* about a peaceful state of mind, that is known as 'unchavṛtti' meaning 'living by gleaning like a bird' (MBh. 12.264.3, *Manusmṛti* 10.112). The twin gods *Aśvinikumāras* are described like the birds having beautiful wings and who always stayed together. (MBh. 1.3.60,61).

vi) Nature descriptions - Sanskrit literature is full of references to birds providing a charming background to natural beauty and scenery.

vii) Speed of birds - In the *Ṛgveda* we come across the references to the swift flying *śyena* (falcon). Likewise we find interesting descriptions of speed and flight of various birds according to their capacity. In the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* (VR 4.57.24-27) there are verses describing the speeds of various birds. *Gr̥dhrarāja Sampāti* says, "I perceive through intuition that you will indeed (be able to) return after seeing *Sītā*. The first (shortest) flight (in point of height) is that of a sparrow and other birds who live on grain. The second (in order of height) is that of birds (such as crows) living on fragments of food left at a meal and those (such as parrots) that subsist on the fruits of trees. *Bhāsas* and herons as well as ospreys take a flight which is the third in order (of height). Hawks take a flight which is the fourth in order (of height); while vultures take a flight which is the fifth in order (of height). The sixth in order (of height) is the flight of swans endowed with strength and virility and graced with comeliness and youth; while the flight of *Garuḍa* (son of *Vinatā*- an eagle) is the highest. We all (vultures) claim out descent from *Garuḍa*."

viii) Migration - We find references to the birds and their migrations which evince that ancient Indians had observed the phenomenon. For example,

चपलस्य तु कृत्येषु प्रसमीक्ष्याधिकं बलम् ।
छिद्रमन्ये प्रपद्यन्ते क्रौञ्चस्य खमिव द्विजाः ॥

VR VII.12.33 (Satavalekar, vol.7, 1970, p.63)

"(*Kumbhakarna* says to his brother *Rāvaṇa*): observing the superior strength of an enemy who is hasty in actions, others for their part look for his weak point even as birds in the sky seek the fissure in the *Krauñca* mountain (in order to cross it)."

ix) Some references to the birds that cannot be identified - In Sanskrit literature there are names and descriptions of some birds that cannot be identified. Birds like *Bhuruṇḍa*, *Bhūliṅga*, *Kaurabhra*, *Śārṅga*, *Jṛmbha*, *Supārśva* and *Tailapāyī* are rather difficult to identify. Their descriptions are not clear and probably they might be mythical birds.

D) Birds in art forms

i) Paintings - In the paintings on walls or rocks we see the pictures of birds that add to the beauty. In the Buddhist cave paintings, we see such paintings and their colours are intact.

ii) Sculpture - Birds are found in sculptures and beautiful stone carvings. For example, 'Mayūra^{ketu}' means 'the one having a peacock for emblem' or it is the name of *Skanda*. We find the images of *Skanda* riding a peacock.

iii) Music - According to Indian traditions basic notes of music are borrowed from the calls of various birds and animals. The text '*Sangītaratnākara*' describes this interaction.

iv) Dance - In the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of *Bharata Munī*, there are various *Nṛtyamudrās*

'hand gestures' that refer to various birds. For example, 'śukatuṅḍa' - a mudrā depicting the beak of a parrot.

E) Uses of birds

i) **References to birds in Āyurveda** - Ancient Indians have discussed the qualities of meat of birds according to the Āyurvedic principles. It is also important to note that Āyurveda has a peculiar classification of birds based on the types of their beaks and their style of hunting and eating.

The birds are classified under the titles of Prasaha, Pratuda and Viṣkira. Prasaha means 'one who catches the prey forcibly and eat it'. (प्रसह्य भक्षयतीति प्रसहः ।) "The meat of the prasaha birds like Gṛdhra (vulture) is sweet, is pungent in vipāka i.e. metabolism, eradivative of vāta, anabolic, hot in vīrya and always beneficial for emaciated (persons)" - *Kāśyapasaṃhitā* 38-39.

The birds like Kokila (cuckoo) belong to the group of 'pratuda' which means a class of pecking birds. (*Caraka-kalpasthāna* 1.8, *Suśruta-kalpasthāna* 1.31). These birds beat the prey with their beaks and eat them are known as 'pratuda'. (प्रतुद्याभिहत्य भक्षयतीति ।) The bird like Kukkuṭa (cock) belongs to the 'Viṣkira' group. (*Carakasāṃhitā - sūtrasthāna* 27.48). These birds eat by scattering. (विकीर्य यो घान्यादिकं भक्षयति । *Carakasāṃhitā-sūtrasthāna* 27.55, *Suśruta-sūtrasthāna* 16.19) The other classification of birds and animals in āyurveda, according to their flesh is Jaleśaya (aquatic), Ānupa (those which stay in flocks), Grāmya (those which live in towns), Kravyabhujā (those which eat flesh), Ekaśapha (those which have one hoof) and Jāṅgala (those residing in forest).

Bird flesh was prescribed for treating certain diseases. These remedies are no longer practically useful and have been replaced by other medicines. A text based on medical treatment of elephants namely 'Hastyāurveda' has a chapter describing fever, where it is said that the fever of birds is known as 'avatāpa' (Pālakapya/ A.P. Deshpande, p.27). Several surgical instruments devised by Suśruta were based on the shapes of bird beaks. For example, Kaṅkamukhayantra - an instrument shaped like a beak of a heron. Our ancestors have noted a certain rheumatism affecting loins and they named it as 'gṛdhrasi' (Sciatica)-(*Carakacikitsāsthāna* 28.56,57). Probably a person who suffers from this rheumatism walks in a limping manner like that of a vulture.

ii) **Warfare** - Ancient texts like the *Dhanurveda* describe various arrangements of the troops of army on the battlefield imitating the shapes of birds with their wings spread apart. For example, śyenaavyūha.

iii) **Hunting** - Mṛgayā means hunting. It was one of the favourite pastimes in ancient India. There are also references to the qualities of flesh birds. Texts like the '*Nalapākadarpaṇa*' describe various recipes made from the flesh of a cock.

F) Yogāsana

Yogāsana is a 'yogic' posture. In the 'yoga' postures there are some postures imitating the shape of a particular bird. For example, Garuḍāsana which means an 'asana' depicting the shape of an eagle.

*** Note**

1. The information given below is based on the following sources:

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ABBREVIATIONS

Agnipurāṇa	AgniP	Brahmavaivartapurāṇa	BrahmaVP
Atharvaveda	AV	Bṛhatsamhitā	BṛS
Anekārthatilaka	AneT	Matsyapurāṇa	MatP
Abhidhānacintāmaṇi	AbhiC	Mahābhārata	MBh
Amarakośa	AK	Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa	MārKP
Arthaśāstra	ArthŚ	Meghadūta	MeghD
Aṣṭāṅgasaṅgraha	AṣṭS	Medinikośa	MedK
Aṣṭāṅgahṛdaya	AṣṭH	Maitrāyaṇisamhitā	MS
Ṛgveda	ṚV	Mṛgapakṣiśāstra	MṛgaP
Ṛtusamhāra	ṚtuS	Rāghavapāṇḍavīya	RaghP
Kalpद्रुकोśa	Kalk	Raghuvaṁśa	Raghu
Kaśyapasamhitā	KS	Rājanighaṇṭusahito	
Kirātārjunīya	Kirā	Dhanvantariyanighaṇṭu	RājN/DhN
Kośakalpataru	KośK	Riṣṭasamuccaya	RiṣṭS
Kumārasambhava	KumāraS	Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa	VR
Kūmapurāṇa	KūP	Vasantarājaśākuna	VasantaŚ
Garuḍapurāṇ	GaruḍP	Vājasaneyisamhitā	VS
Caturvargacintāmaṇi	CaturC	Vāmanapurāṇa	VāmP
Carakasamhitā	CS	Vaijayantikośa	VaijK
Daśakumāracarita	DaśKC	Śabdakalpadruma	ŚK
Nāradapurāṇa	NārP	Subhaṣitaratnabhāṇḍāgāra	SurBh
Naiśadhīyacarita	NaiśC	Suśrutasamhitā	SS
Paramānandīyanāmamālā	PNM	Svapnavāsavadatta	SvapD
Bhaviṣyapurāṇa	BhaviP	Harṣacarita	HC
Bhāgavatamahāpurāṇa	BhāgP	A Sanskrit-English Dictionary	
Brahmaṇḍapurāṇa	BrahmaḍP	Monier Monier-Williams	MW



□

The Cakravāka

1) Introduction

विन्यस्तशुक्लागुरु चक्ररङ्गं गोरोचनापत्रविभक्तमस्याः ।
सा चक्रवाकाङ्कितसैकतायास्त्रिस्रोतसः कान्तिमतीत्य तस्थौ ॥
KumāraS 7.15

"They (the ladies) applied white aloe paste to her body, and decorated it with ornamental paintings drawn with yellow pigment (gorocanā). She (thus) stood surpassing the beauty of the three-coursed river (i. e. Gaṅgā), the sandy banks of which are marked with the Cakravāka birds."

The Cakravāka bird appears in the Sanskrit literature innumerable times. It is one of the most favourite birds representing love and beauty. The traditional belief is that the bird is the perfect symbol of love, because of its longing for love. The attachment of the pair to each other, their communication, their separation during the night and the re-union at the sunrise - all this is reflected in the variety of references to them in the Sanskrit literature. The very concept of separation and re-union has given rise to popular beliefs and symbolic expression of the highest conjugal virtues and love.

Animal and bird motifs are met with ancient Indian art. The Cakravāka pair was usually painted and carved as "the most ideal expression of constancy in love and the bird is always represented in a pair, as a symbol of affection. Whenever a loving pair is depicted in a scene the indication of the Cakravāka pair on a roof-line or in the open court would be to draw attention to this great trait of mutual affection, ending only in separation by death of either." (Sivaramamurthy C.,1974, p. 32).

In the Jātaka tales (434,Cowell, Vol. III,1990, p.309), there is a story of the Cakravāka bird and its conversation with a crow. A Tibetan text speaks of one of the previous births of the Buddha in the form of a cuckoo. In that connection there is a reference to the Cakravāka bird. The bird is shown as conveying highly philosophical thoughts;

"---When leading a homeless life, one must do without affection.
Without a good character, one must do without companions.
When one commits offence with women, one must do
without capacity for deeds of lasting worth."

(Conze Edward,1966, p. 24)

The Cakravāka bird is associated with rivers and lakes that look beautiful because of its presence. The rivers such as Godāvārī, Gaṅgā and Pampā are said to have been adorned by these birds. For example, it is said in the *Vālmiki's Rāmāyaṇa*-

फुल्लद्रुमकृतोत्तंसां चक्रवाकयुगस्तनीम् ।
विस्तीर्णपुलिनश्रोणीं हंसावलिमुखमेखलम् ॥

- VR VII.31.20

"(The river) had trees in blossom for its diadem, a pair of Cakravākas for its breasts, extensive sandy banks for its hips, and rows of swans for its lovely girdle."

The hole in the Rkṣabila cave is described beautifully where the Cakravāka birds are said to be wet with water and their limbs reddened with pollen of lotus flowers. (VR IV. 50. 9a)

The *Māhabhārata* describes the beauty of the Cakravāka birds but it contains a rather peculiar reference to the bird. The verse reads:

अद्य राज्ये करिष्यामि धृतराष्ट्रे जनेश्वरम् ।
अद्य कर्णस्य चक्राङ्गाः क्रव्यादाश्च पृथाग्विधाः ॥

- MBh 8. App 24. 1pr

It is said that on the war field the cakrāṅga and kravayāda birds will devour the (organs of) Karṇa in various parts. Here the word Cakrāṅga is for Cakravāka birds and Kravyāda means flesh-eating animal or beast. It was once believed that the Cakravāka bird does not feed on flesh. But the fact that it rarely scavenges on flesh is noted by the ornithologists. The bird is "occasionally said also to eat carrion in company with vultures". (Salim Ali, 1996, p. 85). So there is every possibility that this trait of the bird was known and recorded in the *Mahābhārata*.

In the *Campūbhārata* (3.53) it is said that the Cakravāka birds were very much proud of staying together and that they had to throw away their pride when black clouds darkened the sky and got separated due to darkness even though it was a day time.

While stating a problem, the mathematician Bhāskarācārya mentions a pond crowded with the Cakra geese and cranes-

चक्रक्रौञ्चकुलितसलिले क्वापि दृष्टं तडागे ।
तोयादूर्ध्वं कमलकलिकाग्रं वितस्तिप्रमाणम् ।---
- *Bījagaṇita* 7.112

"In a pond where water was crowded with the Cakravākas and Krauñcas, the tip of a lotus bud was seen at a height of one 'vitasti' from the water level.----"

In the *Mahābhāṣya* of Patañjali we come across references to the Cakravāka birds (2-4-12 and 4-1-63).

Thus we find that the Cakravāka bird represents the conjugal love in the classical Sanskrit literature. Even the Buddhist and Jaina canonical texts, contain the same image of the Cakravāka birds. The intensity of love is beautifully depicted in the *Raghuvamśa* of Kālidāsa. The poet says

शशिनं पुनरेति शर्वरी दयिता द्वन्द्वचरं पतत्रिणम् ।
इति तौ विरहान्तरक्षमौ कथमत्यन्तगता न मां दहेः ॥
Raghu 8.56

"The night goes to (meet) the moon again, the mate to the bird moving in pair (the Cakravāka male): thus they are able to bear the interval of separation, how can you, who are gone for good, not burn (torment) me?"

2) Synonyms for Cakravāka

There are particular synonyms that occur in Sanskrit literature denoting the Cakravāka bird.

केषुचित्तु क्रियते यथा रथाङ्गनामा चक्रवाक इति ।
- *Tantravārtika* 3, 1, 8

यथा रथाङ्गनामा चक्रवाक इति लक्षणम् ।

- Bhāmatī 1.3.17

रथाङ्गनामा चक्रवाकः ।

- Vedāntakalpataru 5-10, 159-8

All these references mean,

"Cakravāka is a bird who is named after the part of a chariot i.e. the wheel (cakra).

चक्राङ्गश्चक्रवाकः

- Smṛticandrikā V 145. 11-12

Cakravāka (is a bird) who has a curved body.

चक्राहः चक्रवाकः ।

- CaturC 17 III. I. 583;

- Sarvajñānārārāyaṇa's commentry on *Manusmṛti* 5.12

Cakravāka is a bird that is named after a wheel.

चक्राङ्गो मानसौकसि । चक्राङ्गी.... ॥

- MedK3.33

The word Cakrāṅga 'a wheel-limbed one' is used to denote the bird residing in the Mānasa lake;

'Cakrāṅgī' points to the female bird.

कोकश्चक्रवाको रथाङ्गाहयनामकः ॥

-AK, 2.5.22¹

Koka is an onomatopoetic word. (Cakravāka bird is) referred to as a 'Cakra'.

'Vaca' refers to 'speech'. Its name consists the word indicating a part of the chariot.

.... हंसा मानससश्रयाः।

सितपक्षाश्च चक्राङ्गा विशेषास्तत्र केचन ।

- PNM 3.226

"The swans are (the birds) residing in the Mānasa lake. Amongst them, there are some (birds) having special characteristics: they have white wings and curved body."

भूरिप्रेमा, द्वन्द्वचारी, सहायः, कान्तः, कामी, रात्रिविश्लेषगामी,

रामावक्षोजोपमः, कामुकः ।

- ŚK (p. 414)

According to the *Śabdakalpadruma* Cakrāṅga means the one who goes like the wheel or one who pleases with well rounded limbs. (चक्रेण चक्राकारेण अङ्गति गच्छतीति।)

The words in the *Śabdakalpadruma* can be explained as following -

Bhūriprema	=	One who is full of affection.
Dvandvacārin	=	One who wanders in pairs.
Sahāya	=	One who goes along with a companion.
Kānta	=	One who is beautiful or pleasing.
Kāmin	=	One who is lustful.
Ratriviśleṣagāmin	=	One who gets separated from a companion during night.

Rāmāvakṣojapama = One who is 'resembling the breasts of a beautiful woman', (which are not separated from each other).

Kāmuka = One who is passionate.

The synonyms in the Kalpadrukośa (11.119) and Vaijayantīkośa (3.9) are explained earlier.²

3) References to Cakravāka in Sanskrit Literature

A) Oldest References to Cakravāka

शङ्खेव नः प्रथमा गन्तमर्वाक् छफाविव जर्भुराणा तरोभिः ।
चक्रवाकेव प्रति वस्तोरुस्त्राऽर्वाञ्चा यातं रथ्येव शक्रा ॥
- RV 2.39.3

"Like a pair of horns come first to us, like a pair of hoofs with rapid motion, Come like two Cakvās in the grey of morning, come like two chariot wheels at dawn, ye two mighty ones."

In the *R̥gveda* there occurs the word 'कोकयातु' (7.104.22). According to Sāyanācārya, the word means a fiend who has assumed the form of the Cakravāka. (कोकः चक्रवाकः तद्रूपेण वर्तमानं रक्षसम्--). But in the English translations it is described as a fiend who is in the form of a Cuckoo.

-- वरुणाय चक्रवाकान् ॥ (आलभते) ॥
VS 24.22

वरुणाय चक्रवाकान् ॥
MS 3.14.3

"The priest immolates the Cakravāka for Varuṇa.

चक्रवाकौ मतस्नाभ्यां ।---
- VS 25.8

(While describing the Horse-sacrifice it is said that)" (Let) the pair of Cakravāka deity (be satisfied) by the pairs of ribs (of the horse)."

Here the Cakravākas are seen in the form of deities for whom the organs of a horse are offered.

--- दिग्भ्यश्चक्रवाकः ॥
- TS 5.5.13.1

"To the (deities of) quarters (let the) Cakravāka be (immolated)."

प्रतिश्रुत्कायै चक्रवाकः ॥
- MS 3.14.13

"Let the Cakravāka be (immolated) for (the deity-) echo."

This is an interesting reference where the bird is in correlation with a deity named as 'प्रतिश्रुत्' which means 'echo.' The habit of the Cakravākas giving calls to each other continuously might have been observed by our ancient sages. Perhaps for that reason, the birds were related to the deity called as 'echo.'

In the *R̥gveda* (7.104.22) and the *Atharvaveda*, the word 'koka' is found which is translated as 'Cuckoo.' (AV 5.23.4 and 8.6.2). Sāyanācārya explains it as the Cakravāka. However Whitney renders it as 'a certain destructive parasitic animal'. However there is a verse where the Cakravāka is specifically mentioned.

इहेमाविन्द्र सं नुद चक्रवाकेव दम्पती ।
 प्रजयैनौ स्वस्तकौ विश्वमायुर्व्यऽरनुताम् ॥
 AV 14.2.64

"Here, O Indra, do thou push together the husband and the wife like two Cakravākas; let them, with (their) progeny, well-homed, live out all their life-time."

According to the *Vedic Index* (Keith, 1967, p. 282) "Cakravāka is the name apparently derived from the nature of its cry, of a species, of gander, the modern Cakvās as it is called in Hindi, as Brahminy Duck in English, mentioned in the *R̥gveda* and in the list of victims of the Aśvamedha in the *Yajurveda* (24.22). While in the *Atharvaveda* it already appears as the type of conjugal fidelity, its characteristic in the classical literature."

B) Popular Cultural Belief Regarding Cakravāka

Sanskrit literature is full of references to the inseparable pair of the Cakravāka birds. This bird is always portrayed as the symbol of eternal love. The origin of this cultural belief may be traced back to the Vedic literature. Poets like to make use of this belief that is reflected again and again in various literary works. Here are a few representative verses expressing the popular cultural belief.

चक्रवाकीव भर्तारं पृष्ठतोऽनुगता वनम् ।
 विषमं दण्डकारण्यमुद्यानमिव चाङ्गना ॥
 -VR IV.30.65a

"(Rāma says:) Following (her) husband, the lady (i.e. Sitā) went to the forest Daṇḍakāraṇya, difficult to penetrate, like a female Cakravāka (would follow her mate), (happily) as if (she was visiting) a garden".

हिमहतनलिनीव नष्टशोभा व्यसनपरम्परया निपीड्यमाना ।
 सहचररहितेव चक्रवाकी जनकसुता कृपणां दशां प्रपन्ना ॥
 -VR V.16.30a

"Deprived of her charms like a lotus plant blasted by frost, being sore oppressed (as she is) by a series of misfortunes, Janaka's daughter has been reduced to a pitiable plight like a female Cakravāka bereft of her mate."

The sorrowful cry of Cakravākas due to the separation from the companion is frequently met with in classical Sanskrit literature. A few examples may be sited here. In Bhāsa's *Svapnavāsavadatta*, the mournful cry of king Udayana, on account of the sad demise of Vāsavadattā is described:

नैवेदानीं तादृशाश्चक्रवाका नैवाप्यन्ये स्त्रीविशेषैर्विमुक्ताः ।
 धन्या सा स्त्री यां तथा वेत्ति भर्ता भर्तृस्नेहात् सा हि दग्धाप्यदग्धा ॥
 - SvapD, 1.13

"Even the Cakravāka birds are not at all like him; nor even those others who were separated from their excellent wives. Blessed is that woman whom (her) husband regards like that. Because of the love of (her) husband she, though burnt, is not (really) burnt."

In the 3rd Act of the same drama the empress Vāsavadattā curses herself in the following words: "indeed, blessed is the female Cakravāka that does not live in mutual separation (from her mate)." In Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta*, yakṣa describes his beloved wife left alone at home:

तां जानीथा : परिमितकथां जीवितं मे द्वितीयं
दूरीभूते मयि सहचरे चक्रवाकीमिवैकाम् ॥----॥
- MeghD (Uttaramegha) 23

"You should know that lady, with measured speech to be my second life, I, her companion, being far away, (she is) like a solitary, female Cakravāka, isolated from her mate."

In the *Kumārasambhava* of Kālidāsa, it is believed that the ruddy shelduck is the symbol of true love (8.51) and the pair gets separated in the night (8.61). The same belief is seen in the *Vikramorvaśīyam* where it is said that if the pair of ruddy shelduck is separated due to the screen of a single lotus leaf in the pond, they consider to be far removed. They get anxious and sorely bewail for each other. (4.39).

There is a beautiful description of the ruddy shelduck in the *Prasannarāghava* (6.6) of Jayadeva. In the *Harṣacarita*, a guard for the lotus flowers in the palace sang loudly referring to the Cakravāka birds. The shelduck has the reddish colour like the pollen.

विहग ! कुरु दृढं मनः स्वयं त्यज शुचमास्व विवेकवर्त्मीनि ।
सह कमलसरोजिनीश्रिया श्रयति सुमेरुशिरो विरोचन ॥

- HC, 5.4

"Fortify, o bird, thy heart; freely abandon grief; pursue the path of discretion :
With the beauty of the red-lotus pools the hies himself to sumeru's peak."

In the *Vikramānkdevacarita* of Bilhaṇa, it is said that the pair of Cakravākas is eager to talk to each other because they were separated for the whole night. (1.34)

In the description of a beautiful woman, the *Daśakumācarita* uses the similes of the Cakravāka birds: "The breasts like the jars full (of water), imitating the form of the Cakravāka birds". (*Daśakumācarita* I).

C) References to the Cakravāka in Subhāṣitās

We find references to birds in a different form of analogies. Here are some representative examples. A verse from the *Subhāṣitaratnabhāṇḍagāra* reads,

त्यज चक्रवाकि शोकं बधान धैर्यं सहस्व समयममुम् ।
अयमेव वासरमणिर्हरिष्यते शापमूर्च्छा ते ॥

- SurBh 5.179

"O Cakaravākī (female Brahminy Duck), do you discard (your) grief and build courage. Endure this (hard) time. This sun alone will remove your unconscious state of mind, which is like a curse to you."

अस्तंगतोऽयमरविन्द्रवनैकबन्धुर्भास्वान्न लङ्घयति कोऽपि विधिप्रणीतम् ।
हे चक्र धैर्यमवलम्ब्य विमुञ्च शोकं धीरास्तरन्ति विपदं न तु दीनचिन्ता : ॥

-SurBh 5.180

"This sun, the sole relation of the wood (full of) lotuses, has set. No one is able to overcome whatever is brought by destiny. O cakra, abandon grief, having taken a recourse to courage. (Because, the wise man (alone) overcomes the calamity, and not those of feeble mind."

D) References showing superstitions regarding Cakravāka

The Saurapurāna (52.37^{ab}), *The Kūmapurāna* (34.13) and the *Nāradapurāna*

(80) say that if the Cakravāka bird is killed, one should not take meals for twelve days. There are similar references in the other texts also:

चक्रवाकम् --- । एषां वधे नरः कुर्यादिकरात्रमभोजनम् ॥

- Saṁvartasmṛti 145-a

“If the Cakravāka bird is killed, one should not take meals for one night”.

कौशेयं चोरयित्वा तु चक्रवाकत्वमृच्छति ॥

- MārP. 15.26

“One who steals a silk cloth becomes the Cakravāka (in his next birth).”

हत्वा -- चक्रवाकं ---- मासमेकं व्रतं कुर्यात् ।

- Śaṅkhasmṛti 17.24* (391)

“Having committed a sin of killing cakravāka one should observe a penance for a month.”

इयेनभासचक्रवाकानामन्यतमं हत्वा ब्राह्मणाय गां दद्यात् ।

- Viṣṇusmṛti 50.33

“If (any of the birds, namely,) the falcon or vulture or the ruddy shelduck is killed, one should offer a cow to a Brahmin”.

हंसश्चक्रवाकयोरपि निषेधसिद्धौ ।

- Kullūka on Manu 5.12

“The killing of the swan and the ruddy shelduck is prohibited”.

Sage Vyāsa tells Yudhiṣṭhira that the birds like Bhāsa, Haṁsa, Suparśva, Cakravāka, Kāka, Madgu, Gṛdhra, Śyena and Ulūka are not meant for eating. (MBh 12.37.18a, 12.37.26). The Bṛhatsamhitā (56.5) says that the lake where the aquatic birds like Haṁsa, Kāraṇḍava, Krauñca and Cakravāka give out calls, it becomes the dwelling place for deities. The *Bṛhatsamhitā* discusses the auspicious existence of the bird. The *Vasantarājaśākuna* also discusses the augury regarding the Cakravāka bird. It is said (VasantŚ 8.8):

“If the pair of the Cakravāka birds is seen in all places, if it gives out calls, then it suggests prosperity (for a person) and if the pair is unhappy and gives out desperate calls, then it suggests ill-omen”.

E) Description of Cakravāka in the *Mṛgapakṣīśāstra*

The text describes the Cakravāka bird in Śreṇī No.23 (verse 71.100). It gives a general description of the birds. It is said that the Cakravāka birds are white, black and black-red, mixed in colour. They are round-shaped like that of the swan. They get separated during the night, may be, because of a curse. They get united after the sunrise. They prefer to stay in water. They breed during the spring season. The female protects and rears her eggs. The chicks become capable to fly after two months.

The author Haṁsadeva has described three kinds of the Cakravāka birds. They are Koka, Cakra and Rathāṅga. The Koka birds are said to have a red colour. They are small in size and the tips of their feathers are black. They give out calls known as 'krenkāra'. The Cakra birds are small and their feathers, throat and back are red in colour. Their calls are said to be intoxicating for women. Rathāṅga birds are white and round-shaped. Their wings are broad. There are spots on their breast and soles of their feet are red. They eat small fishes. They are said to be grown up when they are two years old. The kings are expected to have these Rathāṅga birds as pets.

4) Ornithological information of Cakravāka

According to Dave, the Cakravāka bird is the Ruddy Shelduck or the Brahminy Duck. He strongly believes that the bird does not feed on dead human bodies and he says that "if there were any truth in the allegation the observant Indians would not have missed the fact." (Dave, 2005, p.453). He has supported this claim by quoting a reference from the Jātaka tales (Cowell, Vol. III, 1990, p.310) where the bird is said to be mainly vegetable feeder and does not eat fruit or flesh. As already mentioned there is a reference to the flesh-eating 'Cakrāṅga' birds in the Mahābhārata and there is some truth in the statement of the Mbh, from the ornithological point of view.

Brahminy Shelduck

The male and female are alike. Brahminy Shelduck is a large chest-nut brown duck with buff head and neck, white upper wing and under wing coverts, with green flashing in flight. The bird prefers to graze along the riverbanks. The nest-site is holes in cliffs, often away from water and it nests in Ladakh, Nepal and Tibet during April to July.

It has a loud metallic call like 'aang, aang' and the grazing grounds are very noisy at dawn and dusk. (This particular habit might have given rise to the belief that the bird laments because of getting separated from its companion when the sun sets).

Notes

1 The Rāmāśramī commentry on the Amarakośa explains the synonyms as follows:

= कोकेति । कोकते । 'कुक आदाने' ...।
... इत्यनेनैव कः द्वित्वं च । चकते । "चक् तृप्तौ" ...

"On the basis of the root 'Kuka' (to receive) the word 'Koka' is form, with the reduplication of 'Ka'.

चक्रशब्देनोच्यते । 'वच भाषणे'।...

(Cakravāka bird is) referred to as a 'Cakra'.

The root V vac means 'to speak'

रथाङ्गस्य चक्रस्याहया नाम यस्य ॥

It s name consists the word indicating a part of the chariot.

2 चक्रवाको रथाङ्गाहः कोको द्वन्द्वचरो ऽपि च । ॥

---Abhidhānacintāmaṇi, 4.396

It is further explained as,

चक्र इति वाक् आख्यास्य चक्रवाकः ॥11॥

= Cakravāka is a bird which named after (the word) Cakra.

रथाङ्गं चक्रं तस्य आह्व नामाऽस्य रथाङ्गाहः ॥12॥

"Rathāṅga is a bird whose name consists the word denoting the part of a chariot or whose name indicates the wheel which is the part of the chariot."

कौति शब्दायति कोकः । ॥13॥

"Koka is a bird which gives out a sound 'cau'."

द्वन्द्वेन मिथुनेन चरति द्वन्द्वचरः ॥14॥

“Dvandvacara means the bird who always wanders in pair.”

The *Abhidhānacintāmaṇi*, further states :

हंसाश्रक्राङ्गवक्राङ्गमानसौकसितच्छदा : ॥

AbhC, 4.391

The cakrāṅga or vakrāṅga and 'mānasouka' are the words which are explained earlier. Sometimes the descriptions of the ruddy shelduck and the swan are mixed up. Or there might be the indication of two types of aquatic birds residing in the Mānasa lake in the Himālayas.

□

Mayūra

1) Introduction

Mayūra (peacock) is the national bird of India since 1962. In many rural areas, peacocks are given protection by local people due to religious reasons. These are the people's sanctuaries. Near Pune a village named 'Chincholi' is known as 'Morachi Chincholi' (Chincholi of peacocks) for years. The villagers believe that a peacock is the vehicle of the deity 'Khandoba'. They feed peacocks and nobody does any harm to them. Peacocks roam fearlessly in the fields. The bird is associated with the goddess of learning- śārada and also to Ganeśa and Kārtikeya. The bird is known since the Vedic times and has adorned flags, thrones and crowns.

The peacock has great symbolic meaning in other cultures of the world. In Buddhism, the great deity Mahāmāyūrī has a peacock for her vehicle. As the peacock, though presenting a fine blend of all the colours of the spectrum, has a special display of green, the Tibetan culture views green as the mixture of all aspects. The peahen is one of the many epithets of the green. Tārā (Jāngulī). The Buddhist worships Jāngulī as a goddess who prevents and cures snakebites. (Bhattacharya, 1924, p.78)

The Japanese deity Kujaku-Myoo is always represented sitting on peacock. (Kujaku means peacock). In one of his four hands we find a peacock's feather. (Hackin, 1996, p.436)

In Tibetan tradition, six peacock feathers are arranged like a fan and used with sprinkling utensils for giving the blessing of purifying water. The feathers are the symbol of compassion and morality because of their capacity to absorb the poison of Kleśas or afflictions like anger, greed and ignorance. (www.khandro.net/animals_birds.htm)

In the Jātaka literature the Mora Jātaka (159) (Cowell, Vol.II-1990, p. 23), the Bāveru Jātaka (339) (Cowell, Vol. III-1990, p. 83) and the Mahāmora Jātaka (491) (Cowell, Vol.IV-1990, p. 210), have the stories of Bodhisattva^{who} was born as a beautiful golden peacock.

The *Gurugranthasahib*, the main religious text of Sikh religion, says out of reverence for Lord Kṛṣṇa that 'by seeing the Lord Kṛṣṇa, the peacocks thought that he is the black cloud and they started dancing.' (*Gurugranthasahib sainchi* 2.1669).

Indian tradition believes that the *śadja* note of music was adopted from the calls of a peacock. The *Sangītaratnākara* (Vol.I-1.3.48) mentions various sources of musical notes. The kuśāṇa dynasty had the coins on which there was a picture of the peacock. Their flag as well as the flag of Brahmadeśa (Myanmar) had a picture of the peacock in olden times.

2) Synonyms for Mayūra¹

- १) मयूरो बर्हिणो बर्ही नीलकण्ठो भुजङ्गभुक् ।
शिखावलः शिखी केकी मेघनादानुलास्यपि ॥
केका वाणी मयूरस्य समौ चन्द्रकमेचकौ ।
शिखा चूडा शिखण्डस्तु पिच्छबर्हे नपुंसके ॥
- AK, 2/5/30, 31²

These synonyms are explained as follows -

The word *Mayūra* is traditionally derived from the root V *may* (1A) 'to go'. Alternatively the word is explained as 'one who cries aloud on the earth' (*mahi+V ru*). The word is included in the *pr̥ṣodarādi gaṇa* (P.6.3.109), among the words that are accepted as the proper words (*sādhu*), on account of their usage or pronunciation in that manner by the learned (*śiṣṭa*). According to MW, the word is to be derived probably from the root V *me* (3U) 'to sound, bellow, roar, bleat. 'Barhin'- 'One having a plumage. The word is derived from the word *barha* 'plumage' with the possessive termination in (*barha + in*).

'*Nīlakaṇṭha*' is 'one having a blue neck.'

'*Bhujangabhuk*' is 'one who devours the snake.'

'*śikhāvala*' is 'one who has a crest'. (*sikha + valac* possession termination).

'*śikhin*' has the same meaning as that of *śikhāvala*.

'*Kekīn*' is one whose calls are known as '*Kekā*'.

'*Meghanādānulasin*' is one who dances to the thunder of the clouds. The root V *las* (1P) has several meanings, out of which, one is 'to dance'. (*lāsya* 'dancing').

It is further said that the calls of the peafowl are like '*kekā*'.

The glossy and bright feathers of the peafowl are known as '*candraka*' and '*Mecaka*' which mean 'dark blue colour or the eye of a peacock's tail'.

'*Śikhā*' is crest. '*Śikhin*' is one having a crest. '*Picchabarha*' refers to the plumage.

2) The *śivakośa* mentions the synonyms like *Mayūraka*, *Śikhigrīva* and *Barhicūda*.

-- मयूरो बर्हिणो बर्ही प्रचलाकी च चन्द्रकी ॥10॥

सितपत्रः सितापाङ्गो नीलकण्ठो भुजङ्गभुक् ।

कञ्जार-शिखि-मेनाद-मेघनादानुलासिनः ॥11॥

केकी शिखावलञ्च स्याच्छिखण्डी च कलापवान् ।

केकास्य वाक्चन्द्रकस्तु मेचकोऽस्त्री शिखण्डकः ॥12॥

- KośK; (*Śirhādivarga*), (P. 199)

Some of the synonyms have been explained earlier and the other synonyms can be explained as follows:

Pracalāki means one who nods his head.

Candrakī means the eyes. The eyes in the peacock's tail are known as *candraka*.

Candrakī is one who has these '*candraka*' s.

Sitapatra = The meaning is not clear.

Sitāpāṅga means one having white eye corners.

Kañjāra - The meaning is not clear.

Menāda = one who makes the sound '*me*'. It is an onomatopoeic word.

Kalāpavān = is one having a tail.

Some of the new synonyms in the text *Abhidhānacintāmaṇi* are explained here:

3) '*Nṛtyapriya*' is one who is fond of dance.

'*Sthiramada*' is one who is intoxicating to such a degree as to cause lasting effect'.

'*Mecaka*' refers to the dark blue colour.

'*Mārjārakaṇṭha*' means one having the calls like that of a cat.

The word '*Maru*' in '*Maruka*' means wilderness.

'*Bahulagrīva*' means one having a thick or large neck. *Nagāvāsa* means tree-dweller.

The *Vaijayantikośa* text gives some other synonyms:

4) 'Varṣāmada' is one rejoicing in the rainy season.

'Citrapatraka' is one having variegated feathers.

'Śāpaṭika' - The meaning is not clear.

'Citrapīṅgala' one who is brightly yellow or gold coloured.

'Dārvaṇḍa' - The meaning is not clear.

'Candrakīrti' 'Candra means a spot similar to the moon, 'Kīrti' is fame. This may refer to the eyes on peacock's feathers.

5) The synonyms given in the *Kalpद्रुकोśa* are:

'Garalavrata' means one who observes the vow of swallowing the venom.

'Gurumārjāranīlebhyaṅaṭha' - The meaning is not clear.

'Patrāḍhya' means one who is rich in feathers.

'Tilaśikhī' - The meaning is not clear.

'Citramekhala' means one having variegated girdle. This term refers to the plumage.

6) The other lexicons³ like the '*Trikāṇḍaśeṣa*' of Puruṣottamadeva, '*Mañkhakośa*' have the similar references to the 'Mayūra'. The '*Śabdakalpadruma*' has almost the same references except 'Dhvaja' and 'Meghānandi'. 'Dhvaji' means one bearing a banner 'Dhvaja' or having anything as a mark. 'Meghānandi' means one who rejoices by seeing clouds.

3) References to Mayūra in Sanskrit Literature

A) Oldest references to Mayūra

Right from the *R̥gveda*, we find references to the peahens who can digest poison.

त्रिःसप्त मयूर्यः सप्त स्वसारो अग्रुवः ।
तास्ते विषं वि जग्मिर उदुकं कुम्भिनीरिव ॥
- RV 1.191.14

"So have the peahens three-times-seven, so have the maiden sisters seven carried thy venom far away, as girls bear water in their jars."

आ मन्द्रैरिन्द्र हरिभिर्यीहि मयूररोमभिः ।
मा त्वा के चित्रि यमन्वि न पाशिनो ऽति धन्वेव ताँ इहि ॥
- RV3.45.1

"Come hither, Indra, with bay steeds, joyous, with tails like peacock's plumes.

Let no men check thy course as fowlers stay the bird : pass over them as 'those over desert lands.'

The reference to the Mayūraśyepa is found in the *R̥gveda* (8.1.25) which means with tails like those of peacocks'.

अश्विभ्यां मयूरान् ---- ॥
VS 24.23.1, MS 3.14.4

"Let the Mayūra (be offered) to the Aśvins."

अदन्ति त्वा पिपीलिका वि वृश्चन्ति मयूर्यः ।
सर्वे भल ब्रवाथ शाकटमरुसं विषम् ॥
- AV 7.56.7

"Ants eat thee; peahens pick thee to pieces; verily, may ye all say 'the poison of the śārkota is sapless.'"

There are other references to the 'Mayūra-grīvā' (neck of the peacock) in the *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* (3.2.4) Mayūraroman (down or fine, soft hair) of the peacock in the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* 1.12.2.

B) References to Mayūra describing its beauty

1) Sanskrit literature is full of references describing the lavish beauty of peacock's plumage and its calls were said to be adding to the exquisiteness of lush green forests and there is great appreciation of how the peacocks welcome the rains. Right from the epics, we find such references. Here are some of the representative verses:

एतान्वित्रासितान्पश्य बर्हिणः प्रियदर्शनान् ।
एवमापततः शैलमधिवासं पतत्रिणाम् ॥

(Vālmīki/Satavalekar, 2nd Ed.,1968,P.196)

(Bharata says) "Behold these peacocks,- which are (so) delightful to look at and are greatly frightened (by the sight of the army), - hastening thus towards the mountain, the abode of birds."

The mountains and the forests are said to be resounded with peacock's calls:

द्रक्ष्यसे दृष्टिरम्याणि गिरिप्रस्त्रवणानि च ।
रमणीयान्यरण्यानि मयूराभिरुतानि च ॥

- VR III.7.15

"You will see springs on mountains charming to the eye and beautiful forests resounding with the noise of peacocks".

मयूरनादिता रम्याः प्रांशवो बहुकंदराः ।
दृश्यन्ते गिरयः सौम्याः फुल्लास्तरुभिरावृताः ॥

- VR III.14.14

"Here are seen lofty and charming mountains made noisy by peacocks, having many caves and covered with trees, in blossom."

क्वचित्प्रनृत्यैः क्वचिदुन्नददिम्बः क्वचिच्च वृक्षाग्रनिषण्णकायैः ।
व्यालम्बबर्हाभरणैर्मयूरैर्वनेषु संगीतमिव प्रवृत्तम् ॥

(Vālmīki/Satavalekar, 2nd Ed.,1967,P.189)

"(Nay) music with dancing has been set in operation as it were in the woodlands by peacocks merrily dancing at one place, crying loudly (like singers) at another and resting elsewhere with their bodies supported on tree-tops as though witnessing the dancing and listening to the music and with their jewel-like tails hanging loose."

Elsewhere there are references to the graceful dance of the peacocks. Every time the green beauty of dense forests is necessarily associated with the existence of the peacocks. Rāvaṇa's residence is described to be crowded by the peacocks.

2) In the *Mahābhārata*, the peacock is described as 'Bhujagāśana' which means 'one which devours the snakes'. Elsewhere it is said:

नित्यं रक्षितमन्त्रः स्याद्यथा मूकः शरच्छिखी ।....

-MBh.12.120.7^a

Here it is said 'be always guarded by speech (or sacred text) like the peacock remains silent in the season of śarad (i.e. autumn)'.
3) The āśramas or residential areas of the sages were necessarily associated to

the peacocks. Those peacocks roamed fearlessly near the peace-loving sages and their disciples. The peacocks were described as attached to the people. For example, it was said that the peacocks stopped their dance when they heard an outcry of Sītā. (Raghu-14.69) Similarly in the *Abhijñānaśākuntala* (4.12), the peacocks are said to have stopped their dance out of sorrow of separation as Śākuntalā was leaving for her husband's house.

Between the inmates of the jungle the snake and the peacocks are actually great enemies. But, in the hot weather of summer, their enmity comes to an end, for a while, as they get tormented by the scorching heat of the sun. This observation is reflected in one of the verses of the *Rtusānhāra* of Kālidāsa. He says:

ख्वेर्मयूखैरभितापितो भृशं विदह्यमानः पथि तप्तपांसुभिः ।
अवाङ्मुखो जिह्वगतिः श्वसन्मुहुः फणी मयूरस्य तले निषीदति ॥

RtuS, I.13

“Being greatly scorched by the rays of the sun and parched in the hot way dust, a snake with its mouth turned downwards (and) moving tortuously is lying under (the shadow of) a peacock, taking rapid breath”.

In ancient times the peacocks were commonly domesticated. *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa* (*Janma kāṇḍa* I.74), describes the garden where Rāma and Sītā visited. It was full of the calls of the peacocks. It seemed as if those calls were welcoming the people. In the *Bhāgavatamahāpurāṇa*, (21.3.41) it is said that the peacocks which are overjoyed have spread their plumage and were dancing like an actor or a dancer.

It was mainly described as the 'Kṛīḍāśikhandīn', 'Mandiramayūra' or 'Kṛīḍāmayūra'. In *Vikramorvaśīya*, there is a perfect reference to the domestic peacock. A child says:

यः सुप्तवान्मदङ्के शिखण्डकण्डूयनोपलब्धसुखः ।
तं मे जातकलापं प्रेषय मणिकण्ठकं शिखिनम् ॥

- *Vikramorvaśīyam*, 5.13

“Send me my peacock, Maṇikaṇṭhaka, which used to rest on my lap and which felt always happy by my tickling his crest when he grows his full plumage”.

जालोद्गर्णीरुपचितवपुः केशसंस्कारधूपै-
र्बन्धुप्रीत्या भवनशिखिभिर्दत्तनृत्तोपहारः ।
हर्म्येष्वस्याः कुसुमसुरभिष्वध्वखेदं नयेथा
लक्ष्मीं पश्यन् ललितवनितापादरागाङ्कितेषु ॥

-MeghD, Pūrva-megha-34

“With your form (size) augmented by the (smoke of the) incense used for performing the hair and escaping through the lattices of the windows and welcomed with presents in the form of their dancings by the domestic peacocks through fraternal affection. Do you dispel the fatigue of your journey enjoying the beauty there in, in its mansions, sweet smelling with flowers and marked with red lac of (i.e. applied to) the feet of graceful ladies.”

उत्पश्यामि द्रुतमपि सखे मत्प्रियार्थं यियासोः
कालक्षेपं ककुभसुरभौ पर्वते पर्वते ते ।
शुक्लापाङ्गैः सजलनयनैः स्वागतीकृत्य केकाः
प्रत्युघातः कथमपि भवान्ान्तुमाशु व्यवस्येत् ॥

-MeghD, Purva-megha-22

"I foresee, o friend, that though you are desirous of going quickly for doing me an agreeable service (or, for the sake of my beloved) there will be delay on your part on every mountain fragrant with the kutaja flowers, greeted by peacocks with eyes full of the tears (of joy) with their cries made to serve as words of welcome. I hope you will somehow try to travel rapidly."

Kālidāsa says in the *Raghuvamśa* that the earth which has become wet due to the new, fresh drops of rain welcomes the clouds heartily by the kekā (calls) of the peacocks. (*Raghuvamśa* - 7.69)

मनोभिरामाः शृण्वन्तौ रथनेमिस्वनोन्मुखैः ।
षड्जसंवादिनीः केका द्विधा भिन्नाः शिखंडिभिः ॥
- Raghu - 1.39

"They listened to the ravishing notes of the peacocks who raised their necks as soon as they heard the rattling of the wheels-notes of a double kind and corresponding in pitch to *ṣaḍja*."

The *Kirātārjunīya* (X.23)⁴ and the *Mālatī-mādhava* (IV.5)⁵ describe the calls of the peacock as 'Madamadhura' (sweet voice because of intoxication).

आलोकयति पयोदाग्बलंपुरोवातताडितशिखण्डः ।
केका गर्भेण शिखी दूरोन्नमितेन कण्ठेन ॥
- Vikramorvaśīya, 4.18

"A peacock with his crest ruffled by the rough forewind looks at the clouds with his neck far-up-stretched that is about to give out shrill cries of joy".

लतामण्डप-तलं-शिखण्डि-मण्डलरम्भ-ताण्डवभिः --- ।
- Śālmalitaruvarṇana, *Kādambarī*. (Bāṇabhaṭṭa/Kṛṣṇamohan Śāstrī, 1961, p.70)

"The peacocks were dancing under the canopy of creepers by forming a circle".

शिखण्डापाङ्गापाण्डुनी - दुकूलपट्टप्रभवे ---- ।
- HC, *Ucchvasa III* (Bāṇabhaṭṭa, 2nd Ed., 1964, P.145).

In this reference there is a minute observation which describes the white cloth. It is said to be 'as white as the corners of peacock's eyes'.

The *Rāghavapāṇḍavīya* (5.61) mentions that during the rainy season the beautiful plumage of the peacocks is not seen.

C) References to Mayūra in architecture

The texts on Indian architecture like the *Viśvakarmāvastuśāstra* (4.16)⁶, mention the carvings of peacocks for increasing the beauty of buildings.

D) References to Mayūra showing augury and superstitions

Mayūra is mentioned in connection with auspicious or inauspicious omens. Here are some of the examples:

- - - चौरैर्मोघमथा ऽऽख्याति मयूरो भिन्ननिःस्वनः ॥
- AgniP, 231.22

"The peacock making an unusual sound conveys plundering by thieves."

मयूरपत्रसङ्काशो द्वादशशब्दं न वर्षति । ॥२२॥

- Triskandha Jyotiṣa - Saṁhitā skandha

“If the colour of the sun looks like that of peacock's feathers, it suggests that there will not be rains for the next twelve years”.

The *Bṛhatsamhitā* (34.6) says that if the circumference or surroundings has the colour of peacock's neck, it augurs heavy rains”. The *Vasantarājasākuna* (8.22,23)⁷, describes various types of consequences of calls of a peacock if they are heard.

मयूरो वर्णकान्दत्त्वा पत्रशाकं च जायते--- ।

-MārKP 15.29

“One who steals away leafy vegetables becomes a peacock (in his next birth).”

It is said in the *Kāmasūtra* (7.29)⁸, “if one keeps an eye of the peacock and that of a wolf in a golden box and ties that box (or amulet) on his right arm, seduces a woman very easily.”

E) References to the Mayūra in *Mṛgapakṣisāstra*

The author Harṇsadeva describes six species of a peacock and he names them as Mayūra, Barhin, Niakanṭha, Bhujaṅgabhuḥ, Śikhāvala and Kekin. There are no specific descriptions of these so called different species and they are very general in character. (śreṇī 30.452-499)

4) References to Mayūra in mythology

There is an interesting story in the Uttarakāṇḍa of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. Once Rāvaṇa set out with his army of demons to gain victory over kings. In a country named Uśīrabīja, a king named Marutta was performing the sacrificial ritual. Rāvaṇa got down there from his aeroplane (Puṣpaka Vimāna). At the sight of Rāvaṇa the gods took different disguises and fled away in panic. At that time Indra assumed the form of a big peacock (VR VII.18.5). When Rāvaṇa left the place all the gods assembled there. Indra thanked the peacock. He felt special attachment to it. He said, "till now you were blue in colour. But from today onwards, your feathers will have various colours. I transfer my thousands eyes to you. Besides you'll be immune from all diseases. Whoever kills you, will meet with death. You'll dance at the commencement of the rainy season. you will be greeted by people with enthusiasm."⁹

In the Purāṇic times, Kārtikeya was associated with the peacock. There are many references to Skanda sitting on the peacock. The Jaina community respects the peacock because they believe that the peacock is the carrier of goddess Sarasvatī.

The peacock was a commonly seen domestic bird in olden times. We find innumerable references in the Purāṇic literature to it.

5) Ornithological information of Mayūra

Mayūra is known as Indian Peafowl or Common Peafowl.

Flocks of peacocks and peahens feed in meadows, fields, on mountain slopes. They surprisingly move well in thorny shrub land. If they are alarmed, they retire to tall trees as they can take strong short flights. Rains inspire them to dance and utter trumpeting calls. The male birds fan their train and perform a spectacular dance in forest clearing, in front of female birds to lure them.

Peacocks require tall leafy trees for roosting. Vegetation along rivers and ravines is a habitat. Their nest-sites are on high riverside rocks, boulders, in thorny thickets and dense undergrowth.

Notes

- 1 -- मयूरो बर्हिचूडायाम् ---- ॥
 - *Medinikośa, Varga 27.199*
 = Mayura is the one who has tail feathers or plumage and a crest or a tuft.
- 2 'मेति ॥ मयते । 'मय गतौ' (श्व. आ. से.) । खर्जादित्वात् (३.४।९०)
 उरः । मह्यां रीति वा । 'अन्येभ्यो ऽ पि' (वा. ३।२।१०१) इति डः ।
 पृषोदरादिः (६।३।१०९) ॥ ॥१॥
 बर्हमस्त्यस्य । 'फलबर्हाभ्यामिनन्' (वा. ५।२।१२२) ॥२॥ इनिः (५।२।११५ ॥ ॥३॥
 नीलः कण्ठोऽस्य ॥४॥
 भुजंगं भुङ्क्ते । 'भुज पालनादौ (रु. प. अ.) । क्विप् (३।२।७६) ॥५॥
 शिखास्त्यस्य । 'दन्तशिखात् संज्ञायाम्' (५।२।२१३) इति वल्च् ॥६॥
 केकास्त्यस्य । ग्रीह्यादित्वात् (५।२।११६) इति : ॥८॥
 मेघानादेनानुलसति तच्छील लस श्लेषणक्रीडनयोः (श्व. प. से.)
 'सुप्यजातौ -' (इ।२।७८) इति णिनि : ॥९॥
 केकेति ॥ के मूर्धनि कायति । 'के शब्दे' (श्व. प. अ.) । 'अन्येभ्यो ऽपि' (वा. ३।२।१०१) इति
 डः । 'हलदन्तात् (६।१।९) इत्यलुक् ॥१॥
 एकम् 'मयूरवाण्याः' ॥ - AK 2.5.30,31
- 3 The '*Atīhānacintāmaṇi*' explains the words in a simplified manner.
 केकी तु सर्पभुक्
 मयूरः बर्हिणौ नीलकण्ठी मेघसुहृच्छिखी ॥३८५॥
 Explanation is given as,
 केका ऽ स्त्यस्य केकी, शिखादित्वात् ॥१॥
 = one who has a (peculiar) call, namely, kekā. It has Śikhā i.e. a crest.
 सर्पान् भुङ्क्ते इति सर्पभुक् ॥२॥ मीनात्यहीन् मयूरः "मीमसि" ॥ (उणा - ४२७) इत्यूरः मह्यां
 रीतीति वां, पृषोदरादित्वात् ॥३॥
 = one who devours snakes is sarpbhuk.
 'Mi' means to destroy, to diminish. One who destroys the snakes is 'Mayūra'.
 बर्हिणि सन्त्यस्य बर्हिणः "फलबर्हाद् -" ॥७॥२१॥३॥
 इतीनः, बर्हतीति वा "द्रुह्वृहि -" ॥ (उणा - १९४ ॥ इतीणः ।
 = Barhin is one who has a plumage.
 शिखादित्वादिनी बर्हिीति वा । ॥४॥
 one who has a crest and a tail feather
 नीलः कण्ठोऽस्य नीलकण्ठः ॥५॥ = Nīlkaṇṭha is one whose neck is blue.
 मेघस्य सुहृत्, मेघः सुहृदस्येति वा मेघसुहृत् ॥६॥
 = Meghasuhrud is one which is the friend of the clouds.



शिखाऽस्त्यस्य शिखी , योगिकत्वात् शिखावलः ॥७॥ ३८५

= Śikhī is one which has śikha (crest).

शुक्लावपाङ्गावस्य शुक्लापाङ्गः ॥८॥

= Śuklapaṅga is one which has white eyecoriness.

शेषश्चात्र - मयूरे चित्रपिङ्गलः ॥

नृत्यप्रियः स्थिरमदः खिलखिल्लो गरलव्रतः ।

मार्जारकण्ठो मरुको मेघनादानुलसकः ॥

मयूर मयूको बहुलप्रीवः नागावासश्च चन्द्रकी ॥

अस्य वाक् केका ।

पिच्छं बर्हं शिखण्डकः ।

प्रचलाकः कलापश्च

अस्य मयूरस्य पिच्छम् ॥१॥

बर्हते नृत्येनोर्ध्वीभवति बर्हम् , पुंक्लीबलिङ्गः ॥२॥

शिखाभिर्दयते शिखण्डः “क्वचित् ” ॥५॥१॥७१॥

इति डे पृषोदरादित्वात् साधुः ॥३॥३ प्रचलति प्रचलाकः “मवाक-” (उणा ३७) ॥ इति निपातनादाकः, प्रचलमकत्यनेन वा ॥४॥ कल्पते कलापः, कलां पातीति वा ॥५॥

मेचकश्चन्द्रकः समौ ॥३८६॥

मेचको मिश्रवर्णत्वात् यत् कात्यः- ‘बर्हिकण्ठसमं वर्णं मेचकं ब्रुवते बुधाः इति ॥ ११॥

चन्द्रप्रतिकृतिश्चन्द्रकः ॥ ॥२॥

- *Abdihānacintāmaṇi* ॥३८६॥

मयूरो बर्हिणो बर्ही शुक्लापाङ्गा शिखावलः ॥

वर्षामदः शिखी केकी शिखण्डी चित्रपत्रकः ।

भुजङ्गारिः शापटिको मयूरश्चित्रपिङ्गलः ॥

मार्जारकण्ठः केकालिर्विष्करो नर्तनप्रियः ।

मेघनादानुलसी च दार्वण्डश्चन्द्रकीर्तिश्च ॥

शब्दोऽस्य केका बर्हस्तु प्रचलाककलापकौ ।

शिखण्डः पिच्छमप्यस्य मेचको बर्हचन्द्रकः ॥

- *Vaijayantikośa* 36-39

अपिच्छाय मयूरस्तु चन्द्रकी गरलव्रतः ।

गुरुमार्जारनीलाभकण्ठः केकी शिखावलः ॥

भुजङ्गभोजी पत्राढ्यः शुक्लापाङ्गः शिखण्ड्यापि ।

चित्रपिच्छः कलापि च मेघमालः शिखी ध्वजी ॥

प्रचलाकी बर्हिणोऽपि बर्ही तिलशिखीति च ।

मेघनादानुलसी स्याच्चित्रमेखल इत्यपि ॥

कलापो बर्हभारोऽस्य पिच्छबर्हं च न स्त्रियाम् ।

शिखण्डी च शिखण्डो नानेत्रंभण् चन्द्रिका स्त्रियाम् ॥

- *Kalpadrukośa* 103 to 107

4. अभिभवति मनः कदम्बवायौ
मदमधुरे च शिखण्डिनां निनादे ।
जन इव धृतेश्चाल जिष्णुर्न
हि महतां सुकरः समाधिभङ्गः ॥
- *Kirātārjuniya*, X.23

5. अयमभिनवमेषश्यामलोत्तुङ्गसानु-
र्मदमुखरमयूरीमुक्तसंसक्तकेकः ।
शकुनिशबलनीडानोकहस्निग्धवर्ष्मा
वितरति बृहदशमा पर्वतः प्रीतिमक्ष्णोः ।
- *Mālaktī-mādhava* IV.5

6. पीठानां फलकानां च स्तंभानां च शिखण्डिनाम् ।
वर्तुलानां पूतिकानां च तन्तुवाजिककुंभिनाम् ॥
- *Viśvakarmāvastuśāstra*, 4.16

7. मयूरशब्दे प्रथमेऽर्थलाभः स्त्रियं द्वितीये लभते तृतीये ।
नृपाद्भयं चौरभयं चतुर्थे भीः पंचमे सिद्ध्यति कर्म षष्ठे ॥
अन्यान् क्षुधातो विदधाति नादान् मिष्टान्नदो वाममुपैति केकी ।
मांगल्यदो नृत्यति भाषितेन प्रीतिः शुभं तस्य विलोकितेन ॥
- *VasantS* 8.22, 23

8. While describing the remedies for improving beauty and vājīkaraṇa, such odd suggestions are given (*Kāmasūtra* 7.29)

9. हर्षात्तदाब्रवीदिन्द्रो मयूरं नीलबर्हिणम् ।
प्रीतोऽस्मि तव धर्मज्ञ भुजङ्गाद्धि न ते भयम् ।
इदं नेत्रसहस्रं तु यत्तद्दहै भविष्यति ।
वर्षमाणे मयि मुदं प्राप्स्यसे प्रीतिलक्षणम् ॥
- *VR VII.18.20, 22*

□

Śyena

1) Introduction

Śyena, described in the Sanskrit literature, is a bird of prey and has been identified variously as a hawk, a falcon, an eagle, an owl or a vulture. Earliest references to Śyena can be found in the Vedas, the Śrautsūtras, the Śulbasūtras, various lexicons starting from 6th C. AD and so on. When we come across the description of Śyenaciti - the piling of bricks in a Soma sacrifice in the form of a falcon-, the geometrical designs of the bird are amazing. It is felt that ancient Indians might have studied the measurements and the wingspan of the bird by close observation of the bird.

It is generally believed that falconry was known in China around 2000 BC and in Persia 1700 BC. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, "In Japan (falconry) appears to have been known at least 600 years BC and probably at an equally early date in India, Arabia, Iran and Syria (Vol. 9, p. 44). " It is further said that " in India falconry has always been a flourishing art" and that " Indian falconers far surpass Iranians and Arabs." (Vol. 9, p. 47)

In his *Aṣṭādhyāyī* (4.2.58), Pāṇini speaks of the formation of the word 'Śyenampāta' denoting the art of falconry. 'Śyenampāta' is a kind of hunting (*mṛgayā*) which literally means, 'a chase with hawks to bring down or fell the prey.' In the same text, another reference is found at 6.3.71 where it is said 'श्येनतिलस्य पाते ने ॥'

An attempt has been made here to study the references to Śyena.

In Sanskrit literature there are various mythical stories about the Śyena¹. In moral stories also, the bird has its own place. We find unusual similies. In the *Raghuvamśa*, the wings of the falcon have been used in a similie as 'upamāna', on the basis of their dusky colour:

श्येनपक्षपरिधूसरालकाः सांध्यमेघरुधिरार्द्रवाससः ।

अङ्गना इव रजस्वला दिशो नो बभूवुरवलोकनक्षमाः ॥

- Raghu.11.60

"The quarters, with the wings of falcons for their grey locks, and with the evening clouds for their blood-wet garments, became unfit to be seen like women in menses with their hair dusky like the falcon's wing and their blood -wet clothes resembling evening clouds."

Elsewhere in the same text (Raghu.7.46), the sharp, pointed nails of the falcon have been mentioned.

The word Śyena is some times translated as a 'hawk'. However it is better to be understood as a 'falcon'. There is a difference between a hawk and a falcon. Hawks have round wings and a long tail. They are slim, yellow-eyed and have middle toe longed. Falcons are black-eyed, short tailed and they are more stout. They have moustachial stripe, malar stripe. It is an interchangeable species.

2) Etymology and Synonyms of Śyena

In the *Nirukta* there is a reference to Śyena from the Rgveda, where the sun

was compared to the Śyena.

जस्तम् इव श्येनम् । (Tied like a falcon)

Here 'Jastam' is 'Baddham', the root verb 'Jasa' (1Ā) means to be exhausted or starved or to strike, to liberate. During Yāska's period, according to Durga the root verb meant 'to bind, to bind round, to take or hold captive'. Durga further says that kings used to practice hawking to catch other birds.

Śyena was analysed as श्येनः शंसनीयं गच्छति । 'Śyena flies swiftly or the speed of Śyena is praiseworthy'.

श्यायते श्येनः । (Kṣīrasvāmī on Amarakośa 2/5/15)

"Śyena is one who moves Śyai means to go, to move."

Synonyms²

श्येनः शशाः क्रव्यादो क्रूरो वेगी खगान्तकः ।

कामान्धस्तीव्रसंतापस्तरस्वी तार्क्ष्यनायकः ॥

-RājN/ DhN, 6.65

श्येन = hawk, falcon; शशाद = One who devours a hare; क्रव्याद = One who devours flesh
क्रूर = One who is fierce; वेगी = swift; खगान्तक = destroyer of birds; कामान्ध = blind with
lust; तीव्रसंताप = violently furious; तरस्वी = energetic; तार्क्ष्यनायक = leader Garuḍa."

श्येनस्तरस्वी दाक्षाय्यो दूरदर्शी शशादनः ।

कामान्धस्तीव्रसंतापः क्रव्यादस्तार्क्ष्यनायकः ।

वेगी खगान्तकः क्रूर एतद्भेदा अनेकशः ॥

-KalK, 11.87,88

The differences are mentioned as

शालियाजा वडाश्चैव लङ्गवः प्राञ्जिका अणिः ॥

रङ्गणाश्चैव संवाणा गृध्रा अपि च वेसराः ॥

अचण्डिकाः कंविकाश्च द्रोणकाश्चावहावकाः ।

पापर्द्धिरसिकैर्ज्ञेया गन्धमादनसम्भवाः ॥

नीलच्छदस्तु करणो लम्बपर्णो रणप्रियः ।

रणमत्तः पिच्छबाणः स्थूलनीडो भयंकरः ॥

- KalK, 11.90,92

Few Synonyms are repeated in this verse. Those which are new words are explained here:

दाक्षाय्य (Dākṣāyya) - vulture (दक्ष = alert)

दूरदर्शी (Dūradarśī) - One who is farsighted

शालियाज (Śāliyāja) - The meaning is not clear.

वडाः (vatā) a sort of bird. (वडा = Vada a small lump)

लङ्गव = laṅgava ('laṅ' cl. I P). to limp

प्राञ्जिक (Prāñjika) - प्राञ्जिक means a hawk.

(The other variation is प्राञ्जिका = a female falcon)

अणिः (Aṇi) - The point of the nail or of a sharp stake)

रङ्गणाः (raṅgaṇa, cl. I.P.) - to move to and fro, to rock

One who moves to and fro.

संवाण (Saṅvaṇa) - a kind bird. sam V2 vā p. = to blow at the same time, blow

गृध्र (Gr̥dhra) - One who is greedy.

वेसर (Vesara, Ves cl. I. P.) - Vesti to go, move.

अचण्डिक (Acaṇḍikā) - a-caṇḍa = gentle.

कंविक (Kanvikā) - meaning is not clear.

द्रोणक (Droṇaka) - meaning is not clear.

वहावक (Vahāvaka) - meaning is not clear.

पापर्दि (pāparddhi) - 'sin-thriving', hunting, chase (pāpardhika = a hunter).

गन्धमादनसम्भव (Gandhamādanasambhava). those that are born on the
Gandhamādana.

नीलच्छद (Nilacchada) - One who is blue-winged.

करण (Karaṇa) - Clever, skillful.

लम्बपर्ण (Lambaparṇa) - One who has long wings.

रणप्रिय (Raṇapriya) - One who is fond of war or battle, falcon, warlike

रणमत्त (Raṇamatta) - furious.

पिच्छवाण (Picchabāna) - One who is arrow-feathered - a hawk.

स्थूलनीड (Sthūlanīḍa) - One who has large, big huge nest.

भयंकर (Bhayankara) - One who is terrible, fearful.

3) References to Śyena in Sanskrit literature

A) Oldest references to the Śyena

In the Vedic literature, Śyena is mentioned in two distinct patterns, the first where it is described in several ways and the other where it is mentioned in the context of falconry. Śyena is variously described as mighty, glorious, vigorous, swift, fast, one that flies to a cherished eyre. He has strong feathers, and is known for his supreme flight, one that cannot be bound. He was hunted and his feathers were used. There are certain excellent behavioural observations of Śyena. He flies in pairs; at his mere sight other birds tremble, He is mountain born, his feather falls in flight (probably when attacking other bird in mid air). He is also symbolically compared with the ethereal human soul. So also references occur that describe the Śyena as one that is tamed and kept in the house or one that can be taught to kill.

स त्वामद् वृषा मद् सोमः श्येनाभूतः सुतः ।
येना वृत्रं निरद्भ्यो जघन्य वज्रिन्नोजसार्चन्ननु स्वराज्यम् ॥
- RV1.80.2

"The mighty flowing soma-draught, brought by the Hawk, hath gladdened thee,
That in thy strength, O Thunderer, thou hast struck down Vṛtra from the floods, lauding
thine down imperial sway."

Sāyaṇa says: श्येनाभूतः श्येनरूपमापन्नया पश्याकारया गायत्र्या दिवः सकाशादाहृतः ---- ।

"(The Soma) is the one fetched by śyena, i.e., by the metre Gāyatri, from heaven
having assumed the form of a śyena."

'श्येनो न । श्येननामको बलवान् पक्षीव दूरगमनातव भयमासीदिति गम्यते ।'

"'Like a falcon'. It appears that you had the fear, due to going far away, like the strong
bird called falcon."

अहेर्या॑तारं॒ कम॑पश्य॒ इन्द्र॑ हृदि॒ यत् ते॑ जघ्नुषो॒ भीर॑गच्छत् ।
 नव॑ च॒ यन् नव॑ति च॒ स्रव॑न्तीः श्ये॒नो न भी॑तो अ॒तरो॑ रजांसि ॥
 - RV 1.32.14

"Whom did you see avenging the dragon, o Indra, as the fear possessed your heart when you had slain (him), (and when), like a frightened falcon, crossed the regions, nine and ninety flowing (rivers)?"³

In the following verses, once again the speed of the falcon is praised.

आ श्ये॑नस्य॒ जव॑सा॒ नूत॑नेना॒ स्मे या॑तं॒ नास॑त्या॒ सज्जोषा॑ : ।
 हवे॑ हि॒ वाम॑श्चिना॒ रात॑हव्यः॒ शश्व॑त्त॒माया॑ उ॒षसो॑ व्युष्टौ ॥
 - RV 1.118.11

"Come unto us combined in love, Nāsatyas; come with the fresh swift vigour of the falcon.

Bearing oblations I invoke you, Aśvins, at the first break of everlasting morning."⁴

प्र सु॑ ष॒ विभ्यो॑ मरु॒तो वि॑रस्तु॒ प्र श्ये॑नः॒ श्येने॑भ्यः॒ आशु॑पत्वा ।
 अच॑क्रया॒ यत् स्व॑षया॒ सुप॑र्णो॒ हव्यं॑ भरन्म॒नवे॑ देव॒जुष्ट॑म् ॥
 - RV 4.26.4

"Before all birds be ranked this Bird, o Maruts; supreme of falcons be this fleet-winged falcon,

Because strong-pinioned, with no car to bear him, he brought to Manu the God-loved oblation."

Sāyana says: विः पक्षी श्येनः । --- श्येनः सुपर्णः श्रवः सोमाहरणनिमित्तं यशः विविदे लेष ॥
 "Vi means a bird - Śyena. The śyena, gets the swiftly flying (bird) success in bringing away or snatching the soma."⁵

ऋजि॑प्य ईमिन्द्रा॑वतो॒ न भु॑ज्युं श्ये॒नो ज॑भार॒ बृह॑तो॒ अधि॑ षण्णे : ।
 अ॒न्तः प॑तत् प॒तत्र्य॑स्य॒ पर्ण॑मिष॒ याम॑नि॒ प्रसि॑तस्य॒ तद् वे : ॥
 - RV 4.27.4

"The Falcon bore him from heaven's lofty summit as the swift car of Indra's friend bore Bhujyu. Then downward hither fell a flying feather of the Bird hastening forward in his journey".

The Śyenasūkta (4.27.1-4) describes the soul (ātman) by using the analogy of the falcon. It describes the soul (ātman) by using the analogy of the falcon.

The following verses represent another aspect of a falcon which speaks of his peculiar calls: Soma is compared with śyena:

आ क॒लशेषु॑ धावति श्ये॒नो वर्म॑ वि गा॒हते॑ ।
 अ॒भि द्रो॑णा॒ कनि॑क्रदत् ॥

- RV 9.67.14

"(The soma juice) dips within the jars: (like) the falcon, he wraps him in his robe and goes

loud roaring to the vats of wood."

Sāyana says, '---यथा श्येनः : वर्म वरणीयं कुलायं वि गाहते प्रविशति तद्वत् ।---

"As Śyena enters the selected coat of mail or envelope, (or in a) nest ---"

(kulāya = a woven texture, web, nest (of a bird))

The other Vedas⁶ take note of the Śyena in a different way.

यथा श्येनात् पतत्रिणः : संविजन्ते अहर्दिवि सिंहस्य स्तनथोर्यथा । --

- AV 5.21.6

"As the birds (patatrin) are all in a tremble at the falcon, day by day; as at the thundering of the lion, [so do thou, o drum.]"

सम्मिश्रो अरुषो भुवः सूपस्थाभिर्न धेनुभिः । सोदञ्छेनो न योनिमा ॥

- Sāmaveda 2.167^a (Uttarārcika 3/5/3)

"(Red-hued, be blended with the milk that seems to yield its lovely breast) falcon-like resting in your home."

असाव्यं शुर्मदायोप्सु दक्षो गिरिष्ठः ।
श्येनो न योनिमासदत् ॥

- Sāmaveda I.473^a, 2.358^a (Purvarcika 5/1/7)

"Strong, mountain-born, the stalk has been pressed in the streams for rapturous joy. Hawk-like he settles in his home."

In the Śrauta, there is a fire altar mentioned as 'Śyeciti' which was supposed to be important than other types of altars. Śyenaciti consists of 200 bricks having different shapes and layers. Five layers of 1000 bricks had different shapes. Morphometry of the fire altars is interesting subject of study. This point is discussed in this chapter.

According to the commentary on Aitareya Āraṇyaka (1.2.4)⁷, 'the hawk sweeps down on birds, he mounts trees and he is the strongest of birds.'

शतं मा पुर आयसीररक्षत्रघः श्येनो जवसा निरदीयम् इति ।

Aitareya Āraṇyaka 2.5.1

"(Within the womb, I learned at the races of these gods.) A hundred brazen forts restrained me, but like a hawk I escaped swiftly downward."

The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa (1.8.2.10) says that the metre- Gāyatri, took the Soma to gods in the form of a Śyena. Further it is said:

श्येनो भूत्वा पुरापतेति ।

- Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 3.3.4.15

"Fly away by taking the form of the Śyena."

The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa mentions the hawk (6.7.2.4-5) as 'Suparṇa Garutmān.'

In the Kātyāyana Śtrautasūtra (22.3) and in the Ṣaḍaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa (2.4) there are references to the 'śyena' in the context of black magic. It is said:

श्येनो वै वयसां क्षेपिष्ठः । - Ṣaḍaviṃśa Br.2.43 - The commentary says: वयसां पक्षिणां मध्ये श्येनो वै येनाख्यः पक्ष्येव क्षेपिष्ठः क्षिप्रतमः ।'

"Amongst the birds, there is a bird called 'śyena' and it excels in speed."

The fifth sādyaśkra (soma) sacrifice is known as śyena sacrifice (and it) is to be performed by one who wants to employ spells against his enemies.

There are many instructions about how to prepare ground for sacrifice and how to perform the ritual.

The Tāṇḍyamahābrāhmaṇa (1.3.8), also mentions the mighty power of śyena.

B) Śyenaciti : The fire-altar

In the Baudhāyana Śulbasūtras, śyenaciti or the fire altar in the shape of Śyena is described. These Sūtras explain how to construct the fire-altars, the thread for measurement (śulba). They also mentioned advanced geometrical designs and

principles. Different methods of construction of altars are described and the main parts of the Śyenciti are said to be the soul, wings and tail. The citi is constructed with bricks that are arranged in layers with each layer laid in a different geometric pattern so that the joints do not overlap. The direction in which the altar should be laid is mentioned. Other factors that are discussed are, bricks used for the construction of the fire-altars (shape, size, number, ingredients, method of baking, ideal brick, brick that should be rejected, marked bricks for particular position in the altar, etc.), the period up to which the altar may be used and the purpose of the altar. Use of string, rope, bricks and stakes are discussed and method of construction and the application of geometric principles are described in detail.

Some fire altars that were in use were, Alajaciti, Kaṅkaciti and suparṇaciti, in the shapes of various other birds, each having a different specific purpose. Careful observations of these altars reveal resemblance with birds of prey. The resemblances are: Śyenaciti with falcon (prominent moustachinal stripe); Alajaciti with common kestrel (two pin like protruding tail feathers - this point was brought to our notice by ornithologist Dr. Reuven Yosef, IBRCE, Israel, during his visit to India); kaṅkaciti with osprey (the typical angle at the wrist of the wing); and Suparṇaciti with an eagle (by the shape of the wings and the tail).

The Vedic fire ritual known as Śyenayāga was a type of somayajña, which was considered as black magic sacrifice. It was performed with the intention to kill or to injure a particular enemy. For this purpose some changes were done in the original somayāga. But according to the Mimāṃsakas this yāga should not be considered as 'Dharma' because the intention behind the sacrifice was bad.

Baudhāyana Śrautsūtra also mentions Śyenaciti as different from other types of fire-altars, where 1000 bricks were used.

अथ एकेषां ब्राह्मणं भवति श्येनचिदग्नीनां पूर्वा ततिः इति ।

- *Baudhāyanaśrautasūtra* 30.5

'तति : line, row, श्येनचिद् is foremost row of the fires.'

In the *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* we find some explanation regarding 'Śyenaciti'

श्येनचितं चिन्वीत सुवर्गकाम इति ।

The commentary says:

वक्रपक्षो व्यस्तपुच्छः श्येनाकृतिर्भवति । ---- वयसां मध्ये श्येनो ऽतिशीघ्रं पतितुं समर्थः श्येन एव श्येनवच्छीघ्रगाम्येव । ---

- TS 4.7.13

श्येनचितं चिन्वीत सुवर्गकामः श्येनो वै वयसां पतिष्ठः श्येन एव भूत्वा सुवर्गं लोकं पतति ---- ।

- TS 5.4.11

" He should pile in a hawk shape who desires the sky; the hawk is the best flier among the bird; verily becoming a hawk he flies to the world of heaven."

The text on Āyurveda namely 'Aṣṭāṅgasangraha' describes śenādiyāga as

शत्रोर्वधार्थं क्रियमाणा अभिचारप्रयोजनका यागाः ।

- AṣṭS, 9.114

"The śyena sacrifices and so on are the sacrifices that are performed for killing the enemy, having witchcraft as their purpose."

The ability of the Śyena to kill the prey definitely and unerringly must have made a tremendous impact on human mind.

C) References to augury regarding Śyena

There are references to the auspiciousness or inauspiciousness of Śyena.

प्रदक्षिणीकृत्य नरं व्रजंतो यात्रासु वामेन गताः प्रवेशे ।
श्येनाः प्रशस्ता प्रकृतस्वरास्ते शांताः प्रदीप्ता विकृतस्वरास्तु ॥
श्येनो नृणां दक्षिणवामपृष्ठभागेषु भाग्यैः स्थितिमादधाति ।
तिष्ठन् पुरस्तान्मृतये करोति युद्धं जयेच्छत्ररथध्वजस्थः ॥

-VasantŚ, 8.34-35

“(If Śyena birds) encircles man while he is going out and while entering if (the birds) go from (his) left side, give out natural calls, then it implies that (the birds) are calm and if (the birds) give out calls irritatingly, it implies that (they) are disturbed. If the falcon is on the left side of a man, it suggests fortune, if (he) is in front (of a man) it suggests death and if he sits on the flag (and) chariot it suggests victory in the war.”

The *Brhatsaṁhitā* (43.62)⁸ says that if the Śyena alights on the flag of the prince, it augurs a trouble to the eyes.

D) References to Śyena in the *Mrgapakṣiśāstra*-

The author Hamsadeva describes Śyena in great details. Many descriptions are close to the ornithological information of the bird.

श्येनास्तु द्विविधाः प्रोक्ता वैनतेयसमा मताः ॥197॥

“There are two types of the śyena and they are said to be like eagles.”

किञ्चिद् बृहच्छरीराश्च कोपपूर्णाश्च निश्चिताः ।
रक्तवर्णाः श्वेतपादास्तीक्ष्णचञ्चुपुटान्विताः ॥198॥

“They are of a bit larger body and are hot-tempered for sure. They are of red colour, have white legs and sharp beaks.”

पक्षविस्तृतिरम्याश्च क्रूरा र्वगला मताः ।
मांसभक्षणरक्ताश्च भीकराकृतयश्चते ॥199॥

“Their wingspan is broad and beautiful, (their) voice is rough. They like to eat flesh and look fearful.”

गगने दूरगाश्चैव नितरां वेगशालिनः ।
नानावनेषु संचारलोलुपाश्च विनिश्चिताः ॥200॥

“They fly swiftly at the distance in the sky. They like to wander in various forests.”

कर्कशाङ्गरुहोपेता दृढपादाश्च ते मताः ।
दुःसाध्याः सूक्ष्मनेत्राश्च नरगन्धासहिष्णवः ॥201॥

“Their wings are rough and legs are sturdy or powerful. They are difficult to catch. Their eyes are small and dislike human odor.”

मध्यन्दिने क्रौर्यभाजः पक्षिर्हिसनतत्पराः ।
प्रायो गरुत्मत्तुल्यास्ते कीर्तिताः श्येनपक्षिणः ॥202॥

“They become furious (or cruel) during afternoon and start hunting birds. The Śyena birds are almost like eagles.”

Further the Śaśādāna is described as,

शशादनास्तु ते ज्ञेया ये भृशं तुङ्गकायकाः ।
श्वेतवर्णगरुद्युक्ता धूम्रवर्णाङ्गकाश्च ते ॥203॥

“Śaśādana (śyena) are those who are very tall who have white wings, whose body is ashy.”

रक्तचञ्चुपटोपेता रक्तपादतलाश्च ते ।
क्रूरचित्ताः साहसैकतत्पराश्च विनिश्चिताः ॥204॥

“They have red beak and legs. They are certainly cruel and daring.”

विकृतांगरुहोपेताः क्रूरनादकराश्च ते ।
दुर्गन्धदेहाः सततं बलपूर्णाश्च निश्चिताः ॥205॥

“Their wings are curved, they make harsh noise, they stink (and) they are certainly very powerful.”

स्वयूथकलहासक्ताः सर्वपक्षिभयंकराः ।
सान्त्ववाग्विमुखाश्चैव नरगन्धासहिष्णवः ॥206॥

“They like to stay in their flock and they are fearful to other birds, they do not understand soft words and they dislike human smell.”

शशमूषकाश्च क्षुत्तृट्शीतसहा मताः ।
कुंकुमच्छायकण्ठाश्च पत्रिणः केचिदीरिताः ॥207॥

“The hares and mice are their food and they are believed to be patient even though they are hungry, thirsty or feel cold. It is said that there are the śyena birds who have red shade on their throat.”

नानावर्णाङ्गनोपेता पत्रिणः केचिदीरिताः ।
गगने वेगपक्षाश्च नितरां दूरगामिनः ॥208॥

“There are (śyena) birds in the forest that are of different colours. They are swift and fly at long distance”.

शाखाप्रवल्ग्वपत्नीडाश्च निद्रामोहादिसंयुताः ।
सततं प्रियमांसाश्च हठात्पतनशालिनः ॥209॥

Śreṇi no. 25

“They build nests on the end of branches, (they) like to sleep, (they) always like flesh and swoop (on the prey).”

एवं बहुविधा श्येना जायन्ते वनभूमिषु ।
श्येनानां परमं चायुस्तार्क्ष्यवत्परिकीर्तितम् ॥210॥

“Thus there are different types (or species) of Śyena bird in the forest. It is known they have life span like that of the eagles.”

E) Śyena as used in sport

In the following representative verse from the *Rgveda*, the falcon that is accomplished to fetch the desired is said to be worthy of glory:

भरद् यदि विरतो वेविजानः पथोरुणा मनोजवा असर्जि ।
तूयं ययौ मधुना सोम्येनोत श्रवो विविदे श्येनो अत्र ॥

- RV 4.26.5

“When the bird brought it, hence in rapid motion sent on the wide path fleet as thought

he hurried.

“---Swift he returned with sweetness of the Soma, and hence the Falcon hath acquired his glory.”

The art and practice of hawking was prevalent during the Vedic period appears to be a likely possibility. In the *Rgveda*, 'soma' was described as *śyenābhṛta*, 'that which was brought by Śyena'. Probably the falcons or hawks were trained to fetch soma from the higher parts of mountains, where it occurred. Soma is sometimes described as having been brought from the sky by falcons and guarded by Gandharvas. Probably the trained falcon fetched soma from a mountain. Prof. Dave speaks of a possibility that soma could also be some animal food that was also relished by men and falcon as food, since a falcon would not be interested in fetching the herb. (Dave K. N., revised ed.2005, p.205) However, no corroborative evidence is available presently and nothing can be said definitively.

The definitive evidence of falconry is seen in the *Manusmṛti*, where it is said that 'One who rears birds (Pakṣiṅām poṣakaḥ, Manu3.162) or one who lives on falcons (Śyenajivin, Manu 3.164), should be condemned'. It is explained in the commentary by Kullūka as-

पक्षिणां पञ्जरस्थानां क्रीडादर्थं विक्रयार्थं वा पोषकः । (*Manusmṛti* 3.162)

Here, 'Pakṣiṅām poṣaka', refers to the art of training falcons for hunting.

As mentioned in the introduction, the 'Śyena was the favourite bird in the sport and amusement. In the Sanskrit texts like 'Śyena Vinoda' (in *Mānasollāsa*), the *Śyainikaśāstra* we get a detailed and systematic observation based on the first-hand knowledge of a falconer. We find many interesting observations like 'the male falcon is of a smaller size while the female falcon is of a bigger size. The female was preferred in the sport than the male.' The king Someśvara of Cālukya dynasty has provided the information of catching the falcons, taming and then training methods are described.

'Śyena Vinoda', or the sport of hawking, was written by the Cālukya king Someśvara the third, (1129-1130 A.D.), the king of Karnataka. This is the oldest known definitive work on falconry from India and it certainly places Indian falconry much earlier than the Mughal period (1526 A.D.) confirming that it was practised in India from earlier times. The original text is in the Sanskrit language in verse form and is written in the Devnāgarī script. Śyena Vinoda is a part of much larger encyclopedic work called '*Mānasollāsa*' or '*Abhilāṣitārthacintāmaṇi*' which has five volumes of twenty chapters each and is likely to be a collection of works of several contemporary poets. (Śrīgondkar, 1939 and Śāstri, K., 1955). The name of this text signifies that in this comprehensive work of that time a person could get any information that was desired. In the *Śyainikaśāstra* (16th C), a much later work, translated into English by M.M. Harprasad Śāstri and edited by Dr. Mohan Chand (1982), the editor reproduces the text of *Śyena Vinoda* in appendix II. In the *Śyena Vinoda* several aspects of falconry are described.

Śyena Vinoda restricts itself only to the practice of hawking. In the text there is an initial brief description of a few birds of prey used in the sport of hawking and various birds of prey that can be used for this sport are enumerated. Methods of catching the falcons and hawks are elaborated and the practitioner is encouraged to devise novel methods. Methods of training the falcons for chasing and capturing prey are narrated.

Methods of feeding them are discussed but medicines for falcons are not described. Habitats where falconry should be performed are mentioned and described. Merits of falcons are briefly discussed; various techniques of releasing the falcons are suggested and the kinds of prey that can be obtained through the trained falcons are enumerated. The most suitable prey-falcon combinations are specified. The basic differences between hawks and falcons are accurately marked. The equipment used in falconry is briefly touched upon. The basic techniques of trapping and training the falcons and hunting with them are described in the *Śyena* and one finds little deviation from these even after a lapse of eight hundred years. This confirms that at that time the techniques described were already refined and perfected from an earlier prolonged practice of falconry. Thus, this sport must be much older than when the text of *Śyena* was written in the twelfth century. Techniques like sewing the eyes of the falcons and serially opening them, teaching them to learn their names while manning, use of the hood and the bells, releasing falcons from either the first or from the hand are described. The optimal period till when the chicks should be taken from the nest are described in relation to the presence of the egg tooth, and this indicates the powers of observation of the ancient falconers in India and their abilities of drawing inferences from the observations. Some techniques like stalking with the bull fell out of popular falconry later and others underwent some changes as more experience was gathered and the refinements in techniques are understandable.

F) Uses of Śyena in Warfare

Amongst other birds, Śyena was used in warfare, either directly or indirectly. This is evident from the following verses. The highly proficient hunting ability of the Śyena must have impressed the ancient Indians.

दुर्गवासिनः श्येनकाकनप्तृभासशुकसारिकोलूककपोतान् ग्राहयित्वा
पुच्छेष्वग्नियोगयुक्तान् परदुर्गे विसृजेत् ॥

-Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra 13.4.14

“Having caught hawks, crows, pheasants, kites, parrots, mynas, owls, and pigeons, with nests in the fort, he should release them in the enemy's fort with fire-mixtures tied to ^{their} tails.”

G) Śyenaavyūha - Strategical formation of infantry

एको रथोऽग्रे कर्तव्यः पश्चाद् द्विरदसप्तकम् ॥3॥
त्रिंशदक्षाः खड्गिशतं पार्श्वे कुन्तधरास्तथा ।
मध्येऽष्टौ रथिनस्त्रिंशदक्षाः पार्श्वे गजद्वयम् ॥4॥
ततश्च पृष्ठाः सर्वे श्येनव्यूहः स उच्यते ।

- *Dhanurveda*, 4th chap.

-*Rājaviṅṅaye Vīramitrodāye Rājacakralakṣṇa*

“(In the Śyenaavyūha) one chariot is in the front place, after that seven elephants are appointed. Thirty horses and hundred warriors are behind the elephants. In the middle eight charioteers, thirty horses (are arranged). On both the sides there are two elephants and other warriors are ready after (them). This formation is called *śyenaavyūha*.”

बृहत्पक्षं मध्यगलपुच्छे श्येनं मुखे तनु ॥1112॥

- *Śukranīti*

“Like the Śyena bird, the (*Śyenaavyūha*) is broad on the wing's place, the place of head

is narrow and the place of neck and tail is midium.”

In the *Mahābhārata*, *Śyenvyūha* was arranged on the war field. It was arranged by Yudhiṣṭhira. In the place of a beak, Yudhiṣṭhira was himself present, in the place of wings Nakula and Sahadeva were appointed and in the last part Bhīma was present.

4) Ornithological information of Śyena

The Laggar, Red-headed Falcon, Amur, Peregrine, Saker, Shaeen Falcon are seen in Western Ghats, Malabar, Kokan and Goa. These are predator birds. There are Red-breasted Falconet, Pied Pigmy Falconet which are very small.

Laggar Falcon was trained to hunt birds as large as Floricans. Peregrine Falcon is a beautiful falcon that usually hunts at dawn or early dusk, stooping on prey at incredible speed. Shaeen Falcon has swift and powerful flight. It stoops on the prey with tremendous velocity, striking in mid-air with its powerful hind claw and bearing the prey away to its favourite perch on a crag to be devoured.

As I have discussed various aspects of śyena before, it is very much clear that ancient Indians have known this bird of prey as a powerful and swift bird. They knew that this bird can be trained for hawking. All the characters described in the Sanskrit literature refer to the qualities of the bird.

Notes

1 One of such stories is given here-

"There was a hunter," he said, "who had been walking all day in the forest but had not been able to get any quarry. Dejected and tired he rested under a tree. His hunting companion, a hawk, was sitting close beside him. The hunter was very thirsty but no water could be found. Then he noticed that water was slowly dripping down from the tree. Delighted, he put down his cup to catch the precious water. Drip, drip - it fell down into the cup, drop by drop. At last the cup was filled and greedily the hunter stretched out his hand to take it. But just before his hand reached the cup, the hawk with a swift movement upset it. The water was lost. The hunter, terribly annoyed, scolded the hawk and replaced the cup. Again the cup slowly filled up; and when it was full, the hunter happy to get a drink of fresh water at last, once more stretched out his hand to take it. But the hawk upset the cup as before. The hunter was now beside himself with rage, and he killed his hawk with one terrible blow. He placed cup again, certain of getting water this time. And while he was waiting for the cup to fill he looked up to see where the water was coming from. And what did he see? A large snake was hanging down from a branch high up in the tree. Its mouth was wide open, and from its mouth drop by drop poison was falling into cup. This was what he had taken to be water. The hawk had twice saved his life, but then he had killed her. With unspeakable regret the hunter buried his old friend who had served him many years and at last had saved his life." (Sv. Atulānanda, 1988, pp 46,47)

2 -- । दाक्षाय्यश्चाप्यथ श्येनो वर्तुलाक्षः शशादनः ॥३०॥

- VaijK; 3.19, 20, 30

वर्तुलाक्ष = One who has round eyes

श्येनः पत्नी शशादनः । 4.400

- AbhiC

श्यायते श्येनः “ श्याकष्टि ” (उणा-२४२) ॥ १ ॥

पत्नी सामान्योऽपि विशेषे वर्तते यत् शाश्वतः - 'येनारव्यो विहगः पत्नी पत्त्रिणी शरपक्षिणी' इति ॥२॥

शशानति शशादनः ॥३॥

= One who devours hares

---- अथ शशादनः ॥१४॥ पत्नी श्येनः ॥--- ॥१५॥

- AK 2/5/14

शशादनश्येनचिल्लवातापी शकुनश्च सः ।

दूरदृग्गृध्रदाक्षाय्या रक्ततुण्डशुकौ समौ ॥

- PNM 3-235

Vātāpi = swelling, fermenting ?

Syena - the white bird.

श्येनौ विहंगमश्चेतौ --- ॥

-Dharanīkośa; Nāntavarya Group 1320 Śāśvatakośa 603.

“Śyenas are white birds..”

श्येनः शुक्ले पत्रिणि ॥

- 2.291; Anekārthasaṅgraha of Ācārya Hemacandra

“Śyena is a white bird.”

श्येनः खगे पाण्डुरे ।

- Śabdārathasamanvayakośa - page 189

= Amongst birds the white Śyena.

(श्येन) श्वेते । श्येनीभिः सुरसिन्धुरोधसि तरुच्छाये कृतं मण्डलम् ।

विहंगमे प्राजिकाख्ये । श्येनावदाते चकिता वनवर्तिका ॥

- Mañkhakośa; 450 ॥

“Prājikā bird is known . A jungle quails shocked by the attack of Śyena.”

“श्यै इ गतौ । 'शास्त्याहञ् विभ्य इतच् ।' उणा २/४६ इति इनच् ।) पाण्डुरवर्ण । इति मेदिनी “पक्षिविशेषः । सञ्चालः इति वाज इति च भाषा । तत्पर्यायः । शशादनः२ पत्नी ३ । इत्यमरः । कपोतारिः८ पतद्भीरुः ५ । इति शब्दरत्नावली । घाति पक्षी ६ गेहकः ७ मारकः८ । इति जटाधारः ॥ शशादः ९ क्रव्यादः क्रूरः ११ वेगी १२ खगान्तकः १३ करगः १४ नीलपिच्छः १५ लम्बकर्णः १६ रणप्रियः १७ रणपक्षी १८ पिच्छबाणः १९ स्थूलनीलः २० भयङ्करः २१ । इति राजनिघण्टुः ॥ शशाघातकः २२ । इति भावप्रकाशः ॥ श्यै उ. गतौ । इति कविकल्पद्रुमः ॥

- ŚK, Page 153 (Vol. 5)

Some of the new synonyms-

सञ्चाल (Sañcāla) - Saṃ - Vca (P. = to move about.

कपोतारि (Kapotāri) - enemy of pigeons.

पतद्भीरु (Patadbhīru) - = terrible to birds.

घाति पक्षी (Ghāti) - a killer bird.

ग्राहक (Grāhaka) - one who catches or seizes.

मारक (Maraka) - one who kills.

करग (Karaga) - One who goes by hands wings?

लम्बकर्ण (Lambakarna) - a hawk, a falcon, long-eared.

स्थूलनील (Sthūlanīla) - a hawk or falcon.

3 Sāyana comments, “---यथा श्येननामको वेगवान् पक्षी स्वकीयस्थानं प्रति आदरेण धावति तद्वत् अहम् इन्द्रं त्वरया प्राप्नोमि । ----”

“As a swift bird named as śyena rushed eagerly to its own dwelling place so do I hurriedly rush to the Indra.”

4 मा त्वां श्येन उद्वधीन्मा सुपुणो मा त्वां विददिषुमान् वीरो अस्ता ।
पित्र्यामनुं प्रदिशं कनिक्रदत् सुमङ्गलो भद्रवादी वदेह ॥

- RV 2.42.2

“ Let not the falcon kill thee, nor the eagle : let not the arrow-bearing archer reach thee.

Still crying in the region of the Fathers, speak here auspicious, bearing joyful tidings.”

Sāyana says, हे शकुने त्वा त्वां श्येनः प्रबलः पक्षिविशेषः मा वधीत् मा हिंसीत् ।

O bird, please don't kill me like the special, strong kind of a bird-Śyena.

इन्द्र पिब वृषधृतस्य वृष्ण आ यं ते श्येन उंशते जभारं ।
यस्य मदे च्यावयसि प्र कृष्टीर्यस्य मदे अप गोत्रा ववर्थ ॥

- RV 3.43.7

“ Drink of the strong pressed out by strong ones, Indra, that which the Falcon brought thee when thou longest; In whose wild joy thou stirrest up the people, in whose wild joy thou didst unbar the cow-stalls.”

5 ऋजीपी श्येनो ददमानो अंशु परावतः शकुनो मन्द्रं मरुम् ।
सोमं भरद् दादहाणो देवान् दिवो अमुष्मादुत्तरादाय ॥

- RV 4.26.6

“Bearing the stalk, the Falcon speeding onward, Bird bringing from afar the draught that gladdens,

Friend of the Gods, brought, grasping fast, the soma which he had taken from you loftiest heaven.”

6 र्मयत मरुतः श्येनमायिनं मनोजवसं वृष्णं सुवृक्तिम् ॥

Taittirīya saṁhitā 2.4.7.1

“Stay, o Maruts, the speeding falcon;
swift as mind, the strong, the glorious.”

7 बाहुभ्यामधिरोहेदेवं श्येनो वयांस्यभिनिविशत एवं वृक्षं स उ
वयसां वीर्यवत्तम इति तस्माद् बाहुभ्यामधिरोहेत्, इति ।

Aitareyaāraṇyaka 1.2.4

8 क्रव्यादकौशिककपोतकाककंकैः केतुस्थितैर्महदुशन्ति भयं नृपस्य ।
चाषेण चापि युवराजभयं वदन्ति श्येनो विलोचनभयं निपतन्करोति ॥

- Brhatsaṁhitā 43.62

Ulūka

1) Introduction

Ulūka or the owl is one of those birds that are entangled in belief-systems of being auspicious or inauspicious. There are various concepts regarding owls. Owl - being a nocturnal bird it is feared some times for having the power of some super-human nature. In some European countries it is a bird representing intelligence and good-luck.

In India, in some parts people have fear of an owl mainly because of its being nocturnal and the sight of an owl is related to death and to some ill omen. The shrill, screeching sound of the owl adds to some kind of mystic effect! People believe that if the owl alights the house it augurs a misfortune or calamity.

From the Vedic times people have certain beliefs about the birds, their being auspicious or inauspicious. In the *R̥gveda* (7.104.22), the pigeon and the owl are referred to as birds bringing some misfortune. In the Purāṇic times, some birds were believed to be the carriers of various deities. The owl was said to be the vehicle of Goddess Lakṣmī-Goddess of Wealth. It is the vehicle of Goddess Cāmuṇḍā who was born from Goddess Kauśīkī. (Joshi N.P., 1979, pp.243, 244)

In the iconographical references there are images of Goddess Lakṣmī (one of the eight forms of Goddess Cāmuṇḍā) preserved in Kanauj, Khajurāho and Los Angeles. In Ellora the owl is depicted as the vehicle or carrier of Goddess Cāmuṇḍā. There are also other reflections on the co-relation between the owl and the Goddess of wealth. In West Bengal, the owl is commonly worshipped with Lakṣmī and pictures can be seen where the owl is pulling the Chariot of Lakṣmī. The owl is discussed from the philosophical point of view also. As the owl stoops on its prey without making any noise, which is special feature its flight, death attacks without giving any intimation. So a man must be careful about his deeds and thoughts. (Sv. Nirmalānanda, Bengali year 1410, pp.159-173). It is fact that, owls feed on various small animals, particularly the mice which cause damage to crops and are therefore greatly beneficial to agriculture. It is probably for this reason that the owl is associated with Lakṣmī, the Goddess of Wealth.

In West Bengal, whenever there is any auspicious event, married women make a particular sound which is called as 'Uludhvani'. In the Monier-Williams' Sanskrit dictionary, the word 'Ululi' means an outcry indicating prosperity. Secondly, in Bengal the Goddess Kālī is adored and worshipped. She is a powerful and fierce female deity. 'Cāmuṇḍā' is a form of Durgā. So the powerful, nocturnal bird like owl can easily be accepted and worshipped in the society.

In the North East India there are many tribes and there is an interesting divergence of ideas in the realm of folklore, mythology and religion. There are bird stories classified around four motifs as the relation of birds with the Sun, creation of birds for sacrifice, stories of helpful birds and of dangerous birds. In a tribe namely 'Moklum', there is a story about an owl possessing fire. The story is very short and

goes like this-

"At first men had feathers and wings but they had no fire. There was an owl who had flint and iron and used to make fire with it. This was because he was quite naked and used to feel very cold. One day some men met the owl and gave him their feathers and wings in exchange for the flint and iron. After that men were able to make fire." (Elwin Verrier, 1993, p.254)

There is another tribal story (the Ashing story) about a child who turned into an owl. The child when he was born, he was very ugly and could not speak. He grew up and searched everywhere for a wife. But he looked so horrible that no one would marry him. He became sad and lonely and he turned into an owl. Afterwards he made friends with a hornbill. The Hornbill helped to get wife for dumb owl out of compassion, but in a decisive manner! By seeing the 'husband', the girl escaped. Her parents warned her to go back to her 'husband's' home. The owl took the girl with him, but she escaped again. When she was washing herself in a small pond, the owl caught up with her and killed her. It is said that the owl has always been sad since then. He went to her parents and wept before them. Still the owl weeps for his dead bride every night! (Elwin Verrier, 1991, pp.73-75)

These are the glimpses of some of the Indian tribal and mythological stories about an owl. They certainly exhibit the impact of this nocturnal bird on the mind set-up of people. We come across similar notions in Sanskrit literature.

In the Jātaka literature, there is a story 'Ulūka Jātaka' (270) (Cowell, 1990, Vol.II, p.242). This is a story depicting the rivalry between the crows and owls. Crows used to eat owls during daytime and at night owls flew about, nipping off the heads of the crows as they slept and killed them. The Story runs like this.

"Once birds in the Himālayas got together and they thought of making the owl their king. The crow immediately opposed the idea by saying, 'stay now! if that is what he looks like when he is being consecrated king, what will he look like when he is angry? If he only looks at us in anger, we shall be scattered like sesame seeds thrown on a hot plate. I don't want to make this fellow king!" He repeated his feelings in these words,

"I like not (with all deference be it said)
To have the owl anointed as our head.
Look at his face! if this good humour be,
what will he do when he looks angrily?"¹



By hearing this the owl naturally got upset and thenceforward there was always enmity between them."

In a Tibetan Buddhist text 'The Buddha's law among the birds', the owl is seen as giving a wise thought. It says, "The hour of death without insight from meditation, - what misery!

A priest without morals, - what, misery!
An old lama without judgement, - what misery!
Here the owl has described various flaws in human behaviour".

- (Conze, 1996, p. 27)

In a Sufi tale named 'The conference of the birds' by Farid ud-Din Attar, the owl is seen to be talking to the bird -(Attar Farid Ud-Din, 1971, p.26), Hoopoe which

had spiritual knowledge. The owl said, " I have chosen for my dwelling ruined and tumbledown house. I was born among the ruins and there I take my delight -- but not in drinking wine. --- "After the owl had expressed the Hoopoe is seen to give advice to him.

In English literature, poets have taken a note of unique appearance of the owl. For example, it is said,

Owl is my favourite. Who flies
like a nothing through the night,
Who-whoing.
Is a feather duster in leafy
corners ring-a-rosyng
boles of mice." - George Macbeth (1932-1992)
(Ed. Adcock F. and Simms J., 1995, p. 283)

It is interesting to take a review of some of the notions associated with the owl and see how people from different parts of the world look at this bird in general. Some people respect a white owl. In Lithuania, the owl is not killed out of fear, as it is linked with the evil spirit. In Africa, Bantus do not touch the owl, because it is associated with sorcerers. Bechuana people have a superstition that the owl sitting on the roof of a house brings calamity and in order to ward off the evil effects, a witch doctor is summoned. He chants magic spells and purifies the place with his charms. Many American tribes associated the owl with the dead. (Hastings J. 1959, p. 524)

Owl is one of the prominent birds with which are associated a number of beliefs and superstitions. Most of the times, the owl is linked with magicians, sorcerers or shamans. It is believed that the owl possesses some mystical powers that can affect human beings. Hence in many parts of the world there was a custom of using owl's feathers. People used to wear owl's head and beak at feasts. Priest carried a stuffed owl as a symbol of their profession. An owl flying into a dovecot indicates that it will bring good luck. Its cry frees one from fever and if it is seen near the house of a pregnant woman, it augurs an easy delivery. In Greece, the owl was supposed to be the symbol of science and arts.

All over the world we find many interesting belief-systems regarding the owl.

" The eagle owl is an object of respect but it is hazardous to mimic the cry of it also. It is also interesting to note that the owl was the incarnation of divinity was the accepted belief in one Samoan village. The eagle-owl was considered beneficial and it was also described as "divine little bird", "servant of the world", etc. etc.". The bird is looked generally as an evil omen and as a lure. It is linked with the female sex, and considered as woman's bird. It goes with Greek deity Pallas Athene. In Australian tribes there is a belief that when an owl is killed, some woman's death is sure to follow. Owl is known as the corpse bird, corpse hen, death owl and sorrowing mother. All these names indicate the superstitions to which its nocturnal habits and startling cry have given rise. There is a mythological story where a beautiful girl named 'Nyctimene' (the night) hid in the deep forest because some bad deed committed by her. She was turned into an owl by Pallas Athene. (Charles de Kay, 1898, pp.154.155)

Some people believe that an owl is an 'immortal maid' because it protects the grain field by killing the menace like rats. In Austria, Greece and Italy, an owl is

considered as an amusing pet. Owl is depicted on coins. Perhaps because of its style of killing the prey, it is considered to be the symbol of warrior goddess. It is a symbol of wisdom. The owl is called 'glaux' (glarer) and Pallas is the deity of night. Pallas is called 'glaux-eyed' perhaps because she could see in the dark like an owl to carry off men's souls.

Now we will take a review of the references to the owl in Sanskrit literature.

2) Synonyms of Ulūka

The word 'ulūkayātu' occurring in the *Rgveda* (7.104.22) refers to a kind of black magic. It may have these aspects-

- 1) One, which moves like an owl.
- 2) One, which attacks in the night by hiding oneself.

Manfred Mayrhofer explains the word 'ulūka' as follows-

"Ululih" means crying aloud or noisy (Ululare heulen). This word is shown to be onomatopoeic and 'ulūka' is an owl.

Synonyms-

उलूकस्तु वायसारातिपेचकौ
 दिवान्धः कौशिको घूको दिवाभीतो निशाटनः
 -AK 2.5.15²

These are the descriptive synonyms,

- 1) Ulūka is one, which makes shrill outcry.
- 2) Vāyasārāti is one, which is an enemy of the crow.
- 3) Pecaka is a kind of an owl. (In Bengali language an owl is called a 'Lakṣmī Pecha'.)
- 4) Divāndha is one, which cannot see during the day.
- 5) Kauśika is one, which resides in kuśa (grass) or one, which resides in holes (kośa).
- 6) Ghūka is one, which makes a sound like ghu, ghu-an onomatopoeic word.
- 7) Divābhīta is one, which is afraid of light of the day.
- 8) Niśāṭana is one, which wanders during the night.

In the PNM,³ the only word other than those mentioned above is kākaśatru which means 'an enemy of the crows'..

Some of the new synonyms in the KosK (Simhādivarga 103, 104)⁴ -

घूत्काकर = Ghūtkākara = one who makes panting or puffing sound.

हृदिलोचन = Hrdilocana = one who has eyes in the heart . (Is it believed because an owl can see during dark night?)

उलूको नक्तचारी च दिवान्धः कौशिकस्तथा ।
 कौशी घर्घरको भीरुः काकशत्रुर्निशाचरः ॥ 472 ॥
 क्षुद्रोलूकः शाकुनेयः पिङ्गलो दुडुलश्च सः ।
 वृक्षाश्रयी बृहद्रावः पिङ्गलाक्षो भयंकरः ॥ 473 ॥
 उलूकस्तामसो घूको दिवान्धः कौशिकः कुविः ।
 नक्तंचरो निशाटश्च काकारिः क्रूरघोषकः ॥ 487 ॥

- RājN/ DhaN

Naktacārī = One who walks at night. (a nocturnal bird).

Kauṣī = The other word 'Kauṣika' is explained earlier. The other meaning is 'one having paws'. 'made of kuśa grass', or 'one of silken paws'.

Ghargharaka = One who makes a sounding like gurgling. 'Gharghara' is an onomatopoeic word which means an uttering with an indistinct gurgling or purring sound.

The other meaning of 'Ghargharaka' is a kind of musical instrument. Does this refer to an owl whose calls are sweet and melodious like that of 'Forest Owllet'?

Bhīru = One who is fearful, timid or cowardly.

Kākaśatru = One who is an enemy of the crows.

Kṣudrolūka = a small owl.

śākuneya = 'Śakunī' means a bird.

Piṅgala = a small kind of owl, one who is reddish-brown, tawny, yellow coloured.

Duḍula = a small owl.

Vṛkṣāśrayi = a tree-dweller, a kind of small owl.

Bṛhadrāvin = crying loud, a species of small owl.

Piṅgalākṣa = one having reddish-brown eyes.

Bhayānkara = one who is fierce.

Tāmasa = one who is dark, an owl.

Kuvi = ? The meaning is not clear.

Krūrāghoṣaka = one who gives out fierce cries.

उलूकचेटी हिवका स्यात् कनकाक्षी च पिङ्गला ।

उलूकः पेचकः कोण्ठः काकारिर्हिलोचनः ॥

नक्तञ्चरो घर्घरको निशादर्शी बहुस्वनः ॥

महापक्षी च कृष्णोऽसौ नक्तकः कृतमालकः ।---

- VaijK 3.21-22

Ulukaceṭī = a species of female owl. ('ceṭa' means a servant but here it is not clear in what context the word is used)

Hikkā = 'hikk' means to kill, to injure. 'Hikkā' means to make a spasmodic sound in the throat. This may indicate a female owl making a peculiar sound.

Kanakākṣī = one who is 'gold-eyed' (or here 'yellow-eyed').

Koṅṭha = The meaning is not clear.

Kākāri = one who is an enemy of the crows.

Harilocana = one who has yellow or reddish-brown eyes.

Niśādarśi = one who can see at night.

Bahusvana = one who makes many sounds.

Mahapakṣi = a large bird.

Kṛṣṇa = one who is black.

Naktaka = one who (works) at night.

Kṛtamālaka = one who is spotted.

The synonyms described above give us the various descriptions of nature, appearance and calls of the owl bird in general.

3) References to Ulūka in Sanskrit literature

A) Oldest references to Ulūka

From the *Rgveda* onwards 'ulūka' is the general word for the owl. The bird was noted for its cry or the shrill voice and was deemed to be the harbinger of ill fortune. In the *Rakṣoghna* hymn (RV 7.104.17), the female fiend is described as one who wanders about at night like an owl.

प्र या जिगति खर्गलेव नक्तमपं द्रुहा तन्वं १ गूहमाना ।
वृत्रां अनन्तां अव सा पदीष्टु ग्रावाणो घन्तु रक्षसं उपब्देः ॥

- RV 7.104.17

"May the cruel female fiend who, throwing off the concealment of her person, wanders about at night like an owl, fall headlong down into the unbounded caverns may the stones that grind the Soma destroy the Rākṣasas by their noise."

In another mantra from the same hymn, an evil spirit in the form of an owl is mentioned. This verse also occurs in the AV (8.4.17) with some variations.

One of the mantras from the RV (10.165.4), the noise of the owl is supposed to be inauspicious.

उलूकयातुं शुशूलूकयातुं जृहि श्यातुमुत कोकयातुम् ।
सुपर्णयातुमुत गृध्रयातुं दृषदेव प्र मृण रक्ष इन्द्र ॥

- RV 7. 104. 22, of AV 8.4.22

"Destroy the evil spirit, whether in the form of an owl, of an owlet, of a dog, or of a duck, of a hawk or of of a vulture, slay the Rākṣasas, Indra, (with the thunderbolt) as with a stone."

यदुलूको वदति मोघमेतद्यत् कपोतः पदमग्नौ कृणोति ।
यस्य दूतः प्रहित एष एतत्तस्मै यमाय नमो अस्तु मृत्यवे ॥

- RV 10.165.4

"May that which the owl shrieks be in vain, (and may it be in vain) that the pigeon takes his place upon the fire; may this reverence be paid to Yama, (the god of) Death, as whose messenger he is sent."

We have a similar verse in the AV.

अमून् हेतिः पतत्रिणी न्येऽतु यदुलूको वदति मोघमेतत् ।
यद् वा कपोतः पदमग्नौ कृणोति ॥

- AV 6.29.1

"Then yonder let the winged missile come upon; what the owl utters, [be] that to no purpose, or that the dove makes its track (padá) at the fire."

We have the references to the Ulūka in the sacrifice.

आलभते वनस्पतिभ्य उलूकान् ।

- VS 24.23

"(He) immolates the owls for the plants."

Owls were offered at the horse sacrifice to the forest trees, probably because

they roosted there.

कपोतः उलूकः शशस्ते नैऋता ।

-TS 5.5,18,1

“Yours are the pigeon, the owl and the hare, you the Nīrti.”

b) References to Ulūka in Sanskrit poetry

The technique of warfare is described in the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, Sugrīva (a monkey-king) says to Lord Rāma:

प्रविष्टः शत्रुसैन्यं हि प्राप्तः शत्रुरतर्कितः ।

निहन्यादन्तरं लब्ध्वा उलूको वायसानिव ॥

- VR 6.11.177*

“Indeed; an enemy, who has belonged to the hostile ranks, has unexpectedly made his appearance. Finding an opportune moment he may kill us even as an owl would destroy crows.”

The *Mahābhārata* describes the owl as a bird which should not be eaten (12.37.18a). A technique in warfare was adopted by Aśvatthāmā when he saw how the mighty owl attacked the crows at night, (Mbh. 10.1.36-38) The owl is described as:

महास्वनं महाकायं हर्यक्षं बभ्रुपिङ्गलम् ।

सुदीर्घघोणानखरं सुपर्णमिव वेगिनम् ॥

- MBh. 10.1.37

“(His) voice was terrible (and loud), body was big, (his) eyes (were) black, the colour of the body (was) light brown, (his) beak and paws were big and broad (and) he fled speedily like the eagle.”

The *Mahābhārata* (12.149.92a) and the '*Rāghavapaṇḍavīya*' (I.83) have a mention to the jungles that are full of calls of the owls.

In the '*Kumārasambhava*' (I.12) it is said,

दिवाकराद्रक्षति यो गुहासु लीनं दिवाभीतमिवान्धकारम् ।

“(It is as though) the darkness hides itself in the caves during the daylight like an owl that has fear of the daylight.”

The owl is depicted in Sanskrit literature at various places, which show that the bird was seen prominently and it did not go unnoticed. In the *Subhāṣitas*, it is said,

यद्यपि तरणेः किरणैः सकलमिदं विश्वमुज्ज्वलं विदधे ।

तदपि न पश्यति घूकः पुराकृतं भुज्यते कर्म ॥

- SuRbh 233

“Even if this whole world rendered bright by the rays of the sun, an owl does not see them (as) it suffers from the actions in the past.”

In a Bengali book explaining the Philosophy behind the cultural and Purāṇic concept of carriers of various Gods and Goddesses, it is said that the owl is a flesh eater, fierce and expert in hunting techniques. While flying the wings of the owl do not make sound. That is why it is a powerful bird of prey. Like the owl, death also comes unexpectedly and without giving any intimation!

Thus the Ulūka has an important place in Sanskrit literature. Here was an attempt to find the reasons behind various beliefs that are related to the owl and which are

strongly rooted in Society. It is very important to find the answers to these beliefs as it helps to protect the bird and encourages the conservation attitude.

c) Superstitions and augury regarding Ulūka

From the Vedic times, we have already seen that there is a tendency to condemn owls. Here are some references implying the belief that owls are inauspicious.

In the *Mahābhārata*, there are references to the owls when it is aimed to show the horrifying effects of war. It is said:

उलूकाश्चाप्यदृश्यन्त शंसन्तो विपुलं भयम् ।
विशेषतः कौरवाणां ध्वजिन्यामतिदारुणम् ॥
- MBh. 7. 129. 15a

“The owls, suggesting a great fear and giving out fierce calls were seen especially in the army of the Kauravas.”

At some places the crows and the owls were hiding their heads near the flags (of the Kauravas). The reference runs like this-

शिरः स्वलीयन्त भृशं काकोलूकाश्च केतुषु ।
(Mbh. 9. 61*. 4pr.)

Elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata*, (MBh 13.112.98a), it is said that one who steals a cake of flour is born as an owl.

मृत्युदूतः कपोतोऽयमुलूकः कम्पयन् मनः ।
प्रत्युलूकश्च कुहानैरनिद्रौ शून्यमिच्छतः ॥
- BhāgP 1.14.14

“This messenger of death a pigeon, owl and the opponent of an owl (a crow), by their harsh calls tremble (my) mind (and) as if wish to make this world empty.”

The *Yajñavalkya Smṛiti* states that the students should stop studying for a short time, if they hear an outcry of the owl (Snātaka Dharma Prakarana 148). This was because of an inauspicious character of the owl.

The *Bṛhatsaṁhitā* contains many references regarding augury. It is said when there is havoc created by strong winds, the calamity is foreseen when the owl enters the palace (46.68). When it makes fierce sounds in the south direction (86.21), it suggests bad luck. When one is going out for some work, if the Piṅgalā - (the spotted owlet) is on the left side, it is good. If the owls start wandering during daytime, instead of being nocturnal (88.2), it is inauspicious for the country. The author Varāhamihira has also described various calls the owl gives out when it is mating. (88.36). He has further elaborately discussed variety of calls of owls suggesting good or bad omens.

The text '*Mānasollāsa*' (13.864-919) has again described the numerable types of owls and their so called effects and augury in a chapter titled 'Piṅgalāśakuna'. Though it is not necessary to believe or consider seriously the fortune or misfortune element in the calls of owl, it is very much important to give attention to the notes and the description of their calls. It is interesting to note that by worshipping the owlets (Piṅgalā), an invitation is given to the deity - Caṇḍī or Maheśvarī Cāmuṇḍā. She is said to be 'Ghūka-dhvajā' i.e. the one having owl (as an epithet) on her flag. This 'Piṅgalā' is expected to be auspicious and giving pleasure and happiness to the worshipper.

The *Vasantarājaśākuna* has discussed various predictions or augury associated with the owl (Piṅgala). The text devotes a complete chapter (No. 13) to describe the 'Piṅgalāruta' which means an outcry of the owl! It is interesting to note that he has particularly talked about the owlets. The reason is simple: they are frequently seen. The author Bhaṭṭa Vasantarāja has described elaborately the differences in the calls of the owlets. According to him, there are five types of calls. In his book on Indian birds, Salim Ali says that a large variety of harsh chattering, squabbling and chuckling notes is observed in the owlets. *Vasantarājaśākuna* mentions predictions indicating either misfortune or good luck. For example, if the owl flies away from the branch of a tree in search of food and if it comes back and rests on the same branch, it suggests that a traveler will be successful in his journey. The purpose of his journey or pilgrimage will be served. It implies that the owlets were not totally condemned every time.

The encyclopaedic text namely '*Śivatattvaratnākara*' (7.2.49-50) has described the owl in the 'Indra-Jāla vidyā' (i.e. sorcery or juggle). This has devoted few verses to the augury suggested by the owl (5.8.66-70). The author also describes various calls given out by the owl. For example:

रात्रौ गृहस्योपरि भाषमाणो दुःखाय घूकः सुतमृत्यवे च । 5.8.66

"If the owl gives out calls (by sitting) on the house at night, (it augurs) for unhappiness that will be created by the death of the son."

The 'Ghu, Ghu' calls of the owls are always suggesting peace (5.8.69). By the end of such verses the author prays: 'Let this owl be auspicious for all.' (5.8.70)

It is very tragic to note that there were the practices of black - magic that suggested the use of owls and their flesh. The practices of this kind, based on misconceptions aimed at achieving some mean aims, for which owls were and are killed. For example, in the texts like 'Kāmaratna', the uses of feathers of owl are suggested for killing the unwanted person. For curing the diseases of eyes, use of owl is prescribed (10.1, 16, 29).

Thus, the concepts showing the auspicious or inauspicious character of the owls give us a brief sketch of the belief-system that prevails in the society.

d) References to the Ulūka in *Mṛgapakṣīśāstra*

The author Haṁsadeva has described various types of owls. He says (Śreṇī no.28) that there are three types of owls that live in the gardens near houses, in the large parks and on trees in forests. Their eyes are big, head is large, they have many spots on their body. These are known as Ulūka, Vāyasārāti and Pecaka. The Kauśika owls are divided in four species- Kauśika, Ghūka, Divābhīta and Niśāṭana.

We shall briefly discuss their definitions. It is interesting to note that the author says:

‘सम्प्राप्तगरुतश्चैते वृक्षाणां शोभदा मताः ॥’ --- ॥34॥

"When (the owl chicks) get feathers they are said to be adorning the trees."

1) Ulūka = The body of Ulūka is black and red. Their eyeballs are yellow.

(According to the Marathi translation, this might be the the Brown Fish Owl.)

2) Vāyasārāti = These owls are the enemies of crows. They are black, white and have reddish spots on their body. They give harsh calls. (According to Marathi

Translation, this is Barn Owl.)

3) Pecaka = The tips of feathers are white, their colour is white or greyish, the eyes are yellow and their body and the belly is hefty.

4) Kauśika = They are black, red - black and greyish in colour. They give out calls like 'Ghu, Ghu'.

- i] One of the types of Kauśika is tall; they kill birds during the night. (According to Marathi Translation, this might Collared Scops Owl.)
- ii] Ghūka = They give out calls like 'Ghu, Ghu'. Their wings are black and the body is greyish. They are small built. Their feathers are rough. (According to the Marathi translation, these are jungle owlets).
- iii] Divābhīta = These owls harrase other small birds and destroy their eggs. They give out shrill calls. (According to Marathi translation this is striated Scop's owl)
- iv] Niśātana = Their body is small and spotted. Their beak is long, tail is short, nails are sharp. (According to Marathi translation the bird is Spotted owlet.)

4) Mythological references to Ulūka

The *Vālmīki Rāmāyana* says that the 'krauñci' (female crane) gave birth to the owls, (III.14.18). In the *Uttarakāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyana*, there occurs a story of a vulture and an owl fighting for the nest. They are said to have gone to Lord Rāma for justice. Rāma said that the owl was residing in the nest from the time of the origin of trees and creepers. The vulture was residing in the nest from the origin of the human beings. This implied that the owl was present before the scavenging vulture, because the trees came into being earlier than the human beings. This story is included in canto no.13 which is supposed to be an interpolation.

The origin of animal tales (*paśukathā*) is found in the *Mahābhārata*. There is a story of an owl staying on the Himavat mountain . (MBh 3.191.4). The name of this owl is *prāvārakarṇa* "the owl having tufted ears". The King named Indradyumna fell from the heaven as the share of his good deeds came to an end. Sage Mārkaṇḍeya advised the king to go and meet the owl to find out the reasons behind his downfall. The owl helped the king to answer his queries. In this story, the word '*prāvārakarṇa*' is important. This species can be identified as a horned owl.

While describing the geneology, the *Mahābhārata* says that उलूकान्सुषुवे काकी ...' which means 'female crow gave birth to the owls (1.60.55).'

In the *Liṅgapurāṇa* also there is a reference to the owl which is expert in music. It is interesting to note that the calls of the forest owlet are very melodious like that of the cuckoo.

Another important mythological story is found in the *Adbhuta Rāmāyana* of the sixth canto where the owl is appreciated for its musical calls. There was a king named Bhuvaneśa. He ordered his citizens to praise the deities only by reciting Vedic mantras, and the King himself be praised by singing songs in a common language. There was a brāhmin named Harimitra who was a great devotee of Lord Viṣṇu. He offered his prayers to his favourite deity by his sweet melodious songs. The King got irritated and harassed Harimitra. Due to this injustice, the king was born as an owl and,

when felt hungry was forced to eat the dead body of his former birth. This owl happened to come to the caves near the lake Mānasa where he met Harimitra. A large-hearted Harimitra felt sympathy for the owl. The owl became a great master in the art of music and came to be known as Gānabandhu who taught music to sage Nārada.

5) Ornithological information of some of the types of Ulūka

1] Indian Great Horned Owl (Bubo Bubo)

Field Characters - This owl is seen singly or in pairs in wooded rocky ravines or shady groves.

Habits - Mainly nocturnal. This owl avoids heavy forest and spends the day under the shelter of a bush or rocky projection or in ancient mango trees.

Call - A deep, resounding Bubo. It is not loud.

Food - This owl eats small mammals, birds, reptiles, fish, crabs or large insects.

2] Barn or Screech owl (Tyto Alba)

Field Characters - It is a typical and commonly seen owl. Normally spotted dark brown-silky white below tinged with buff.

Habits - This owl lives easily in the company of human beings. It mainly nests in deserted buildings and cities, ancient forts and ruins. It spends the daytime standing upright and immerses after dusk with a screeching sound.

Call - Its call is like screaming and it has hissing notes.

Food - Mainly eats rats, mice and thus it is of great help to farmers.

3] Spotted owllet (Athene brama)

Field characters - This owl is white spotted grayish brown little owl. It has a typical large round head. Its eyes are front facing, big and yellow.

Habits - Mainly nocturnal. Spends the daytime in the hollow in an ancient tree trunk or sitting on a secluded branch.

Call - There is a large variety of harsh chattering and chuckling notes.

Food - Chiefly insects, young birds, mice and lizards.

4] Forest Eagle-owl [Bubo nipalensis]

Field Characters - A large brown owl, has white horns or ear tufts, fully feathered legs and brown eyes.

Habits - Observed in dense evergreen and moist deciduous forests.

Call - A very deep and far reaching moaning hoot.

Food - Birds also up to the size of a peafowl and mammals up to the size of a jackal.

This owl is the largest Indian owl. Its hunting style and appearance is like a hawk. It is a ferocious hunter.

It should be noted, however, that the words showing basically different varieties of the owl are used in Sanskrit literature, mostly in a vague manner and have thus been treated as synonyms of the owl.

Notes

- 1 This particular story reminds us of the *kākolūkiyam* in the *Pañcatantra* where the crow said:

वक्रनासं सुजिह्वाक्षं क्रूरमप्रियदर्शनम् ।
अक्रुद्धस्येदृशं वक्त्रं, भवेत्क्रुद्धस्य कीदृशम् । ॥
स्वभावरौद्रमत्युग्रं क्रूरमप्रियवादिनम् ।
उलूकं नृपतिं कृत्वा का नः सिद्धिर्भविष्यति । ॥

- *Pañcatantra* III.34,35

“(He who has) a curved nose, extremely crooked eyes or fixed gaze fierce and inauspicious look, looks so terrifying when he is not angry. How will he look when he will be actually angry? He is of fearful temper, talks in unpleasant (voice). By making such an owl our king, what will be our achievement?”

- 2 The lexicons like *Anekārthasaṅgraha* (3.10), *Ābhīdhānacintāmaṇi* (4.390) have the same synonyms like the *Amarakośa*.

- 3 निशाटश्च दिवान्धोऽसावलूकः काकशात्रवः ।

- PNM, Pariccheda III

- 4 घूको निशाटः काकारिरुलूकः कौशिकोऽपि सः ।

घूत्काकरो दिवाभीतो दिवान्धो हृदिलेचनः ॥

- *Kośakalpataru*, *simvādivarga* (103, 104).

□

Kāka

1) Introduction

From our childhood we are told the stories of the crow and the sparrow. A famous folktale is found in the ' *Līlācaritra*' of Svāmi Cakradhar (13th C. AD). It is said,

“काउळ्याचे घर सेणाचें : साळैचें घर मेणाचें :
पाउसु पडे : काउळ्याचे घर वाहात जाए :
साळैचे घर उरे :

— (Cakradhara/Kolte, 1982, Para 124, p. 102)

“The house of the crow was (made) of cowdung. The sparrow has the house (built up) of wax. (once) it rained. The house of crow was flowed away (but) the house of the sparrow was saved.” -

This is one of the most famous folktales in Marathi literature. The stories of the crow are found in the fables of Sanskrit literature. There is also a story in folk literature which shows the wisdom of the crow. In this story the thirsty crow was in search of water and saw an earthen jar of water. He looked into it but there was a small quantity of water left only to the bottom of a jar. In order to increase the level of that water the crow put stones in a jar. When the level was reached he happily drank the water. (It is important to note here that bird watchers have observed that birds make use of tools.)

In the Buddhist Jātaka stories various birds and animals have been mentioned. There is a story of the crow- the Kāka Jātaka (140) (Cowell, Vol. I, p. 300). In the Kāka Jātaka the Bodhisattva is shown in the form of a king of crows. The story shows the wisdom and compassionate behaviour of this King crow and narrates how he saved his kinsfolk from great danger. This Jātaka presents a positive aspect of a crow. The Jātaka tales contain some of the stories where the behavioural traits of the crows are mention. The crow is referred to in Vinilaka Jātaka, Koṣīya Jātaka, Ulūka Jātaka, Lola Jātaka, Supatta Jātaka and Jambukhādaka Jātaka.

In Tibetan mythology, the crow has an important place. It is associated with the Protector deity 'Mahākāla'. In the case of the first Dalai Lama, a pair of crows protected him when he was a baby. In relation to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, his mother noticed a pair of crows outside the house, following his birth.

There is an interesting reference to a crow in Tibetan Culture, particularly related to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. It is said that “the Fourteenth Dalai Lama was not surprised when the emissaries from Sera arrived his home; it was in the logic of things. He also recalls that a pair of crows used regularly to perch on a cornice of the house, and it is accepted in Tibet that there is a special relationship between the Dalai Lama and these birds. Traditionally it was a crow that protected Gedun Truppa during the bandit raid on the night he was born, and later on his spiritual practices enabled him to make direct contact with the fearsome divinity Mahākāla ”. (Levenson, 1988, p.55). The raven is seen in 'The Buddha's law among the birds' who put forth the preaching of Bodhisattva by saying,

‘ When you have performed the acts of worship
help will come from the guardian angles.’ (Conze, 1996, p.23).

The *Gurugrantha sahib (Dasamagrantha Sahib)* is a religious text of Sikhism. It has pointed out the scavenging habit of crows. It is said that crows become happy by seeing lots of dead bodies on war field. While describing a story of Sarpasatra from the *Mahābhārata*, there is a reference to crow :

— मज्यो तच्छकं मच्छकं जेम कागं । 5 ॥ 173 ॥

“Frightened Takṣaka ran away from the Sarpasatra like a small insect which runs away from a crow.”

The *Rāmacaritamānasa* of Tulsidās shows clear impact of Anyoktis and Subhāṣitas Sanskrit literature. Here a few examples are given. While saying the pious importance of Prayāga Tīrtha, it is explained as

चौ. - मज्जनफलु पेखिअ ततकाला ।
काक होहिं पिक बकउ मराला ॥
सुनि अचरज करै जनि कोई
सतसंगति महिमा नहिं गोई ॥

- Bālakāṇḍa (Tulsidās/Prasāda, 1994, p.4)

“In an instant behold the effect of the bath; crows become cuckoos and cranes become swans. Let no one marvel at hearing this, for the influence of good company is no secret.”

तेहि कारन आवत हिअँ हारे ।
कामी काक बलाक विचारे ॥
आवत येहि सर अति कठिनाई ।
रामकृपा बिनु आइ न जाई ॥

- Bālakāṇḍa , (Tulsidās/Prasāda, 1994, p. 33)

“The poet tries to find out the answer why crows do not have capacity to reach the Mānasa lake-the lustful crows and cranes lack the heart to visit the place because (it is said in earlier lines that) there are no snails, frogs and scum near the Mānasa lake. So sensual wretches like crows do not reach there.”

In the other cultures and traditions in world we find interesting references to the crow. In India also we come across a variety of references to birds. In a well-known book named ‘ *Thirukkural* ’ by a saint Thiruvalluvar says that,

‘ A crow can defeat an owl by day:
Kings need the right time to win ’. -

- (Thirukkural/Sundaram, 1990, (481); 49)

Another example of a crow is given to convey the importance of right time and right opportunity. At the other place to explain the ‘ kindred ’ attitude, Thiruvalluvar says,

‘ Crows trumpet their finds and share them-
Gains accrue to such natures.’ -

- (Thirukkural/Sundaram, 1990, (527); 53)

In the North Eastern part of India, (Verrier Elwin, 1191, p.271), the Singpho tribe has folk stories about birds and animals. They tell a story of a cunning crow who caused to bring diseases from heaven to earth. He was thrown in fire due to his atrocious acts but

out of pity was given a chance to live. But from that time the crow has been black.

There is an interesting story and belief in the Madiya Gonds from Madhya Pradesh. Gond people believe that their ancestors were the demons i.e. rākṣasas and therefore have respect for Rāvaṇa. The tribal people eat many animals and birds except the crow. According to them, crow is auspicious because it troubled Sītā when she was staying in the forest along with Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. The Jaṭāyu which was a vulture, helped Rāma, and for this reason Gond people believe vultures to be their enemies. In the Prakṛta text namely 'Gāhāsattasa' (Skt. Gāthāsaptaśatī), we come across references to the crow.

Laos, a different style is found in the story of Rāma. It is said that Sage Svāmita (i.e. Viśvāmitra) was performing penance to get peace of mind. A beautiful lady (Apsarā) was sent to disturb his concentration. She was believed to have taken the form of a crow. So sons of Thosoratha (i.e. Daśaratha), Pha Lama (i.e. Rāma) and Pha Lak (i.e. Lakṣmaṇa) killed that crow.

In the Bible it is said that if the human race has to face the wrath of God, owls and ravens will start staying near people (Isiah 34.11). It is supposed to be inauspicious to stay in the company of these birds. In the Bible we come across a reference to a crow which is similar to the concept of Kāka pakṣa. A bride praises her bride groom by admiring his hair which are curly and glossy black like that of raven's feathers. (The song of songs 11).

The 'Koran' is the holy text of Muslims. It is said in Koran that a crow which is sent by Allah teaches the son of Adam how to dig the earth and how to hide a dead body in it. (Pārā 6, Al Maida 5).

In Australian aborigines culture, there is a story of kind-hearted crows. The story is about crows which helped and cured injured white swans. By seeing the noble deed of crows, god was pleased. He said that From that day these swans would always be black, because kind crows applied their black feathers on the wounds of swans. This generous act should always be remembered. Thus the variety of black swans came into existence. The black swan is a unique feature of Australia.

In Germany, crows appear mostly in the winter when the weather is cold, gray and the whole nature is asleep. That time crows appear in flocks and darken the sky. Due to this, people correlate crows with decay, death and sorrow and also with threat and fear. Ravens are considered to be clever. In many fairy tales of the 'Brothers Grimm', they are pictured as clever beings. Ravens appear as unhappy beings who were under a curse as they were human beings who were turned into ravens due to some unlucky incidence. (This cultural information was obtained through a personal communication with a friend.)

2) Etymology and Synonyms of Kāka

1 In the Nirukta it is said that if you want to devaluate somebody you use the words like a dog or a crow, i.e.

शवा काकः इति कुत्सायाम् ।

- Nirukta, 3. 18

It is further said that

काकः इति शब्दानुकृतिः । तत् इदं शकुनिषु बहुलम् । - Nirukta 3.18

“This bird is named as ‘Kāka’ because of his repetitive sound ‘Kā’.

And it is also said:

न शब्दानुकृतिः विद्यते इति औपमन्यवः ।

काकः अपकालयितव्यः भवति ।

“According to Aupamanyava, the names of birds don’t contain शब्दानुकृति i.e. imitation of sound. The crow is (a symbol of ill omen so) be to driven away. That is why the word ‘kāka’ is formed from ‘अप+काल्’”. There is the root V kal with the prefix apa.

2 The *Vaidika kośa* says:

घाष्ट्यादि दोष समुच्चयेन यः कुत्स्यते स काकः ।

“The crow is one who is despised due to his accumulation of the bad qualities such as boldness and so on.”

3 In the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini, it is said,

घ्वाङ्क्षेण क्षेपे ॥42॥ पदानि ॥ घ्वाङ्क्षेन । (स.त.वि.सु.सप्तमी)

- 2.1.42

“ A word ending with the 7th case-affix is compounded with the word dhvāṅkṣa, ‘ a crow’ (and with synonyms of crow) when a contempt is implied; and the resulting compound is Tat-puruṣa.”

[Tīrthadhvāṅkṣa = “ a crow at the sacred bathing place i.e. ‘a very greedy crow at a bathing place does not remain long, any where, so a person who goes to his teacher’s house and does not tarry there long, is called a ‘tīrthakāka’; or a ‘tīrthavāyasa’.] (Pāṇini /Vasu, Vol.1, 1988, p.236).

4 In the *Amarakośa*¹ it is said, -

काके तु करटारिष्टबलिपुष्टासकृत्प्रजाः ।

घ्वाङ्क्षात्मघोषपरभृद्बलिभुग्वायसा अपि ॥

- AK 4.2.20

Kāka / (because) it makes sound.

Karāṭa is one which makes a sound ‘ke’.

It declares itself (or its existence) by crowing. (आत्मघोष).

घ्वाङ्क्ष is to utter the cry of birds or to caw.

The Ak further gives other synonyms as,

घोरवाशित = घोर = awful वाशित = having desire for female crow.

द्रोणकाक = raven, काकोल = raven, दग्धकाक = inauspicious crow or raven लौल्य= restlessness, fickleness, वृद्धकाक = large crow, raven.

The *Amarakośa* mentions other synonyms for the crow as ‘cirañjīvi’ (one who has long life), ‘Ekadr̥ṣṭi’ (one who has one eye) and Maukuli (whose beak is a bud-shaped).

5 *Kośakalpataru* of Viśvanātha refers to kāka as,

प्रतिसूर्यः काकरुकः काकः पीयुः सकृत्प्रजः ॥४॥

मौकुलिः करटोऽरिष्टो बलिपुष्टोऽपि वायसः ।

चिरञ्जीवी द्विको घूकवैरी घ्वाङ्क्षश्च शक्रजः ॥५॥

आत्मघोषो गूढकामी धूलिजङ्घो निमित्तकृत् ।

एकदृक्परभृद्द्रोणो नाडीजङ्घः कणूककः ॥६॥

स्त्रियां काकोलूकिका स्याद्वैरे वायसघूकयोः ।— ॥७॥

Pratisūrya = The meaning is not clear.

kākaruka = One who is faint-hearted, timid.

Ghūkavairī is the one who is an enemy of the owl.

Śakraja is one who was born of Śakra (or Indra). (This reference perhaps goes back to the story in the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* where Jayanta - the son of Lord Indra took the form of crow and bothered Sītā).

Gūḍhakāmī is one who does secret activities. (one who mates secretly).

Dhūlijaṅgha means a crow. (Perhaps this refers to the smoke-colour of the housecrow). (The meaning is not clear.)

Naḍijaṅgha The meaning is not clear.

kaṇūkaka The meaning is not clear. (Kaṇūkaya means a desire to utter words (of blame or censure?).

The lexicon titled '*Śabdakalpadruma*' gives many synonyms of kākā. Most of them are discussed before^{2,3}. Here is the list of some new synonyms for kākā.

Vātaja (वातजः) = one who is born of Vāta (wind).

Bala (बलः) = one who has strength.

Sūcaka (सूचकः) = one who indicates (?)

Piśūna (पिशुनः) = one who is betrayer.

Kaṭakhādaka (कटखादकः) = one who eats voraciously.

Kāga (कागः) = one who makes the sound 'Kāga'.

Mukhara (मुखरः) = one who is talkative.

Khara (खरः) = one who speaks roughly.

Mahāhala (महाहलः) = one who is extremely greedy.

Calācala (चलाचलः) = one who is ever moving.

Gūḍhamaithuna (गूढमैथुनः) = one who mates secretly.

Luṅṭhāka (लुण्ठाकः) = one who is a plunderer.

Śrāvaka (श्रावकः) = one whose sound is audible from afar.

3) References to Kākā in Sanskrit literature

A) Oldest references to Kākā

The *Atharvaveda* (7.66.1,2) mentions a black coloured bird (kṛṣṇa śakunī) which may point to the crow.

इदं यत् कृष्णः शकुनिरभिनिष्पत्तन्नपीपत् ।
आपो मा तस्मात् सर्वस्माद् दुरितात् पान्त्वंहसः ॥
- AV 7. (64) 66.1

“What here the black bird, flying out upon (it), has made fall- let the waters protect me from all that difficulty, from distress.”

Sāyaṇācārya says: (Sāyaṇa/Vishva Bandhu, Part II, p.970),

कृष्णः कृष्णवर्णः शकुनिः पक्षी । काक इत्यर्थः ।

“The bird is black. It is meant to be the crow.” Further in the commentary on AV 7. (64) 66.2, according Sāyaṇācārya the touch of that bird is inauspicious

Elsewhere the *Atharvaveda* has a reference to the crow as 'कृष्णः शकुनः' in 12.3.13. In the Vedic Index, 'Vāyasa' is said to be a big bird. In the *Ṣaḍavimśabrahmaṇa*, it expressed the meaning as the crow directly.

B) References to Kāka in Sanskrit poetry

We find descriptive references to the kākā. It seems that the bird was commonly seen and it was mainly related to the augury. We will take some examples, Bibhīṣa warns Rāvaṇa that if he is not ready to free Sītā, he would land up in troubles. He tried to show the various inauspicious events.

वायसाः संघशः क्रूरा व्याहरन्ति समन्ततः ।
समवेताश्च दृश्यन्ते विमानाग्रेषु संघशः ॥

- VR VI. 10.19a (Vālmiki/Satavalekar, Vol. 7, 1970, p.52)

“Crows in flock utter harsh cries on all sides and are seen gathered in swarms on the tops of seven storied palaces.”

When Sītā was seized by the demon-king Rāvaṇa, Rāma was very much depressed. He lamented and when he saw a crow in the forest and he said:

तां विनाऽथ विहङ्गोऽसौ पक्षी प्रणदितस्तदा ।
वायसः पादपगतः प्रहृष्टमभिकूजति ॥

- VR 4. 1. 24

“In the past the yonder bird (which is a crow) emitted a hoarse cry while flying through the air (thereby forebidding the abduction of Sītā). Now in the absence of Sītā, the crow is crying most delightfully while remaining perched on the tree (thereby predicting her return).”

The crows are said to eat up the dead bodies. It is said:

उपविष्टस्य वा सम्यग्लिङ्गिनं साधयिष्यतः ।
शरीरं भक्षयिष्यन्ति वायसाः श्वापदानि च ॥

- VR V.13.40a (Vālmiki/Satavalekar, Vol. 6, 1967, p.111)

“Or crows and beasts of prey will eat up (my) body when (I), having sat down (for fasting till death), shall be engaged in (my) attempt to extricate the soul (from the body).”

The *Agnipurāṇa* tells about two types of the crow- Grāmya (house crow) and Araṇya (jungle crow) (231.12). The same Purāṇa advises that the king should be alert about situation in war by hiding oneself like that of the eye of the crow (240.29). The *Nārada-purāṇa* (Triskandha Jyotiṣa Samhitā Skandha 68) refers to ‘śvetakāka’ ‘the white crow’. This reference perhaps shows the albinism in the crows was seen and observed. While describing the nature and cemeteries (*Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* 8.21), the *Harivaṁśa* (53.19. 54), as well as *Bhallaṭaśataka* (21) describe the cawing of the crow. The Kākapakṣa (काकपक्ष) was the style of hair-cutting in ancient times suggesting the side-locks.

There are popular Sanskrit maxims where the crow is depicted.

- 1) Kākatāliyanāya (काकतालीयन्याय) = It says that an unexpected and sudden fall of a palm-fruit upon the head of a crow at the very moment of its sitting on a branch of that tree, denotes a very unexpected and accidental occurrence, whether welcome or unwelcome. There are other five explanations of this maxim. (Apte Kośa; p.58)
- 2) Kākadadhīhātakanyāya (काकदधिघातकन्याय) = In this maxim a part stands for a whole. For example, if anyone warned to keep the crow off the curds, it would

imply that all other possible raiders were also to be warded off.

- 3) Kākadantagaveṣāṇā (काकदन्तगवेषणा) = This maxim suggests that some efforts are certainly futile. The searching after a crow's teeth, denote any useless or impossible task.
- 4) Kākākṣigolakanyāya (काकाक्षिगोलकन्याय) = This maxim originated from the belief that the crow has but one eye, and that it can move it, as occasion requires, from the socket on one side into that of the other. This rule or maxim is used when a word or a phrase which, though used only once in a sentence, may, if occasion requires serve two purposes.
- 5) Kakolūkaniśāvat (काकोलूकनिशावत्) = This maxim suggests that what is day to the former is a night to the latter and vice versa.
- 6) Kākāpikanyāya (काकपिकन्याय) = This maxim uses the illustration of the crow and the cuckoo. It suggests that though apparently similar, the distinction between the pairs of these birds is grasped at the proper time of their test. (This information is based on -Apte, V. S. (1995). *The practical Sanskrit- English Dictionary*, Poona: Prasad Prakashan. Vol. III- Appendix E, p. 58)

There are innumerable śubhāṣitas (moral and witty sayings) in Sanskrit literature. An example of a crow is used for various purposes as showing cunning elements in human nature; behavioural traits of a crow are pointed out and they are compared to human tendencies. We will examine few examples:

कृष्णं वपुर्वहतु चुम्बतु सत्फलानि
रम्येषु संचरतु चूतवनान्तरेषु ।
पुंस्कोकिलस्य चरितानि करोतु नाम
काकः किल ध्वनिविधौ ननु काक एव ॥२१३॥

- SuRBh (Nārāyaṇa Ācārya, 1998, p. 228)

“Let (the crow) bare a body of black colour; let (him) taste (lit.kiss) would fruits; let (him) roam in beautiful mango forests (gardens); let (him) do the deeds of a cuckoo, the crow is just the crow when (it comes to) producing the sound.”

काकस्य गात्रं यदि काञ्चनस्य
मणिक्यरत्नं यदि चञ्चुदेशे ।
एकैकपक्षे ग्रथितं मणीनां
तथापि काको न तु राजहंसः ॥२१०॥

- SuRBh (Nārāyaṇa Ācārya, 1998, p. 228)

“Eventhough the body of a crow is (decorated) with gold, its beak is studded with diamonds, each wing decorated with precious stones, it cannot become a swan.”

तुल्यवर्णच्छदैः कृष्णः कोकिलैः सह संगतः ।
केन विज्ञायते काकः स्वयं यदि न भाषते ॥२०५॥

- SuRBh (Nārāyaṇa ācārya, 1998, p. 228)

“Because of the similarity of colour and feathers, if the black (bird) is in company of koels who will recognize (it as) a crow if (i.e. as long as) it does not speak.”

The ‘*Subhāṣitasudhānidhi*’ contains many verses about the crows and how they take care of eggs and rear the chicks of a parasitic cuckoo.

काकैः सह प्रवृधस्य कोकिलस्य कला गिरः ।
खलसङ्गोऽपि नैष्ठुर्यं कल्याणप्रकृतेः कुतः ॥

- *Subhāṣitasudhānidhi* 718

“Though brought up with the crows the art of the cuckoo, (lies in its) speech. Those who are good-tempered by nature, how can they be cruel even though they are in company of bad (people)?”

Most of the times, a crow is blamed for its shrewd and cunning nature. It is compared to other birds and most of the times its stupidity is highlighted. But there are some examples which praise certain traits in crows. In the *Agnipurāṇa* it is said:

द्वैधीभावेन तिष्ठेत काकाक्षिवदलक्षितः ।
उभयोरपि संपाते सेवेत बलवत्तरम् ॥

- AgniP. 240.29

“At the time of war, a king should proclaim his existence on war field and he should be there without taking the side of either of the two opposing forces and like the eye of a crow that remains unnoticed.” (Here ‘*dvaiddhībhāva*’ means a duality, double-dealing or falsehood.)

In the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* also there is a reference (24.18) where the King is expected to follow the behaviour of the crow.

In the practice of black magic the use of feathers and eyes of the crow was suggested as in the (*Kāmaratna* 10.8, 16).

Thus it can be seen that the crow is depicted from various aspects in Sanskrit literature.

C) Superstitions related to Kāka

a) Many of the superstitions related to a crow have their origin in the Purāṇic literature. We will take few such examples showing certain beliefs regarding the crow:

यः करोति पैशुन्यं साधूनामन्यथामतिः ।
वज्रतुण्डनिभा जिह्वामाकर्षन्तेऽस्य वायसाः ॥

- VāmP 12.10 (*Karmavipāka varṇana*)

“One who does wickedness with bad intentions in case of good people, (after his death), the sharp-beaked crows pull his tongue (in the hell).”

The *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* (14.9) also says that the sharp-beaked crows are remove the eyes (of bad) human being (in the hell) and again and again they get (new) eyes. It was believed that the result of some evil deeds leads one to take the birth of a crow. In the *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa*, (15. 13, 14) it is said that one who takes food before offering it to gods, ancestors and brahmins becomes a crow (after death), or “one who is ungrateful towards others becomes a crow” (15.18). The touch of that crow was believed to be indicating death (40.9).

The *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa* says that one goes into the hell namely ‘*Kākatuṇḍa*’ and his eyes are broken by the crows if one shows ill feelings towards women (30.84 *Prakṛti Khaṇḍa*); that “one who kills a woman or an infant, becomes a crow in his next seven births” (30.148 *Prakṛti Khaṇḍa*).

The Purāṇas suggest various expiations if the crow is killed. In the *Kūrmapurāṇa*

(2.33.8) expiations are suggested for having eaten the meat of the crow; one is purified by (observing) Kṛcchra (a particular kind of religious penance).

The *Āṅgirasasmṛti* (43) says that if a crow touches the pot made of 'Kāmsya' metal (i.e. amalgm of zinc and copper, bell metal), it should be purified. The *Manusmṛti* (11.159) says: " if the food that you eat is touched by a crow, one should drink water which is (purified) by boiling a medicinal plant namely 'Brahmasuvarcalā')." (An infusion of it is drunk as a penance.)

b) Augury or śakunaśāstra regarding Kāka

In a number of Sanskrit texts we come across the notion of augury. In antient times, augury was belived to be a special branch of knowledge. There are some books that written specifically explaining the sight of bird and its good or bad consequences. In the case of a crow, there are a number of notions of this kind. It is an old tradition of asking a crow questions about the future events. In the *Mahābhārata* (12.83), there is a reference to a sage named Kālakavr̥kṣīya munī, who wandered from place to place by carrying a crow in a cage. He is said to have the knowledge of the augury in relation to a crow (vāyasīvidyā - MBh. 12.83.8).

We will consider the few of the examples in relation to crow. In the *Agnipurāṇa* there is a chapter on auguries ('śakunāni') (no. 232). It is (232.2) said that if "a crow from a flock, flies away crowing, it is a bad sign for the army." " If a crow vomits raw flesh in front of (a house), there would be a gain of wealth" (232.7). It is further said: "If the crow comes cawing loudly it would be an impediment to the journey the person. A crow on the left is considered to be beneficial and causing destruction of the task if on the right." (232.9)

The *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* (Chapter 232.1-37) speaks of omens caused by the crow:

प्रोषितागमकृत्काकः कुर्वन्द्धारि गतागतम् ।

- MārK. 2.4

"If the crow goes and comes at the door, it suggests the arrival of one who stays far away."

It is also said:

अमेध्यपूर्णवदनः काकः सर्वार्थसाधकः ।

- MārK. 2.13

"If a crow is seen which holds in its beak any filthy thing, it suggests that all our wishes will be fulfilled."

The *Bṛhatsamhitā*, (chapter 95) describes the consequences of cawing of the crow. In all there are 62 verses which contain such descriptions. We will review few of them:

वैशाखे निरुपहते वृक्षे नीडःसुभिक्षशिवादाता ।

निन्दितकण्टकिशुष्केष्वसुभिक्षभयानि तद्देशे ॥

- BṛS, 95.2

" If (there is seen) a nest (of a crow) on a dead tree in the month of Vaiśākha there will be prosperity in the country; but (if it be seen to build its) nest on a dry, thorny, tree, there will be famine and other fears in the land."

It is interesting to note that various types of crowing and their meanings are described in the whole chapter elaborately in the *Bṛhatsamhitā*. 95.50-56. For example, various sounds of a crow are mentioned as Kā, Kava, Ka, Kara, Kurukuru, Keke, Kuku, Kharekhare, Kakhākha, āā, Khalkhal, Kākā, Kākāṭi, Kavkav, Kagāku, Karakau, Kalaya etc. There are different consequences for each type of sound. It implies an attempt to note the various notes of crowing and trying to find out their connection to future happenings.

Like the *Bṛhatsamhitā*, in the '*Vasantarājaśākuna*' there is a whole chapter (No. 12) describing the good and bad consequences of a crow and its crowing. The author says that there are five classes or casts (*varṇa*) amongst crows, namely Brāhmaṇa, Kṣtriya, Vaiśya, Śūdra and Antyaja. He describes the colours, sizes, and beaks of crows accordingly. Consequences of the sight of crows depend upon the *varṇa* of that crow. This chapter is very extensive and describes the effects- good or bad in great details. We will see few examples from the text.

ब्रह्मप्रदेशे स्थितवायसस्य प्रभातकाले मधुरस्वरेण ।
अभीप्सितस्यागमनं ध्रुवं स्यात् स्वामिप्रसादो द्रविणस्य लाभः ॥
- VasantS 12.21

“If a crow makes a sweet sound in the sky then there will certainly be an arrival of the most desired guest, the favour of the master and obtainment of wealth.”

वृक्षाग्रनीडे त्वतिवर्षकालो मध्ये तरोर्मध्यमतोयपातः ।
तुच्छापि वृष्टिर्न भवत्यघस्तात् स्फुटं यथोक्तं न दिशोऽस्फुटत्वात् ॥
- VasantS 12.63

“If a crow makes a nest on the top of the tree, it suggests heavy rains. If it makes a nest in the middle part of the tree, it suggests average rain and if a nest is built near the bottom of the tree, it suggests a possibility of famine.”

The *Vasantarājaśākuna* described many notes of the sound of crows and their meaning and indications. Though it is a matter of belief, it is remarkable to read such minute descriptions about types of crowing sound.

The '*Pañcapākṣika*' discusses the augury related to the cawing of the crow.

Prākṛit texts also contain various references to crows. In the *Riṣṭasamuccaya* of Durgadevācārya (11th century) Karāṭa is referred to. It was believed that crows were inauspicious. It was said

नगरभवानां मध्ये काकः श्वानश्च रासभो वृषभः ।
दक्षिणगतः सशब्दो मरणमेव ददाति नियमेन ॥177॥

“It indicates a sure death, if a crow, a dog, a donkey or a bull is making a noise on the right in the midst of townsmen.”

In the next verse (178) also the sight of a weeping crow was said to be indicative of death.

In the text called *Āṅgavijjā* that is the science of divination through physical signs and symbols, female crow-kākī and also male crows-kāka and kākola are mentioned.

D) References to kāka in the Mṛgapakṣiśāstra

In a text called *Mṛgapakṣiśāstra*, types of kāka are described elaborately.

Hamsadeva describes twelve types of crows:

- 1) Kāka - Kāka is said to be

काका नितान्तं कृष्णाङ्गाः स्थूलकर्कशरोमकाः ॥274॥

- śhreṇi 27

Kāka or crows are jet black. Their feathers are broad and rough.

According to the author these type of crows live in groups, their eyesight is very sharp.

- 2) Karāṭa = This crow makes a harsh sound. The karāṭa crows are black, their wings are long, they have short beak.
- 3) Balipuṣṭa = These crows have bluish shade. Their colour is glossy. They have short beak. Nourished by food offerings.
- 4) Sakṛtpraja = They have offspring once (a year).
- 5) Dhvāṅṣa = These crows are bluish in colour. They have various types of speed in flight.
- 6) Ātmaghoṣa = These crows continuously keep on crowing. They are bluish black and they live on the trees on the bank of river Sarasvatī. It utters its own name. Hence they are called 'self- proclaimers.'
- 7) Parabhṛt = These crows have bluish colour. The tip of their feathers is white. They have short beak and they incubate and rear the cuckoo's eggs.
- 8) Vāyasa = These crows are jet black. They have sharp beak and often seen sitting on the back of cattles. They make harsh noise. They have scavenging habits.
- 9) Cirañjivī = These crows are black and their neck, breast and wings are white. They are supposed to be longlived.
- 10) Maukuli = These crows are small, they have pied colour and have beautiful wings.
- 11) Droṇakāka = These are the ravens. They have broad bill, long wings and are black in colour. They like to eat flesh.
- 12) Kākola = These crows live on mountains. They are dangerous to other small birds. They can be tamed.

At a few places superstitious beliefs are also reflected in the descriptions by Hamsadeva. Though these words are mentioned as the types of crows, there is hardly any correlation between a species and the name of a crow. Mainly these are descriptive terms. The text of *Mṛgapakṣiśāstra* is criticized by Salim Ali for being full of vague descriptions.

4) Mythological references of a kāka

There is a popular belief that a crow has only one eye. The origin of this belief can be traced in the story (in an interpolated canto) of the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*. In the *Ayodhyakāṇḍa* (canto no. 96) there is a reference to a crow who was the son of god Indra and his name was Jayanta. He bothered and irritated Sītā and Rāma. Rāma was annoyed by its behaviour and threw a stick by consecrating with a mantra. The crow got hurt on his eye because of that consecrated stick. This incident gave rise to a belief that crows have only one eye. The *Agni Purāṇa* (5.34, 35) and *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa*

(6.88) give the same reference.

In the Uttarakāṇḍa of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (18.26-29) there is a story which explains about the crow's right to eat the offering of rice to Pitṛs. - 'Once there was a king named Marutta. He performed a Maheśvara satra. Indra and other gods attended the function. Rāvaṇa the King of demons was passing by that way. By seeing his powerful presence all the gods were frightened and fled away assuming the forms of different birds. Lord Yama who was the deity of death escaped in the form of a crow. Because of this, Yama was pleased with crows. He blessed all the crows that in future, when human beings worship the pitṛs by offering rice to them, the crows will have the right to eat that rice. Thus the right of the crows to eat offerings of rice originated from that time.'

In the *Agnipurāṇa* the origin of crows is mentioned. Kaśyapa was the son of Marīci. Marīci was the son of Brahmā. Kaśyapa's wife namely Tāmṛā had many daughters like Kākī, Śyenī, Bhāsī, Ṛḍhrikā, Śukī and Grīvā. The crows in the world are born from Kākī (*Agnipurāṇa* (chapter 19). (Vettam Mani, 1989, p.366)

In the *Skandapurāṇa* there is a part named Brahma Khaṇḍa. In this part we come across a story which tries to explain why crows are supposed to be the symbol of sin. The story is aimed at discussing the importance of Śiva Pañcākṣara mantra. Long ago, the King of Kaśī had a daughter named Kalāvati who received the Śiva Pañcākṣara mantra. He got married to the King of Mathurā, named Daśārha. He was a sinner. When he touched Kalāvati, who was a holy woman, he experienced unbearable pain and burning sensation. So Kalāvati took her husband to the sage Garga. The sage purified the sinful King and made him to do a penance. At once the King's sins came out of his body in the shape of crows. Some crows flew away. Some fell down having their wings burnt. Thus after that the king was completely purified. (Vettam Mani, 1989, p.366)

A pair of crows is shown to be associated with a goddess called Jyeṣṭhā in ancient sculptures. It is a goddess representing śaktidevatā. In South India, the worship of this goddess is seen. In the *Kamba Rāmāyaṇa* we come across a story which tells us about the origin of Jyeṣṭhā. She was obtained by churning the sea of milk. (Vettam Mani, 1989, p. 36) When Viṣṇu, Brahmā and Śiva saw her, they sent her away by ordering her to sit in inauspicious places. Since Jyeṣṭhā came out before Goddess Lakṣmī therefore she is supposed to be the elder sister of Lakṣmī and called 'Alakṣmī.' Thus she is supposed to be a deity of inauspicious things. In Śaiva Purāṇas, it is said that Jyeṣṭhā is one of the eight portions of Parāśakti. She is said to possess the powers which regulate human lives. Due to this inauspicious element this goddess might be related to crows which are said to be her 'Abhijñānacihna' (a symbol).

5) Ornithological Information of kāka

There are three main types of crows. The most commonly seen bird is a house crow. It has grey neck and the size is like that of a pigeon. Both sexes look alike. It lives in close association and contact with man. It is dependent for its livelihood on human life. It does not have any particular food preferences and is ready to eat almost anything, including dead rats, carrion, kitchen scrap, fruits, grains, eggs or fledging birds pilfered from nests. This crow is a useful scavenger but it is also dangerous to ornamental bird species in the urban area. This crow has community roosting on selected

trees where a large number of crows gather every night.

The second type of a crow is a jungle crow. It is bit larger than a house crow. Its colour is glossy jet black and has rather a heavy bill. Its voice is a hoarse 'caw'. It is chiefly a bird from country side but few times it is seen in towns and villages. It accompanies vultures to feed on carrion. It is an omnivorous bird and is destructive of eggs and chicks of birds or young ones of small mammals. It is very clever in finding the tiger or panther kills that are hidden in the jungle.

Jungle crow is found throughout the Indian union. Like the house crow, jungle crow is also found in four geographical races. The races are based mainly on the difference of size of wing and bill. Jungle crow is mainly a bird of the countryside. Many times it associates with vultures to feed on carrion. This crow is omnivorous. It is dangerous to the chicks of birds and to domestic poultry, and also the young ones of small mammals.

The nesting season of the jungle crow is normally from December to April in peninsular India and from March to May in northern India. Both sexes share the parental duties. The cuckoo bird lays its eggs in the nest of the jungle crow.

The third variety is a raven. It is larger than a kite. Its colour is jet black and has a massive bill. It feeds on scavenging, and roosts commonly. Its peculiar feature is that it is monogamous and pairs for life. It is long lived.

Indian crows are also divided in seven categories, according to their appearance.

- 1) All-black Punjab and Tibetan ravens.
- 2) The brown-necked raven of Sind.
- 3) The black jungle crow
- 4) The black rook (where the adult bird has the basal third of its bill almost white).
- 5) The eastern hooded crow which is glossy black. It's upper and lower back and underparts are drab grey.
- 6) The house crow.
- 7) The Jackdaw of Kashmir.

Notes

1 In the Rāmāśramī on the *AmaraKośa*-

काके इति ॥ कायति । 'कै शब्दे । —

करोति शकुनम् । 'शकादिभ्यो ऽ टन्' (उ ४/८१)

के रटति । 'रट परिभाषणे' । —

— ध्वाङ्क्षति । 'ध्वाङ्क्ष घोरवाशिते च' ।

ध्वाङ्सः काके बकेऽर्थिनि । गृहे ध्वाङ्सी

तु काकोल्याम् । (इति हैमः) ॥६॥—

काँ काँ : इति शब्दनात् आत्मानं घोषयति ।—

शकादिभ्यो ऽटन् =

घोरवाशित = घोर , वाशित

द्रोणकाकस्तु काकोलः ।

द्रोणेति । — द्रोणाख्यः काकः । 'द्रोणो ना दग्धकाके स्यादश्वत्थाम्नो गुरावपि' इति रुद्रः ।—

काकयति। 'कक लौल्ये' स्वार्थण्यतः । बाहुलकालोलच् 'काकोलं' नरकान्तरे कुलाले द्रोणकाके, विषभेदे तु न स्त्रियाम् (इति मेदिनी ॥ - (२) ॥ द्रोणकाको दग्धकाको वृद्धकाको वनाश्रयः' इति त्रिकाण्डशेषः । 'द्वे डोंडकाक' इति ख्यातस्त्र ॥

= द्रोणकाक = raven काकोल = raven, दग्धकाक = inauspicious crow or raven लौल्य
= restlessness, fickleness, वृद्धकाक = large crow, raven

2 The Abhidhānacintāmaṇi describes probably the types of a crow with great details and explanation. It is said,

काकोऽरिष्टसकृत्प्रजाः ॥ 387 ॥

आत्मघोषश्चिरजीवी घृकारिः करटो द्विकः ।

एतद्गृग् बलिभुग् घ्वाङ्क्षो मौकुलिवायसो ऽन्यभृत् ॥ 388 ॥

Each and every word is elaborately explained as -

कायति काकः । काशब्दं कायति वा, ककते

लौल्यादिति वा, ईषत् कायति वा ॥ 1 ॥

कै कायति = to sound

“One who makes a sound ‘ka’ is a crow or kka”. काक् = to be unsteady ईषत् = a little.

नास्ति रिष्टं मरणमस्य, अमृतभुक्तत्वादरिष्टः ॥ 2 ॥

“One who is not hurt (and) who has no death.”

Ariṣṭa is a crow.

सकृतदेकवारं प्रजायते सकृत्प्रजः, सकृत् प्रजाऽपत्यमस्य वा ॥३॥ ॥ 387 ॥

आत्मनः स्वनाम्नो घोषोऽस्य आत्मघोषः, काकेति वाशनात् ॥ 4 ॥

“One who proclaims its own name is Ātma-Ghoṣa.”

चिरं जीवति चिरञ्जीवी ॥ 5 ॥

“One who has a long life is cirañjīvi.”

घृकानामरिः घृकारिः ॥ 6 ॥

“One who is an enemy of owls, is Ghūkāri.”

करोति शब्दं करटः — इत्यटः, ‘क’ इति रटतीति वा ॥ 7 ॥

“One who makes a sound ‘k’ is karāṭa.

द्वौ ककारौ नाम्न्यस्य द्विकः ॥ 8 ॥

“One in whose name there are to ‘ka’ letters.”

एका दृक्, एकदृगस्य रामेण काणीकृतत्वात् ॥ 9 ॥

“One who has only one eye as its one eye was injured by Rāma.”

बलिं भुङ्क्ते बलिभुक्, वैश्वदेवभागार्हत्वात् ।

बलिपुष्टोऽपि ॥ 10 ॥

“One who eats the offered food i.e. Bali, as it is entitled to the food offered in the Vaiśvadeva rituals; one who is fed on Bali.”

घ्वाङ्क्षति काङ्क्षति घ्वाङ्क्षः ॥ 11 ॥

“One who is (always) desirous.”

माति मौकुलिः “माशालिप्योमोकुलिमली” ॥

इत्योकुलिः ॥ 12 ॥

मुकुल = bud. “One whose beak has a shape of a bud.”

वयते वायसः ।— ॥ 13 ॥

“One who wanders is vāyasa.”

अन्यान् पिकान् बिभर्ति पुष्णात्यन्यभृत् ॥14॥ ॥ 388 ॥

“One who rears chicks of other cuckoo birds.”

Species of a crow are described as -

वृद्ध - द्रोण - दग्ध - कृष्ण - पर्वतेभ्यस्त्वसौ पर : । वनाश्रयश्च काकोलः ।
वृद्धादिभ्यः : परोऽसौ काकः वृद्धकाकः ॥ 1 ॥
'द्रुणत् हिंसायाम्' द्रोणकाकः । द्रोणो ऽपि ॥ 2 ॥
(द्रुणत् = to hurt, to kill, to go).

A crow who is ferocious.

दग्धकाकः ॥ 3 ॥

“A crow whose, (colour) is like burnt (i.e. gray or ashy colour).”

कृष्णकाकः ॥ 4 ॥

“A crow who is black.”

पर्वतकाकः ॥ 5 ॥

“A crow who resides on the mountain.”

वनमाश्रयोऽस्य वनाश्रयः ॥ 6 ॥

“One who takes shelter in the jungle is ‘Vanāśraya’.”

Vṛddhakāka means the one who is long lived.

3 In the Kalpadrukośa of Keśava, the crow is described as वायस, अरिष्ट, आत्मघोष. It is said

सकृत्प्रजोऽपकृष्टः स्यादलिपुष्टो निमित्तकृत् ।

लुण्ठाको बलिभुक्काणः परमृत्युश्च शक्रजः ॥ 96 ॥

लुण्ठ = to rob, to plunder, काण = one eyed निमित्तकृत् = omen maker, crow, raven,
परमृत्यु = crow (The meaning is not clear) अपकृष्ट = The meaning is not clear.

अरण्यवायसो द्रोणः काकोलो घनवागपि ।

द्रोणकाको महाप्राणः सप्रोक्तः क्रूरवागपि ॥ 98 ॥

Aranyavāyasa = A crow who resides in the forest.

Ghanavāk = (A crow) whose voice is coarse.

Mahāprāṇa = (A crow) who makes a harsh breathing a cry.

□

Kukkuṭa

1) Introduction

The kukkuṭa or the cock is found in Sanskrit literature from the time of the *Yajurveda*. In the Purāṇic period this bird is mainly seen with God Skanda or Kārtikeya in iconography. The cock is largely popular for its flesh and there are recipes described where the flesh of the cock is chief ingredient. In the *Bhojanakutūhala*, the qualities of the flesh of the cock and the jungle fowl are discussed since it is one of the popular varieties of flesh. The flesh of jungle fowl is said to be pleasant to the stomach (हृद्य) removing phlegm and light. But (the flesh of) the domestic cock is phlegmatic and heavy. In the text '*Nalapākadarpaṇa*', we find a description of qualities of the flesh of the cock. In that text there is a group of verses that describe '*kukkuṭamānsatailaudanam*' means a variety of rice made by using flesh of the cock.

It is said:

कथ्यते ताम्रचूडस्य पिशितस्योदनः पुनः ।
सैन्धवादीनि वस्तुनि केषाञ्चिन्नक्षिपेद् बुधः ॥
- *Nalapākadarpaṇa* 100

"Once again, the rice made of cock-flesh is being told. Knowledgeable person prepares it by (using) Saindhava (salt) etc."

There are various texts in Sanskrit literature giving such recipes. The Indo-Aryan Armies took cocks on expeditions to announce daybreak to the soldiers. Cock fighting was a popular ancient sport.

In the Jātaka stories, we find many stories regarding the cock. In the kukkuṭa jātaka (no.383) (Cowell, Vol. III, 1990, p.168) and (no.448) (Cowell, Vol. IV, 1990, p.35), the Bodhisattva was born as a cock who saved himself from a female cat and in the other Jātaka the Bodhisattava was said to be born as the offspring of wild hen dwelling in a grove of bamboo trees. There is a story how he saved himself from a falcon.

In a Tibetan Buddhist text of 17th C titled 'The Buddha's law among the birds', Lord Buddha gives moral teaching to various birds. Here the cock - the domestic bird is seen to express philosophical thoughts gained by the Bodhisattva. He says:

" Whilst you live in this Saṃsāric world, no lasting
happiness can be yours, do you understand that ?
Wherever the mind may go, it cannot control its fate,
- do you understand that ?" (Conze, 1996, p.28)

The folklores from the North-Eastern part of India contain many interesting stories about the cock. A Shimong story says that Polo - the moon- was a woman. She falls in love with a cock. Her husband- the sun catches her with her lover. When the cock saw the arrival of Doini- the sun, it ran away with great flutter of wings. The village council punished the cock by mutilating. The cock had a very large organ that was cut in compensation. That part fell to the ground and it turned into an earthworm.

Every morning this worm calls the cock by crying ‘ Doini is coming’ and the cock cries in reply ‘ I’m ready, I’m ready’. In some North-eastern stories the red cock was used as a symbol whose crowing is answered by others which represents the singer whose theme is answered by the refrain. There is also a story about the origin of cocks and hens. (Verrier Elwin, 1991,pp.99,100)

The Taraon Mishmi tribal people in the North-East India tell the story of origin of the cock. A person namely Chin was turned into a cock. But this cock had no wings, and no crest on his head. A boy fixed a red flower on his head which turned into a crest, and he tied leaves to its body and they turned into wings.

In Maharashtra, there are many poems and stories about cock. Usually the four qualities of the cock are praised. They are- his readiness to fight, waking up in the early morning, partaking food along with friends and protecting females in calamities.

Now we can take a review of various aspects of the Kukkuṭa in Sanskrit literature.

2) Synonyms and etymology to kukkuṭa

According to the *Nirukta*,

कृकवाकः सावित्रः (मैत्रा. सं. ३/९४/९५॥ काठक सं ५/७/८) ---1

‘Kṛkavāku ‘ means one which gives out calls like ‘kukukū’. The cock gives alarming calls for the sunrise.

The synonyms for kukkuṭa are as follows:

कृकवाकुस्ताम्रचूडः : कुक्कुटश्चरणायुधः ॥

- AK 2.5.17

“Kṛkavāku means the one which speaks from the throat, Tām racūḍa means the one which is red-crested, kukkuṭa is one which out calls like ‘kukkuṭa’. It is an onomatopoeic word imitating the cock’s cry. Caraṇāyudha means one having the feet for weapons.”

The *Abhidhānacintāmaṇi* offers other words like,

अथ निशावेदी कुक्कुटश्चरणायुधः ॥4.390॥

कृकवाकुस्ताम्रचूडो विवृताक्षः शिखण्डिकः ॥3.391॥

Some of the new words are explained here:

निशां वेदयति ज्ञापयति निशावेदी ॥

“One which make us know (the end of) night.”

विवृते अक्षिणी यस्य विवृताक्षः ॥

“One which has revolving eyes.”

शिखण्डोऽस्त्यस्य शिखण्डिकः ॥

“One which has a crest.”

In the *AbhiC* text, the other names are mentioned:

कुक्कुटे तु दीर्घनादश्चर्मचूडो नखायुधः ।

मयूरचटकः शौण्डो रणेच्छुश्च कलाधिकः ॥

आरणी विष्करो बोधिर्नन्दीकः पुष्टिवर्धनः ।

चित्रवाजो महायोगी स्वस्तिको मणिकण्ठकः ॥

उषाकीलो विशोकश्च वाजस्तु ग्रामकुक्कुटः ॥

The kukkuta is known as,

Dirghanāda is one which gives out long calls.

'Carmacūḍa' is one which has a crest of (piece of) leather.

'Nakhāyudha' is one which claw-armed.

'Mayūracataka' is one having the feathers resembling those of the peacock. In English too, the two words denotes some similarity.

'Śaunḍa Raṇecchu' is one which is fond of and eager to fight. (śaunḍa means excited).

'Kalādhika' the meaning is not clear.

'Āraṇī' - The meaning is not clear.

'Viṣkīra' is a scatterer.

'Bodhi' is one which awakens.

'Nandika' the meaning is not clear (Perhaps 'the one which is the happy one - nandi')

'Puṣṭivardhana' is one which (good for) increasing growth. (Perhaps this indicates that the flesh of the cock is supposed to be nourishing.)

'Citravāja' is one which is decorated with variegated feathers.

'Mahāyogi' means a great yogī. The significance of the word is not clear.

'Svastika' is an auspicious bird.

'Maṇikaṇṭhaka' The meaning is not clear.

'Uṣākīla' is one which suggests the dawn

'Viśoka' is one free from sorrow.

'Vāja' is a domestic cock.

'Grāmakukkuṭa' is also a domestic cock.

I'll explain the new words mentioned in the Kalpadrukośa (11.130,131)¹ -

'Kālajña' is one which is the knower of time.

'Niyoddhā' means the fighter.

'Nakharāyudha' is one which has a weapon of claws.

'Bahupraja' is one which has a numerous progeny.

'Śikhaṇḍī' is one which is crested.

The 'Śabdakalpadruma' says,

कुक्कुटा आदानेन कुटतीति । कुट + कः । पक्षिविशेष । कुक्कुडा इति भाषा ।

“ Kuṭati ' means to become curved or to be crooked. This definition might be suggesting the onomatopoeic word suggesting the cock's cry.”

These are a few other words, Kāhala, Yāmanādī. Kāhala means a kind of musical instrument and the meaning of the word 'Yāmanādī' is one who announces the time? or one who gives out a call at a proper time?

The *Vaijayantīkośa* (3.13)² mentions some new words for the kukkuṭa. They are,

Dīrghavāk = one who gives out long calls.

Dakṣa = one who is alert.

Cūlika = one who has a crest.

Āraṇī = The meaning is not clear. (आ + रण् ; one who makes sound like an anklet.?)

3) References to Kukkuṭa in Sanskrit literature

A) Oldest reference to Kukkuṭa

In the *R̥gveda*, there are no references to the cock. Though the cock seems to be

the most common pet bird, we do not find any reference to the bird in the *R̥gveda*. The words like the 'Kukkuṭa', 'Kuṭaru', 'Kṛkavāku' are simultaneously used for the bird cock. From the Saṁhitā period.

कुक्कुटोऽसि मधुजिह्वः — — ॥

- VS. 1.16

“You are the cock, a sweet-tongued one”.

अग्नये कुटरुनालभते — — ॥

- VS. 24.23

“(The priest immolates) the cock for Agni.”

क्वयिः कुटरुर्दात्यौहस्ते वाजिनां ॥

- TS 5.5, 17.1 ; VS 24.59

= (Let the bird Kyayī), kuṭaru (Datyūha) (be offered to the Vājī).

कुटरुरसि मधुजिह्वस्त्वया — — ॥

- MS 1.1, 6 ; 4.1,6

“You are the cock, a sweet-tongued one”.

अग्नये कुटरुनालभते, — ॥

“(The priest) immolates the Kuṭaru for the sake of Agni.”

- MS 3.14.4

According to Sāyaṇa, kṛkavāku is the jungle fowl.

— कृकवाकुः सावित्रो ।

- VS. 24.35, MS. 3.14, 15;

“Kṛkavāku (is the bird) belonging to Sāvitr.”

The Atharvaveda has a reference to the cock:

यां ते चक्रुः कृकवाकावजे वा यां कुरीरिणि ।

अव्यां ते कुत्या यां चक्रुः पुनः प्रति हरामि ताम् ॥

- AV 5.31.2

“What [witchcraft] they have made for thee in a cock, or what in a kurīra-weaving goat; in a ewe what witchcraft they have made - I take back again.”

B) References to kukkuṭa showing superstitions

It is a common practice to offer the cock to the village or the 'Grāma' deities and to the super-natural entities like ghosts in order to satisfy them. In the Purāṇic literature³ there are many dos and don'ts regarding this bird.

प्रदोषे कुक्कुटो वाशेदधेमन्ते वापि कोकिलः ।

अर्कोदये त्वभिमुखी शिवा रौति भयं वदेत् ॥

- MatP. 23.7.5

“The crowing of the cock in the evening hoarsely, (the laughing of the cuckoos and the howling of the jackal facing the rising sun are also) most inauspicious signs.”

The other Purāṇa texts like *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa* (30.103), *Agnipurāṇa* (263.28), and the *Atrismṛti* (268) mention the cock in the context of expiation or their being auspicious or inauspicious. In the *kūmapurāṇa*, the food which is touched by the cock or the dog is said to be not good for eating (15.26). This obviously shows the hygiene-

related rule.

In the same vein the *Bṛhatsamhitā* says,

कुक्कुरुतं प्रदोषे हेमंतादौ च कोकिलालापाः ।
प्रतिलोममंडलचराः श्येनाद्याश्चाम्बरे भयदाः ॥
- BrS 46.69

“If the cock should be heard to cry soon after the sunset, or if the cuckoo should be heard to cry in the hemanta (cold) season, or if the hawk and the like birds should be found to move in circles from right to left, there would be misery in the land.”

The *Caturvargacintāmaṇi* (Hemadri/Pramathnatha Tarkabhuṣan, 1904, p.175-176) says that if one sells away the cock one has to undertake expiatory deeds.

C) Description of kukkuṭa in *Mṛgapakṣīśāstra*

The author Harṇsadeva has described four types of the kukkuṭa in Śreni No. 32.
- krukavāku (कृकवाकु :)

कृकवाकुः स विज्ञेयो रक्तवर्णच्छदान्वितः ॥552॥
हरिद्रावर्णचंचूको नितरां दीर्घनादकः ।
किंचित्तुंगोनवश्चैते संततं त्वरितक्रमाः ॥553॥

“Kṛkavāku should be known to be of red feathers. Its beak is yellow, its call is very long, its legs are long and its speed is fast.”

-Tāmracuḍa (ताम्रचूड)

The Tāmracuḍa variety of Kukkuṭa has white feathers. They are said to have red and hefty body, broad throat, sharp and shiny beak.

- Kukkuṭa (कुक्कुट)

Kukkuṭa is described as a different variety. Kukkuṭas are said to be ‘Dhumravarnāṅga’ (verse No. 559) which means having gray colour like smoke.

Caraṇāyudha (चरणायुध)

The Caraṇāyudha variety is said to be multi-coloured birds. They are described as fat, having long legs, broad wing span. Some of the Caraṇāyudha birds are said to live in jungle and they are described as cruel, and they give out shrill calls.

The other description of the Kukkuṭa are more like human personifications.

4) Mythological references to the kukkuṭa

In the Hindū mythology, the cock is associated with God Kārtikeya⁴. When Skanda was born, he was very powerful. It is said Skanda, the son of fire God, held the divine power in one of the hands, on the other hand, he held a mighty cock and started playing. (MBh.3.214.23,24). Further it is said:

कुक्कुटश्चाग्निना दत्तस्तस्य केतुरलंकृतः ।
रथे समुच्छ्रितो भाति कालाग्निरिव लोहितः ॥
- MBh.3.218.32

“The Fire God presented skanda a high flag which was decorated with the symbol of the cock, elevated on the chariot, it looked red like the fire at the time (of the destruction of the world’ - .”

In the *Matsyapurāṇa*, this association is found in a rather different way,

ददौ क्रीडनकं त्वष्टा कुक्कुटं कामरूपिणम् ॥
- Matsyapurāṇa 159.10

“Tvaṣṭā (or Viśvakarmā) gave (kārtikeya, some toys) and a cock which had a power to take any form according to its will.”

It is referred to in the *Agnipurāṇa* (50.30)⁵, that the Kaumāri śakti (the female goddess in the form of power incarnate) is said to be holding the cock in one of her six hands.

Thus it is commonly believed from the Purāṇic times that god Skanda possesses a cock as one his attributes.

5) Ornithological information of Kukkuṭa

A domestic breed or hen is easily seen. Red Junglefowl and Grey Junglefowl are the species which not so easily observed. Red Junglefowl is the ancestor of all domestic breeds of fowl.

Notes

- 1 ताग्रचूडो विवृताक्षः कुक्कुटश्चरणायुधः ।
कालज्ञः कृकवाकुः स्यान्नियोद्धा नखरायुधः ॥
बहुप्रजः शिखण्डी च विष्किरः स्यादुषःकलः ।
- *Kalpद्रुकोशा* 11. 130,131.
- 2 कुक्कुटो दीर्घवाग्दक्षः शिखी चूलिक आरणिः ।
कृकवाकुर्विवृताक्षस्ताग्रचूडः शिखण्डिकः ॥
- *Vaijayantīkośa* 3.13
- 3 यः कुक्कुटानि बध्नाति मार्जारान्सूकरांश्च तान् ।
पक्षिणश्च मृगाञ्छगान्साऽप्येनं नरकं व्रजेत् ॥
- *Vāyupurāṇa*,101.163, *Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa* 4.2.165

It is said that one who catches the cock goes to hell.

- मानपविद्धश्च कुक्कुटो ग्रामसूकरः ।
श्वा चैव हन्ति श्राद्धानि यातुघानाश्च दर्शनात् ॥
- *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* 30.22

Here in this verse it is said that the very sight of the cock is inauspicious for the śrāddha.

- शताब्दं तत्र निवसेद्यमदूतेन ताडितः ।
ततो भवेन्मेषजातिः कुक्कुटश्च त्रिजन्मनि ॥
- *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa* 30.103

= (One who steals away the food, seat, bedding of Brāhmaṇa) he goes to the cūrṇakuṇḍa, gets beaten by the servants of Yama, then gets the birth of a goat, then gets the birth of the cock three times.

- प्रदोषे कुक्कुटो वासे शिवा चार्कोदये भवेत् ।
गृहं कपोतः प्रविशेत्क्रव्याद्वा मूर्ध्नि लीयते ॥
- *Agnipurāṇa* 263.28

It is suggested here that if the cock gives out calls at Pradoṣa (the time preceding the nightfall) it forebodes the death of the king.

भुञ्जानः संस्पृशेद्यस्तु वायसः कुक्कुटस्तथा ।
त्रिरात्रेणैव शुद्धिः स्यादथोच्छिष्टस्त्वहेन तु ॥

- *Atrismṛiti* 268

“(By the end of *kr̥cchra vrata*), if the food is touched by a crow or a cock, (then) one is purified after three nights.”

- 4 द्वाभ्यां गृहीत्वा पाणिभ्यां शक्तिं चान्येन पाणिना ।
अपरेणाग्निदायादस्ताम्रचूडं भुजेन सः ॥
महाकायमुपशिलष्टं कुक्कुटं बलिनां वरम् ।
गृहीत्वा व्यनदद् भीमं चिक्रीड च महाबलः ॥
- MBh 3.214. 23-24

- 5 शिखिपिच्छं धनुः खेटं पताकाऽभयकुक्कुटे ।
कपालकर्तरीशूलपाशभृद्याम्यसौम्ययोः ॥
- *Agnipurāṇa* 50.30

□

Gr̥dhra

1) Introduction

In the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* (in Āraṇyakāṇḍa and Kiṣkindhā kāṇḍa), Gr̥dhra - the vulture, has played an important role in the form of Jaṭāyu and Sampāti who helped Lord Rāma in his mission of searching for Sītā. In the Buddhist literature, the Gr̥dhra is referred to in the stories or in preaching the Dharma. The Jātakas describe the birth stories of the Bodhisattva who was born as a vulture. In the Jātaka stories there are 'Gijjha Jātakas', (no. 164 [Cowell, Vol. II, 1990, p. 34], 399 [Cowell, Vol.III,1990, p.204] and 427 [Cowell, Vol. III, 1990, p.287]. In the Gijjha Jātaka (no. 164¹, 399), the Bodhisattva is born as the vulture. He had to feed his old parents. He was helped by a merchant of Benaras and in turn he also tried to show his gratefulness (no.164). This vulture was caught in snares and gins that were set everywhere. The merchant interfered and the vulture was set to liberty.

In the other Jātaka (no.399) also, the vulture had to feed his parents by getting flesh of cows and the like for them. While seeking for flesh he came to the cemetery and caught his foot in the snares².

In the Gijjha Jātaka (no.427), the Bodhisattva is a parent vulture who tries to advice his son against rash behaviour.

In a Tibetan Buddhist text namely '*Bya chos rinchen phreñ-ba*' (the Buddha's Law Among the birds, a precious garland), there is a reference to a king vulture, who expressed his thoughts by saying:

“One must know that born, one cannot stay,
that one must die” (Conze, 1996, p. 21)

The vulture has a mythological status in the Buddhist literature. A hill, one of the five hills near Girivraja Rājagṛha is known as 'Gr̥dhrakūṭa'. When Ānanda was meditating on this hill, Māra tried to disturb him by appearing in the form of a vulture. In order to save Ānanda, the Buddha kept his hand on Ānanda's shoulder by cracking the stone. It is said that there is still a crack and the footprint of the vulture can be seen. (Bharatiya Sanskriti Kosa, Vol.3, p. 100).

It is said that during the period of 5th Dalai Lama, Drupthob Tashi, a Khampa yogi was said to have the ability of transforming himself into a white vulture. He generously preached other birds that particularly subsisted on human corpses at sky burial sites. These birds are believed to bless the corpses by tapping them three times with their wings before consuming them. (www.khandro.net/animal_birds.htm)

In the North-east India in the Khampti tribe there are stories about vultures. In one of the stories namely 'The witch on the silver Tree'. There is a story of a witch who assumed the form of the vulture. In the story 'The power of intelligence', there is a strange reference to the vulture that gave birth to two puppies-one male and the other female. The vulture gave these puppies to a hunter and assured him that they will be of great help to man. (Verrier Elwin, 1991, pp. 233,234)

In English literature, there is a beautiful story of the old vulture, who was training the young vultures. This vulture described the power of a man, his tendency to indulge in wars and prove himself superior. The old vulture says: "two herds of men will often meet and shake his earth with noise, and fill the air with fire." He explains that men destroy each other and the ground becomes covered with carcasses. Then the young vulture asks: "But when men have killed their prey, why do they not eat it? I would gladly know the reason of this mutual slaughter. I could never kill what I could not eat." The mother vulture answers, "this is the question which I cannot answer, though I am reckoned the most subtle bird of the mountain." (Ed. Adcock F. and Simms J., 1995, pp.11-12). This answer certainly makes us introvert and fills our mind with pity for a human being who does not hesitate to kill others for selfish motives. There are a number of poems in English literature describing vultures. For example,

Hung there in the thermal
whiteout of noon, dark ash
in the chimney's updraft, turning
slowly like a thumb pressed down
on target; indolent V.'s; flies, until they drop. -
(by Margaret Atwood) (Ed. Adcock F. and Simms J., 1995, p.273).

The vulture's very like a sack
Set down and left there drooping.
His crooked neck and creaky back
Look badly bent from stooping
Down to the ground to eat dead cows
So they won't go to waste
Thus making up in usefulness
For what he lacks in taste.
(- by X.J. Kennedy) Ed. Adcock F. and Simms J.,
1995, p. 286).

Now we will have a review of some of the references to Gṛdhra in Sanskrit literature.

2) Synonyms for Gṛdhra

'Gṛdh' means to endeavour to gain, to desire, to be greedy, to strive after greedily, to deceive or to cheat.

The bird is called Gṛdhra because it devours the carrion.

— दक्षाय्यगृध्रौ — ॥

-AK 2.5.21

"Dakṣāyya is one who is alert.

Gṛdhra is one who strives after greedily."

दक्षाय्यो दूरदृग् गृध्रः ।

- AbhiC. 4.401³

"One who is 'dakṣa' i.e. alert is Dakṣāyya."

"One who can see a long distance is 'dūradrḡ'."

“One who is greedy for flesh is ‘Gṛdhra’.”

“Puruṣavyāghra = (Literally it means a ‘man-tiger’.)”

kāmāyu = It means a vulture.

kūnitekṣṇa = The meaning is not clear.

Sudarśana = One who looks good or the one who has good eye-sight.

The *Śabdakalpadruma* (Kāṇḍa 2)⁴, the *Vaijayantīkośa* (3.30) mentions two names-

Vajratuṇḍa = One who is hard-beaked.

Dūradarśana = One who can see at a long distance.

The Āyurvedic text ‘*Dhanvantariya nighaṇṭu Rājanighaṇṭusahita*’⁵ have mentioned few other synonyms like these-

“Gṛdhra (गृध्र) = Gṛdhra is a vulture or one who is desiring greedily.

Śālmaliṣṭha (शात्मलिष्ठ) = Śālmali is a silk-cotton tree which is a lofty and thorny tree with red flowers.

‘Śālmaliṣṭha’ is one abiding in the Śālmali.

Khagendra (खगेन्द्र) = Khagendra is the chief of the birds.”

3) References to Gṛdhra in Sanskrit literature

The Gṛdhra has played an important part in the epic *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. Farsighted, good natured Sampāti and Jaṭāyu helped Rāma in his search for Sītā. Jaṭāyu sacrificed his life in his fight with demon king Rāvaṇa who abducted Sītā.

Gṛdhrarāja Sapāti says,

तस्मादाहारवीर्येण निसर्गेण च वानराः ।

आयोजनशतात्साम्राट्पश्यन् पश्याम नित्यशः ॥

- VR IV. 58. 30a

“Therefore, o monkeys, through the potency of our food and by virtue of our nature (as descendants of Vinatā) we (vultures) can always see to a distance of more than one hundred yojanas (or eight hundred miles).”

The classical literature also refers to the powerful and mighty vultures. For example,

गृध्रैराबद्धचक्रं वियति विचलितैर्दीर्घनिष्कम्पक्षैः ।

- *Mudrārākṣasa*, 3.28

“Vultures, whose wings long and motionless having formed themselves into circles in the sky.”

गृध्रा मधूकमुकुलोन्नतपिङ्गलास्या

दैत्येन्द्रकुञ्जरनताङ्कुशतीक्ष्णतुण्डाः ।

भ्रान्त्यम्बरे विततलम्बविकीर्णपक्षा

मांसैः प्रवालरचिता इव तालवृन्ताः ॥

- *Urubhaṅga* - I.11

“Vultures, with eyes tawny and protruding like Madhūka buds, and beaks as sharp as the curved goad for the elephant of the lord of demons, with extensive long wings outstretches in the sky look like coral-in laid fans on bits of flesh.”

In the *Vaimānikaśāstra*, the flight and speed of the vulture is admired. It is said;

अथ विमानशब्दार्थविचारः ॥

वेगसाम्या द्विमानोऽण्डजानामिति ॥

- *Vaimānikaśāstra* -1.1

Owing to similarity of speed with birds, it is named विमान.

The explanation according to the *Bodhānandavṛtti* (commentary) given for this sūtra is as follows:

अण्डजेत्यत्र सूत्रेस्मिन्गृध्राद्याः पक्षिणः स्मृताः ।

आकाशगमने तेषां वेगशक्तिः स्ववेगतः ॥

यद्वा गृध्रादिपक्षिणां वेगसाम्यं यस्यास्ति वेगतः ।

“In the sutra, ‘aṇḍaja.’ ‘egg-born’, (by the word aṇḍaja), the birds such as ‘vulture’ and as on are implied. The power of their speed in flying to the sky (is noted), on account of their own speed. Or alternatively, (the word ‘vimāna’ is understood is that way), because it is the one which bears similarity of speed with the birds such as vultures and so on, on the basis of speed.’ The commentator probably attempts to derive the word ‘vimāna’ as a compound ‘vi+ māna’ where ‘vi’ means ‘bird’ and ‘māna’ means ‘measurement’ i.e. similarity or comparison.

A) Oldest reference to Gṛdhra

The twin gods Aśvins are referred to as Gṛdhras. The translator translates the word Gṛdhra as eagles. In the *Vaidika kośa*, it is said that the vulture in the *Rgveda* is especially noted for its swiftness in flight and its fondness for devouring carrion. It is a bird of prey.

आ वां श्येनासो अश्विना वहन्तु रथे युक्तास आश्वः पतङ्गाः ।
ये अप्तुरो दिव्यासो न गृध्रा अभि प्रयो नासत्या वहन्ति ॥

- RV1.118.4

“O Aśvins, let your falcons bear you hither, yoked to your chariot, swift, with flying pinions.

Which, ever active, like the airy eagles (or vultures) carry you, O Nāsatyas, to the banquet.”

उलूकयातुं शुशुलूकयातुं जहि श्वयातुमुत कोकयातुम् ।
सुपर्णयातुमुत गृध्रयातुं द्रुषदेव प्र मृण रक्ष इन्द्र ॥

- RV 7.104.22

“Destroy the fiend shaped like an owl or owlet, destroy him in the form of dog or cuckoo.

Destroy him shaped as eagle or as vulture : as with a stone, O Indra, crush the demon.”

द्रुप्सः समुद्रमभि यज्जिगाति पश्यन् गृध्रस्य चक्षसा, विघर्मन् ।
भानुः शुक्रेण शोचिषा चकानस्तुतीये चक्रे रजसि प्रियाणि ॥

- RV 10.123.8

“When as a spark he cometh near the ocean, still looking with a vulture’s eye to heaven, His lustre joying in its own bright splendour, maketh dear glories in the lowest region.”

The Atharvaveda emphasizes the aggressive nature and killer instincts of vultures.

सरूपौ द्वौ विरूपौ द्वौ कृष्णौ द्वौ रोहितौ द्वौ ।
बभ्रुश्च बभ्रुकर्णश्च गृध्रः कोकश्च तै हताः ॥

- AV 5.23.4

“Of like form two, of various form two, black two, red two; both the brown and the brown-eared, the vulture and the cuckoo (Koka) ? - they are slain.”

उदस्य श्यावौ विशुरौ गृध्रौ घामिव पेततुः ।
उच्छोचनप्रशोचनावस्योच्छोचनौ हृदः ॥

- AV 7.95.1

“Up have flown his two dark-brown quiverers as two vultures to the sky-up-heater-and-forth-heater, up-heaters of his heart.”

शुने क्रोष्ट्रे मा शरीराणि कर्तमलिकल्लवेभ्यो
गृध्रेभ्यो ये च कृष्णा अविष्यवः ।
मक्षिकास्ते पशुपते वयांसि ते विघ्रसे मा विदन्त ॥

- AV 11.2.2

“Make ye not bodies for the dog, the jackal, for the buzzards (? aliklava), the vultures, and them that are black (and) greedy (aviṣyu); let thy flies, lord of cattle, let thy birds not find themselves at food.”

अलिकल्लवा जाष्कमदा गृध्राः श्येनाः पतत्रिणः ।
ध्वाङ्क्षाः शकुनयस्तृप्यन्त्वमित्रेषु समीक्षयन्
रदिते अर्बुदे तव ॥

- AV 11.9.9

“Let the buzzards, jāṣkamadās, vultures, falcons, winged ones, let the crows, the birds (śakuni), satisfy themselves - exhibiting among the enemies - in case of thy bite, O Arbudi.”

The Kṛṣṇayajurveda (5.5. 20.1) makes a reference to a vulture with a white belly. The Yajurveda appreciates a vulture in this way:

गृध्रः सुपर्णः कुणपं निषेवति ॥

Yajurveda, Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā 4.9.19, Taittirīya Āraṇyaka 4.29

“The vulture the beautiful winged visits the corpse.”

This is perhaps for the first time that a reference to the scavenging habit of a vulture is made.

B) References to Gṛdhra and scavenging

The Sanskrit classical literature has taken a note of scavenging habit of vultures. We will see some of the examples:

चञ्चच्चञ्चप्रकृतच्युतपिशितलवग्राससंवृद्धगर्ध -
गृध्रैराबद्धपक्षद्वितयविधुतिभिर्बद्धसान्द्रान्धकारे ।

- Nāgānanda 4.18

“ In this (cemetery) where an impenetrable darkness is fastened down by the vultures whose (gardha) is increased by the mouthfuls of bits of flesh dropping after being torn up by the edges of their trembling beaks and who have begun the flapping of (their) pairs of wings,”

उपलविषमा नागेन्द्राणां शरीरधरा घरा
दिशि दिशि कृता गृध्रावासा हतातिरथा रथाः ।

- Ūrubhaṅga 1.5

“With the carcasses of big elephants the earth is (as if) uneven with boulder rocks; all

around vultures have built their nests and the chariots have the fighters killed.”

उन्मुखः सपदि लक्ष्मणाग्रजो बाणमाश्रयमुखात्समुद्धरन् ।
रक्षासां बलमपश्यदम्बरे गृध्रपक्षपवनेरितध्वजम् ॥
- Raghu.11.26

“Immediately the elder brother of Lakṣmaṇa took out the arrow from the quiver and looked upward; he saw the army of demons whose flags are fluttering in the sky due to the fanning by the wings of the vulture.”

In the *Kumārasambhava*, there is a reference to the hovering vultures (15.29). In the *Agnipurāṇa*, there is a reference to Jaṭāyu.

C) References to the food liked by Gṛdhra

ततो वयः प्रपतन्ति पुरुषान् अदनाय ।
- *Nirukta* 2.6

“Afterwards the vultures dart forwards to devour the human beings.”

The *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* (8.12)⁶ says that the foul smell of heap of bones attracts the vultures. In the other verse from the same purāṇa (13.46), it is said that the vultures cut the flesh of the body.

D) Description of Gṛdhra in the *Mṛgapakṣīśāstra*

The author Harṇsadeva mentions two types of vultures and gives their descriptions:

गृध्राः स्थूलशरीराश्च बृहत्पक्षतिमंडिताः ।
कृष्णरक्तावयवका दृढचञ्चुपुटान्विताः ॥217॥
भृशं कर्कशरोमाङ्गा गगनेवेगगामिनः ।
संपूर्णबलसंपन्नाः संततं पक्षचालनाः ॥218॥

“Gṛdhras have hefty body, broad wings, black and red coloured organs, and strong beak. They have rough hair on their body and they fly speedily in the sky. They are absolutely strong and flutter their wings now and then.”

दाक्षाय्या ह्रस्वदेहाश्च बृहत्पक्षतिसंयुताः ॥222॥
पक्षतिप्रान्तभागेषु श्वेतवर्णविभूषिताः ।
धूम्रवर्णा दीर्घपादाः क्षुद्रचञ्चुपुटा मताः ॥223॥ śreṇī २६.

“It is said that Dākṣāyya (type of vultures) have small body and broad wings. The tips of their feathers are white, their colour is smokey, (they have) long legs and comparatively small beak.”

E) References to Gṛdhra showing superstitions and augury

The *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* has many references showing augury that suggest inauspicious consequences for the army of demons or for the demon king Rāvaṇa. Vultures were hovering in the ariel region and a large flock of vultures followed Rāvaṇa’s chariot.

केतमूर्धनि गृध्रस्तु विलीनो दक्षिणामुखः ।
नदन्नुभयतः पार्श्वं समग्रां श्रियमाहरत् ॥

- VR VI 57.39 (*Vālmiki /satavalekar, Vol.7, 1970, p.331*)

In this verse it is suggested that there was a vulture on the chariot of the ogre perched

facing the South and it was suggesting ill omen.

The brother of Rāvaṇa – Kumbhakarna experienced the inauspicious omens, like:

निष्पात च गृध्रोऽस्य शूले वै पथि गच्छतः ।
प्रास्फुरन्नयनं चास्य सव्यो बाहुरकम्पयत् ॥

- VR VI 65.50a (Vālmiki/satavalekar, Vol.7, 1970, p.413)

“A vulture actually alighted on his pike as he was marching along the road. His left eye twitched and his left arm throbbed.”

Likewise the son of Rāvaṇa faced ill omens when he was fighting with Rāma’s brother Lakṣmaṇa.

क्रव्यादा दारुणा वाग्मिशिचक्षिपुर्भीमनिःस्वनान् ।
न तदानीं ववौ वायुर्न च जज्वाल पावकः ॥

- VR VI 89.37a

“Hideous carnivorous (such as vultures and jackals) emitted frightful cries with their tongues. No wind blew at that time nor did fire burn.”

While speaking about the punishments in the hell, it is said in the *Bhāgavatamahāpurāṇa* (3.30.26) that the organs of a wicked persons will be dragged in the house of Yama (God of death) by dogs and vultures.

While talking about effective periods, it is said in the *Bṛihatsarhitā* (97.9), “effect connected with swarms of the jackals and the vultures will be felt after a gap of ten days.”

गृध्रः वामेऽपसव्ये पुरतः पृष्ठे स्थितः सन् यथाक्रमं ।
युद्धं विभेदं मरणं श्रियं च तथापसव्यशब्दः विपत्तिहेतुर्भवति ॥

- VasantaS 8.33

“If the vulture goes to the right, the left, in front or backward (of us), it suggests either (the possibility) of war, or division, or death or wealth. (But) if the vulture gives out calls by stopping (at one place) it (certainly) suggests the disaster.”

4) Mythological references to Gṛdhra

In the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, the Gṛdhra is said to be the son of śyenī (female Hawk) (VR III.14.33C)

In the *Mahābhārata*, (7.131.27a), there is a reference that the vulture spreading its wings and paws and it is posed as if it is giving out calls was depicted on the flag of Ghaṭotkaca (son of Bhīma). A similar bird was depicted on the flag of demon called ‘Alambuśa’. In the Śāntiparva of the *Mahābhārata*(12.149) there is a story of a dialogue between the vulture and the fox. A dead body of a child was brought to the cemetery for funeral rites. That time the vulture and the fox were present there. Both of them tried to fool the relatives of the dead child because both of them wanted to devour the corpse.

In the *Mahābhārata* as well as in the *Agnipurāṇa* (116.11,12) there are references to Gṛdhrakūṭa, (a mountain in northern India) and Gṛdhravata (a mountain of the Himālayas). In the Purāṇas, Gṛdhrikā-a female vulture- was said to be born of sage Kaśyapa and his wife, Tāmrā. In the *Garuḍapurāṇa* (in the *Gāyātīrthamāhātmya* 12), there is a reference to the God namely ‘Gṛdhreśvara’. It is said:

देवं गृध्रेश्वरं दृष्ट्वा को न मुच्येत बन्धनात् ।—

“Who would not get released from the bond (of karma) after seeing Lord Gṛdhreśvara?”

Gṛdhreśvara is supposed to be the Lord ‘Śaṅkara’. The Gṛdhraṇḍī mountain in the Himālaya is believed to be the abode of Mahādeva. It is said that those who visit this mount get Mokṣa or become absolved of all sins. Likewise the Purāṇic literature mentions the vulture as the vehicle of Goddess. कामुण्डा.

Also, it is believed in the tradition of the Mahāyān Buddhism that the Buddha turned the Wheel of Law (dharmacakra) for the second time at the Gṛdhraṅḍī mountain and gave the teachings of the Pāramitāyāna. {Dalai Lama (1977). *My land and my people*, New Delhi: Shrishti Publication, p.239}

The *Agnipurāṇa* and the epics like the *Mahābhārata* and the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* refer to the habitat of the vulture as ‘Gṛdhraṅḍī’ and ‘Gṛdhraṇḍī’.

5) Ornithological information of Gṛdhra

1) Black or King Vulture (Redheaded Vulture)

It is a huge black vulture with deep scarlet naked head, neck and legs. It has whitish band on underside of wings prominent, white patches on upper thighs and at base of neck. It is seen throughout India up to about 2000 m in the Himalayas. It is a carrion-feeder.

2) Cinereous vulture

It has a massive, black or blackish brown vulture with pinkish naked neck with a black ruff. It is a resident of the Himalayas. It feeds on carrion.

3) Indian Griffon Vulture (Eurasian Griffon)

It is a huge cinnamon-brown vulture. It has distinctive whitish ruff at base of neck. It feeds on carrion.

4) Indian Longbilled Vulture

It is brown above with feathers pale edged. It has distinct white ruff at base of neck. It feeds on carcasses.

5) Whitebacked or Bengal Vulture (whiterumped vulture)

It is blackish brown with naked head and neck. While banking in the air and at rest, the white back is prominently seen. It is a carcass-feeder.

6) White Scavenger Vulture or Pharaoh’s Chicken (Egyptian Vulture)

It is dirty-white kite-like vulture. It has naked yellow head and bill. It is a scavenger bird. It also feeds on human excrement, freshwater turtles.

Notes

1 There is a question that was asked by the King which denotes the special characteristic of the vultures,

“A vulture sees a corpse that lies one hundred
leagues away !

When thou alightest upon a trap dost thou not

see it, pray ? “ (Cowell, Vol. II, 1990. p.35)

2 That time the son of hunter asked him,

“ Carrion a vulture sights across a hundred leagues of land ;
Why do you fail to see a snare and net so close of hand?
When ruin comes upon a man, and fates his death demand,
He fails to see a snare or net although so close at hand.”

- 3 दाक्ष्यते दाक्षाय्यः “श्रुदक्षिगृहि-” (उणा - ३७३) ॥ इत्याय्यः,
दक्षाय्य एव दाक्षाय्यः, प्रज्ञादित्वादण् ॥१॥
दूरात् पश्यति दूरदृक् ॥२॥
गृध्यति मांसं गृध्रः “ऋज्यजि-” ॥ (उणा - ३८८) इति किद् रः ॥
शेषश्चात्र -
गृध्रे तु पुरुषव्याघ्रः कामायुः कूणितेक्षणः ।
सुदर्शनः शकुन्यासौ ॥

- 4 गृध्रः - गृध्यति अभिकाङ्क्षति मांसानीति ।
पक्षिविशेषः । दाक्षाय वज्रतुण्डः ३ दूरदर्शनः
इति राजनिर्घण्टुः ॥

- *Śabdakalpadruma, Kāṇḍa 2, p. 348*

- 5 गृध्रस्ताक्षर्यः शाल्मलिस्थः खगेन्द्रो भुजगान्तकः ।
वज्रतुण्डश्च दाक्षाय्यो गरुत्मान्दुष्टदर्शनः ॥६२॥
राजनिघण्टौ सिंहादिरेकोनविंशो वर्गः -
गृध्रस्ताक्षर्यो वैनतेयः खगेन्द्रो भुजगान्तकः ।
वक्रतुण्डश्च दाक्षाय्यो गरुत्मान्दूरदर्शनः ॥३२॥

‘Dhanvantarīya nighaṅṭu Rājanighaṅṭusahita, 6.27.

- 6 गृध्रगोमायुसंकीर्णं श्ववृन्दपरिवारितम् ।
अस्थिसंघातसंकीर्णं महादुर्गन्धसंकुलम् ॥

MārP 8.12



Garuḍa

1) Introduction

In India, Garuḍa is respected and worshipped along with his Master - Lord Viṣṇu. In temples, the stone or the wooden images of this bird are regularly seen. Garuḍa is mainly honoured because of his mythological status and his valor. In the warfare, there was a device of arranging soldiers on the battlefield in the shape of Garuḍa. It was known as Garuḍavyūha. In the various yoga postures, there is a special posture known as 'Garuḍāsana'. 'Suparnaciti' is a type of fire altar which was moulded into the form the bird Su-parṇa or Garuḍa.

Garuḍa or Eagle is the mythological character in Indian as well as in a other cultures. In Greek mythology, Jupiter is believed to have taken the form of an eagle. Ganymede was a handsome boy. Zeus was excited with passion. He came in the guise of an eagle and bore him away to Mount Olympus. In the Nordic tales, Luonnotar, a primal goddess grew restless in the heavens and slipped into the cosmic sea, where she drifted until an eagle built a nest on her knee. When she accidentally upset the nest, its eggs broke and formed the earth, sky, sun, moon and stars. (ed. Cotterell A. and Strom R., 1999, p.209). There is another belief that Thiassi-a frost giant, disguised as an eagle. In Celtic culture, Taliesin was a prophetic poet and Shamanistic seer. He appeared as an eagle, the bird often chosen by Shamans on their spirit-flights or trace journeys to the other world. The eagle's golden nimbus symbolizes Taliesin's radiant brow.

The Holy *Bible* refers to an eagle as:

“ Doth the eagle mount up at thy command,
and make her nest on high?
She dwelleth on the rock, and hath her lodging there,
Upon the crag of the rock, and the strong hold.”

- *Bible ; Job 39.27,28*

In the North-east Indian tradition we find folklores referring to Garuḍa. The Ashing story says that there were two Wiyu brothers. When the whole world was covered with water, these brothers had no place to live. When they were wandering in despair, an eagle flew to help them. They jumped into the sky and clung to him. He carried them into the sky. When the water dried, he brought them down again to the earth. There is another story which says that an eagle was born of Mathum-Matha's spittle. (Verrier Elwin, reprint 1991, p. 261)

The *Guru Grantha Sahib* of Sikh religion praises an eagle for his valor:

जिऊ खगराज बडो अहिराज समाज के काट लेता करि लीने ॥

- 1.36

“ The King of birds (Garuḍa) (easily) cut the King of snakes into pieces.”

2) Synonyms for Garuḍa

A) 57 Synonyms for Garuḍa in the *Mahabhārata* (5.99.1-3, 9-14)

- Suparṇa (सुपर्णः) = One who has beautiful wings.
- Pannagāśin (पन्नगाशिन) = One who devours snakes.
- Vainateyasuta (वैनतेयसुतः) = One who is the son of Vinatā.
- Sumukha (सुमुखः) = One who has beautiful face.
- Sunāmna (सुनाम्नः) = One who is well-named.
- Sunetra (सुनेत्रः) = One who is beautiful or fair-eyed.
- Suvarcasa (सुवर्चसः) = One who is full of vigour.
- Surūpa (सुरूपः) = One having good appearance.
- Pakṣirāja (पक्षिराजः) = One who is the king of birds.
- Subala (सुबलः) = One who is very powerful.
- Suvarṇacūḍa (सुवर्णचूडः) = One who has golden crest.
- Nāgāśin (नागाशिन) = One who is snake-eater.
- Dāruṇa (दारुणः) = One who is dreadful.
- Caṇḍatuṇḍaka (चण्डतुण्डकः) = One who is 'powerful-beaked'.
- Anala (अनलः) = It means the God of fire. In the case of Garuḍa, it may mean sharp, bright like fire.
- Anila (अनिलः) = It means the God of wind. In the case of Garuḍa, it may mean fast-flying like wind.
- Viśālākṣa (विशालाक्षः) = One who is large-eyed.
- Kuṇḍalin (कुण्डलिन) = One who is spotted.
- Kāśyapin (काश्यपिन्) = One who is related to Kaśyapa.
- Dhṛvajaviṣkambha (ध्वजविष्कम्भः) = One who is supporting the flag.
- Vainateya (वैनतेयः) = One who is the son of Vinatā.
- Vāmana (वामनः) = One who is crooked.
- Vātavega (वातवेगः) = One who is speedy like wind.
- Diśacakṣu (दिशाचक्षुः) = One who has 'sky-vision'.
- Nimeṣa (निमेषः) = It is a measure of time, and means twinkling or winking. It refers to the speed of the Garuḍa.
- Animiṣa (अनिमिषः) = One who has no winking of his eyes.
- Trivāra (त्रिवार) = Calling Thrice? (or Trivārah). The meaning is not clear.
- Saptavāra (सप्तवार) = Calling Seven times? (or Saptavārah). The meaning is not clear.
- Vālmikī (वाल्मीकि) = The meaning is not clear.
- Dvīpaka (द्वीपकः) = The meaning is not clear.
- Daityadvīpa (दैत्यद्वीपः) = Refuge of the demons. It perhaps refers to the place of shelter.
- Sariddvīpa (सरिद्द्वीपः) = 'Sarit' means river, stream. 'Dvīpa' is an island. It may refer to the habitat.
- Sārasa (सारसः) = One who is belonging to a pond or lake.
- Padmakesara (पद्मकेसरः) = It means the filament of a lotus. (Does it refer to the colour?)
- Sukhaketu (सुखकेतुः) = One who is swift and bright.
- Citrabarha (चित्रबर्हः) = One who has variegated plumage.
- Anagha (अनघः) = One who is faultless.
- Meghakt† (मेघकृत) = One who is made up of a cloud? or one who makes the cloud?
- Kumuda (कुमुदः) = White water-lily. It may refer to the colour of the Garuḍa.

Dakṣa (दक्षः) = One who is alert.

Sarpānta (सर्पान्तः) = One who kills the snakes.

Somabhojana (सोमभोजनः) = One who consumes 'soma' as food.

Gurubhāra (गुरुभारः) = One who is heafy.

Kapota (कपोतः) = Pigeon. It may refer to the grey colour of the Garuḍa.

Sūryanetra (सूर्यनेत्रः) = Name of Garuḍa. It may refer to the sharpness of sight.

Cirāntaka (चिरान्तकः) = One who is existing from ancient times.

Viṣṇudhanvā (विष्णुधन्वा) = One who is related to Viṣṇu.

Kumāra (कुमारः) = One who is young.

Paribarha (परिबर्हः) = One who has round plumage.

Hari (हरिः) = One who is reddish-brown.

Susvara (सुस्वरः) = One who has melodious voice.

Madhuparka (मधुपर्कः) = It is mixture of milk and honey. (Perhaps it refers to the brown colour of the Garuḍa.)

Hemavarṇa (हेमवर्णः) = One who is golden-coloured.

Malaya (मलयः) = It may refer to the habitat in the mountain range on the west of Malabar and Western Ghats.

Mātariśvan (मातरिश्चन्) = One who flies in sky.

Niśākara (निशाकरः) = One who causes night. (or 'night-maker').

Divākara (दिवाकरः) = One who causes day. (or 'day-maker').

Though these names are said to be the names of offspring of the Garuḍa, they are the descriptive synonyms of Garuḍa.

B) Other synonyms of Garuḍa

The Garuḍa is fondly called as the 'Patagapati' (पतगपति) or 'Patageśvara' (पतगेश्वर) which means the King of birds.

The *Kalpadrakośa* contains a similar synonyms as mentioned before (11.86,87) except a few words like, Maṇituṇḍaka (मणितुण्डकः) = It means a bird living on water.

Sanghātacārin (संघातचारिन्) = Sanghāta is dashing or killing together.

The *Śabdakalpadruma* (page 309) mentions almost the same synonyms except few that are noted here,

Viṣṇuratha (विष्णुरथः) = One who is the chariot (i.e. vehicle) of Lord Viṣṇu.

Mahāvīra (महावीरः) = One who is a great warrior.

Uragāśana (उरगाशनः) = One who is the devourer of snakes.

Amṛtāharana (अमृताहरणः) = One who brought Amṛita (heavenly nector).

Tarasvin (तरस्विन्) = Speedy

In *Abhidhānacintāmaṇi*, it is said that

—गरुड इव गरुडः प्रचण्डत्वात् ॥ 1.43

The mighty qualities are indicated here.

गरुडः शाल्मल्यारुणावरजो विष्णुवाहनम् ॥2॥

सौपर्णो यो वैनतेयः सुपर्णः

सर्पारतिवज्रिजिद् वज्रतुण्डः ।

पक्षिस्वामी काश्यपिः स्वर्णकायः

तार्क्ष्यः कामायुर्गुरुमान् सुधाहत् ॥

- AbhiC¹, 2.145

“One who devours the snakes is Garuḍa.”

“One who flies with wings, as well as one who has spotted belly.”

“Śālmali is a huge tree. One who resides on it is Śālmalya.” Kūṭaśālmali is the name of the capital-mountain of Garuḍa.

“One who is junior or younger to Aruṇa.”

“One who is the vehicle of Viṣṇu.”

“One who is matron is called as Sauparṇeya.”

“The offspring of Vinatā is Vainateya.”

“Suparṇa is one who has beautiful wings-is Suparṇa.”

“One who is an enemy of snakes is ‘Sarpārāti’.”

“One who is the conqueror of Indra is Vajrijit.”

“One who is hard-beaked is Vajratuṇḍa.”

“One who is the lord of the birds is ‘Pakṣisvāmin’.”

“One who is the child of Kāśyapa is ‘Kāśyapin’.”

“One who has golden body is ‘Svarṇakāya’.”

“One who is the child of Tṛkṣa is Tārṁkṣya.”

“One who has the life according to his own desire is Kāmāyu.”

“One who has wings is Garutmān.”

“One who brings the nector is ‘Sudhāhṛt’.”

Further it is said in the *Abhidhānacintāmaṇi* :

पक्षिसिंहो महापक्षो महावेगो विशालकः ।

उन्नतीशः स्वमुखभूः शिलाऽनीहोऽहिभुक् च सः ॥2.145॥

Pakṣisirṅha (पक्षिसिंहः) = One who is the lion amongst the bird.

Mahāpakṣa (महापक्षः) = One who has big wings.

Mahāvega (महावेगः) = One who has great speed.

Viśālaka (विशालकः) = One who is mighty.

Unnatīśa (उन्नतीशः) = One who is the lord of unnati (i.e. of prominent heights.)

Svamukhabhū (स्वमुखभूः) = The meaning is not clear.

Śilā (शीला) = One who is powerful like a stone?

Anīha (अनीहः) = The meaning is not clear. (one who is devoid of desire?)

Ahibhuk (अहिभुक्) = One who eats snakes.

3) References to Garuḍa in Sanskrit Literature

A) Oldest references to Garuḍa

In the *R̥gveda*, the Garuḍa is sometimes referred to as the ‘Suparṇa’ - strong winged or fair winged. Here are some of the examples of ‘an eagle’ in the *R̥gveda* -

मा त्वा॑ श्येन॑ उद् वधी॑न्मा सुप॑र्णो
मा त्वा॑ विद॑दिषु॒मान् वी॑रो अस्ता॑ ।
पित्र्या॑मनु॑ प्रदिशं॑ कर्निक्र॑दत् सुमृ॑ङ्गलो भद्र॑वादी व॑देह ॥

- RV 2.42.2

“Let not the falcon kill thee, nor the eagle: let not the arrow-bearing archer reach thee.

Still crying in the region of the fathers, speak here auspicious, bearing joyful tidings.”

In Rgveda 7.104.22 the word is used to refer to the fiend or evil-spirit which is shaped as an eagle.

अत॑स्त्वा रु॒यिम॑भि राजा॑नं सु॒क्रतो दि॒वः ।
सुप॑र्णो अ॒व्यथि॑र्भर॑त् ॥

-RV 9.48.3

“ Hence, Sapiient one! the falcon, strong of wing, unwearies brought thee down, Lord over riches, from the sky.”

ए॒कः सु॒पर्णः स॑ समु॒द्रमा वि॑वेश स इ॒दं विश्वं॑ भु॒वनं वि च॑ष्टे ।
तं पा॒केन॑ मनसापश्यमन्तित॒स्तं मा॒ता रे॒व्हि स उ॑ रे॒व्हि मा॒तरम् ॥

- R V 10.114.4

“ One of these Birds hath passed into the sea of air : thence he looks round and views this universal world.

With simple heart. I have beheld him from anear : his mother kisses him and he returns her kiss.”

The *Yajurveda - Vājasaneyī Samhitā* says:

सु॒पर्णो॑ऽसि ग॒रुत्मान् ——— ॥

- VS 17.72

“(The fire in the alter is compared to the) beautiful winged eagle.”

----- संवत्स॑राय मह॒तः सु॒पर्णान् ॥

- VS 24.25

“(Let) big eagles (be offered to the deity namely) Saṁvatsara ‘a year’.”

The *Sāmaveda* describes the eagle as golden winged and beautifully flying in the sky (3.2.8). The idea in the Rgveda is reflected in the Sāmaveda where it is said that the eagle brought the Soma (a sacred plant), from the heaven (4.1.3). Agni is compared to the strong eagle. (20.7.1)

The *Atharvaveda* says, “ An eagle (suparṇa) (was born first) (1.24.1). The particular kind ‘Vanaspati’ (plant) is said to be discovered by the eagle (2.27.2, 2.30.3) In another verse for warding off the poison of a poisoned arrow, it is said, “ the winged (garutmanta) eagle consumed thee first, o poison;” (4.6.3)

B) References to Garuḍa in *Mṛgapakṣīśāstra*

Hamsadeva describes Garuḍa under three types namely Garuḍa , Vainateya and Pannagārin.

The author says, “ Garuḍa is of three types- white, black or pied “ (25.169). We will review the descriptions as observed by him:

Garuḍa = गरुडास्ते समाख्याता ये भृशं श्वेतकण्ठकाः ॥

रक्तावयवसंयुक्ता वक्रचञ्चुमुखाश्च ते ।

पक्षविस्ताररम्याश्च दृढपादविभूषिताः ॥

- 25.178,179

“Garuḍas are those whose throats are profusely white, organs are red and the beak is crooked. (Their) wings are broad and legs are full of strength.”

Vainateya = ‘ Vainateya’ type of eagle are said to be handsome.

रक्तकृष्णागरुद्युक्ताः स्वल्पश्चेतांगभासुराः ।
किञ्चिद्बृहद्वालयुता दृढकोपाश्च ते मताः ॥

- 25.184

“(They) are said to be reddish black, (also) have whitish colour, (they) have rather long tail and (they) are short-tempered.”

The Vainateyas are said to give out calls like ‘Krenkāra’. They make circles in the air while flying.

Pannagarin = According to the author this type of eagles are said to be spotted.

4) Mythological references to Garuḍa

The *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* refers to the mighty Garuḍa. For example, Sītā says to Hanumāna:

त्रयाणामेव भूतानां सागरस्येह लङ्घने ।

शक्तिः स्याद् वैनतेयस्य तव वा मारुतस्य वा ॥

- VR V. 39.26a (Vālmiki/Satavalekar, Vol.6, 1967, p.277)

“ The capacity to cross the sea in this world exists in three created beings only, viz, Garuḍa (son of Vinatā), the wind-god and yourself.”

The Vānaras (monkeys) saw an eagle which was bright and strong like fire (VI. 50.36) (Vālmiki/Satavalekar, Vol. 7-Part 1, 1970, p.289). A weapon called as ‘Paitāmahāstra’ has the beautiful and colourful feathers of eagle. (VI.108.12a) (Vālmiki/Satavalekar, Vol. 6-Part 2, 1967, p.254). When Sugrīva and other monkeys were hit by the Nāgāstra of Indrajit, Śrī Rāma called Garuḍa to remove the snares of snakes.

The *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* narrates a story (III 14.32 c) about the geneology of the Garuḍa which consists of Viṣṇu, Brahmā, Marīcī, Kaśyapa and Garuḍa. Aruṇa and Garuḍa were the sons of Vinatā.

In the *Mahābhārata* also there is a story regarding Aruṇa and Garuḍa. Aruṇa became a charioteer of the sun. Vinatā laid an egg that took thousand years for hatching. When an egg broke itself open, Garuḍa came out with blazing effulgence and rose up in the sky. His body was glowing like the sun. He got blessings from deities. Further there is a story about his valor and how he freed his mother from slavery by obtaining divine nector (amṛta) from heavens. (Mbh. - I.14. 5.23 and onwards). In these chapters Garuḍa is described as, for example,

गुरुं भारं समासाद्योद्धीन एष विहङ्गमः ।

गरुडस्तु खगश्रेष्ठस्तस्मात् पत्रगभोजनः ॥

- MBh. I. 343 . 3pr.

This bird can fly by bearing a heavy weight. He is the best among the birds and is a devourer of snakes.

Now we will consider few examples of the Garuḍa in the Purāṇa literature. In the Purāṇic period, Garuḍa became a powerful, mythological entity. He was honoured as the king of birds. The Bhāgvatamahāpurāṇa gives a story of bravery of an eagle and how he retrieved and returned the crown of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, which was stolen away by a demon.

The *Agnipurāṇa* (63.1), the *Varāha Purāṇa* (125.30b), the *Devībhāgavatapurāṇa*

(3.17.43a) honour Garuḍa along with his master deity-Viṣṇu.

Garuḍa worshipped as a deity

There are some verses for worshipping an eagle, from ancient times. For example, in the *Taittiriya Āraṇyaka* (10.1.5 (no.8), Liṅgapurāṇa (2.48.15) there are references to golden-winged Garuḍa.

ॐ पक्षिराजाय हूँ फट् ॥२८॥

- AgniP. 307.28

This is a Tāntrika reference. Garuḍa is respected and worshipped as the vehicle of Lord Viṣṇu right from the Purāṇic times. We see the images of Garuḍa in a number of temples in India.

The Viṣṇupurāṇa mentions (5.12.4) that an eagle made a shadow of his wings for Śri Kṛiṣṇa.

सुपर्णः पततां श्रेष्ठो दारुणः पन्नगाशनः ।

- Viṣṇupurāṇa 1.21.18

“The beautiful-winged one is superior among the birds, (he is) fierce, and devourer of snakes.”

Vāyupurāṇa (II.8.63b) says that there are two sons of Vinatā and they are Aruṇa and Garuḍa. And Garuḍa is the king of birds and snakes.

In the *Bhāgvatapurāṇa* (5-20-8), the residence of an eagle is said to be on the tree of Śālmali on an island of Plakṣa. The name of the *Garuḍapurāṇa* itself shows how an eagle is religiously worshipped and respected. It is a narration to Garuḍa by Mahāviṣṇu.

Apart from the purāṇas, texts like the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* have references to Garuḍa. For example,

अदृष्टपारपर्यन्तमतिवेगेन धावता ।

सर्वतो गरुडेनापि कल्पकोटिशतैरपि ॥

- Yogavāsiṣṭha 3.53.13e

“Garuḍa eventhough flies with extreme speed, he cannot reach the invisible limit (of infinite sublime sky of ‘cit), even within (the period of) hundreds of crores of aeons.” The *Pārameśvarasāhita* (8.39.c) says that an eagle has beautiful wings.

In the *Bhāgvatamahāpurāṇa* (11.16.15), Śri Kṛiṣṇa says सुपर्णोऽहं पतत्रिणाम् । and in the *Bhagvadgītā*, Śri Kṛiṣṇa says that ‘ I am the Garuḍa amongst the birds’ - (वैनतेयश्च पक्षिणाम् ॥ १०.३०)

5) Ornithological information of Garuḍa

As documented in the ‘Book of Indian Birds’ by Salim Ali, these eagles are seen in India-

Black Eagle, Booted Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle, Greater Spotted Eagle, Greyheaded Fish Eagle, Greyheaded fishing Eagle, Imperial Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Pallas or Ringtailed Fishing Eagle, Pallas Sea Eagle, Rufousbellied Eagle, Short-toed Eagle, Tawny Eagle, Whitebellied Fish Eagle and Whitebellied Sea Eagle.

In Sanskrit literature many times Garuḍa is emphasized as the devourer of snakes. This is probably a reference to the sea-eagle. If we go through the descriptions of Suparna-as a vehicle of Lord Viṣṇu, it may be the Golden eagle-that is described as having golden body.

Notes

- 1 गिलाति नागान् गरुडः । =
इत्युडः, गरुड्भिर्दयते इति वा पृषोदरादित्वात्; डस्य लत्वे गरुलः ।
कूटशाल्मलो नाम गरुडस्य राजधानीपर्वतः । शाल्मलो
भीमवत्, सोऽस्याऽस्ति शाल्मली ॥२॥
अरुणास्याऽवरजोऽरुणाणरजः ॥३॥
विष्णोर्वाहनं विष्णुवाहनम् ॥४॥ २.१४४
सुपर्ण्याः सुपर्णाया वाऽपत्यं सौपर्ण्यः ॥५॥
विनतायाः अपत्यं वैनतेयः ॥
शोभनानि स्वर्णमयत्वात् पर्णान्यस्य सुपर्णः ॥
सर्पाणामरातिः सर्पारातिः ॥
वज्रिणं जितवान् वज्रिजित् ॥
वज्रवत् तुण्डमस्य वज्रतुण्डः ॥
पक्षिणां स्वामी पक्षिस्वामी ॥
काश्यपस्याऽपत्यं काश्यपिः ॥
स्वर्णरूपः कायोऽस्य स्वर्णकायः ।
तृक्षस्याऽपत्यं तार्क्ष्यः, गर्गादित्वाद् यञ् ॥
कामेन इच्छया आयुरस्य कामायुः ।
गरुतः पक्षाः सन्त्यस्य गरुत्मान्, ऊर्म्यादित्वाद् वत्त्वं न भवति ॥
सुधां हतवान् सुधाहत् ॥



Kapota

1) Introduction

All over the world a pigeon is supposed to be the symbol of peace. Kapota or the Blue Rock Pigeon is a very familiar bird as it resides fearlessly near human habitats. In ancient India, this bird was looked down upon as a bad omen. The sages prayed deities to keep away these birds from their residences. In the Jātaka tales, the Bodhisattva is seen in the form of a pigeon who tried to teach a greedy crow, the importance of noble and moral character. This story is narrated in the Kapota Jātaka (42) (Cowell, Vol. II, 1990, p. 112). Similar stories are found in the Lola Jātaka (274) (Cowell, 1990, Vol. II, p. 248), Kapota Jātaka (375) (Cowell, 1990, Vol. 3, p. 148) and Kāka Jātaka (395) (Cowell, 1990, Vol. 3, p. 195). The text 'The Buddha's law among the birds' is influenced by the Jātakas. The pigeon is seen as imparting a message of the Bodhisattva saying:

“ Well might one despair, - the quarrels
of families in disunion !

Well might one despair, - the absurdities
of jealous neighbours !” (Conze, 1996, p.25)

Since the pigeon is living in close company of human beings, it has observed the flaws in human behaviour more clearly! This pigeon has further promised not to reside in the stupas and shrines because their droppings make the stupas shabby.

In various religious texts there are different images and references to the pigeon. We will take some of these examples:

कोकिल देख कपोत मिली मुख
कूँजत ए सुनिकै डरपाई ।-

- (Sikh) *Gurugranthasāhib Sainchi* 2.924

“The pigeon goes near the cuckoo, but when he sees her (pains and) longing separation, it is frightened.”

कंठहि कपोति लखि कोप कीन ।—

- (Sikh) *Gurugranthasāhib Sainchi* 2.17

“When the female pigeon saw (the beauty of Anasūya) she used to get angry.”

In the *Bible* it is said that the person who wants to offer something to the God, he can offer young pigeons.

“ And if his oblation to the Lord
be a burnt offering of fowls,
then he shall offer his oblation of
turtledoves, or young pigeons.” - *Leviticus* 1.14

There is another reference in the *Bible* where it is said:

“ I did mourn as a dove :” - *Isaiah* 38.14

There is another reference explaining the religious importance attached to the Dove:

“ And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily form, as a dove, upon him, ”

- S. Luke 3.22.

Perhaps references of this kind have given rise to the holy and auspicious correlation between a dove and peace.

2) Synonyms for Kapota

कपोतः स्याच्चित्रकण्ठपारावतविहङ्गयोः । —

- MedK, 16.103

“Citrakaṇṭha (चित्रकण्ठ) = one who has speckled throat.

Pārāvata (पारावत) = one who comes from a distance.”

Kapota (the spotty necked pigeon) has these two synonyms.

पारावतः कलरवः कपोतः — ॥

- AK. 2.5.14

The *Rāmāśramī* commentary on the *Amarakośa* says:

पारेति ॥ परं जीवमवति । —

The meaning is not clear from the point of referring this word to a pigeon.

कलो रवोऽस्य ।

“One whose calls are like ‘kala.’ ”

The *Anekārthatilaka* (2.50, 3.61 4.49,53) gives ‘Pārāpata’ as a synonym for Kapota. Pārāpata is a variant for ‘Pārāvata.’

पारापतो रञ्जकश्च पारावतक इत्यपि ।

प्रासादकुक्कुटो झल्लकण्ठो रक्तान्तलोचनः ॥

मदोत्कटचाटुकर्ता भवेत्कलरवोऽपि सः ।

नीलकण्ठः कपोतः स्याद्वन्योऽप्यथ घृधूत्करः ॥

कपोतकः शृङ्गधूमो भस्माङ्गोऽप्यरुणस्त्वसौ । —

- KośK, śiṃhādivarga 95-97

“Rañjaka (रञ्जक) = One who is charming.

Prāsādakuṅkuṭa (प्रासाद कुक्कुट) = a domestic pigeon.

Jhallakaṇṭha (झल्लकण्ठः) = according to MW it is a domestic pigeon. But meaning is not clear.

Raktāntalocana (रक्तान्तलोचन) = one having red corners of the eyes.

Madotkaṭa (मदोत्कट) = one who is excited by passion.

Cāṭukarṭṛ (चाटुकर्तृ) = one who utters pleasing words or does flattery.

Nilakaṇṭha (नीलकण्ठ) = one who has dark blue throat.

Vanya (वन्य) = wild pigeon.

Ghughūtkara (घृधूत्कर) = one who makes the sound ‘ghū-ghū.’

Śṛṅgadhūma (शृङ्गधूम) = The meaning is not clear. This may be suggesting the gray colour of smoke. The Blue Rock is of smoky gray colour.

Bhasmāṅga (भस्माङ्ग) = one whose body is of gray colour like that of ashes.”

Aruṇa (अरुण) = one who is reddish-brown.”

The *Abhidhānacintāmaṇi* gives the similar synonyms (4.405) and it defines the word ‘Pārāpata’ as ‘पारम् आपतति ।’ = One who flies towards the opposite side.

— “परावतः कलरवो रक्तदृष्टिर्मदोत्कटः ॥

- VaijK. 3.14

Raktadr̥ṣṭi (रक्तदृष्टि) = one who is red-eyed i.e. a pigeon.

Madotkātā (मदोत्कट) = one who is excited by passion.

“वतः पतः परापारापारेभ्यश्चातिमानवान् ।

स्यान्मदनमोहनवाग्विलासी रक्तनेत्रवान् ॥

कण्ठारवो गृहार्येभ्यः कपोतोऽप्यथ कामुकः ।

अन्हिपिच्छः कलरवो वग्देशी छुल्लुलारवः ॥

कोकथुस्तु वनोद्भूते धूसरो धूम्रलोचनः ।

भीषणोऽग्निसहायः स्याद् दहनो गृहनाशनः ॥

भेदा एषां बहुविधा गृह्याणां वनचारिणाम् ॥

- KalK.11.132-135

The pigeon is called Parāvata, Pārāvata, Parāpata or Pārāpata.

Atimānavat (अतिमानवत्) = possessing extreme pride?

Madanamohan (मदनमोहनः) = one who is the infatuater of the god of love.

Vāgvilāsin (वाग्विलासिन) = one who utters coquettish words or a pigeon.

Raktanetrvat (रक्तनेत्रवत्) = one who is red-eyed.

Kaṅṭhārava (कण्ठारव) = one who utters words from the throat.

Gṛhārtha (गृहार्य) = one who (stays in) any household care.

Kāmuka (कामुक) = one who is lustful.

Ahnicpiccha (अन्हिपिच्छ) = The meaning is not clear.

Vagdeśin (वग्देशिन) = The meaning is not clear. (Can we say ‘Vagdesi’ indicates its constant cooing.)

Chulchulārava (छुल्लुलारव) = This must an onomatopoeic word.

Kokathu (कोकथु) = It means a wood pigeon.

Vanodbhūta (वनोद्भूत) = one who is born in a jungle.

Dhūsara (धूसर) = one who is smoky coloured.

Dhūmrālocana (धूम्रलोचन) = one who is grey-eyed.

Bhīṣaṇa (भीषण) = one who is terrifying.

Agnisahāya (अग्निसहाय) = one who has the fire as his friend (?).

Gṛhanāśana (गृहनाशन) = (one which is threatful to the house) one who destroys the house.

According to the KalK lexion these are the differences between domestic and wild pigeons.

Perhaps the pigeon makes the house filthy and stinky as well as there was a fear of spreading fire due to unhindered flying of the pigeons inside the house. That may be the reason why they are called as helping in spreading fire.

3) References to Kapota in Sanskrit literature

A) Oldest References to Kapota

As it is said earlier, Sanskrit literature contain references to a pigeon right from the time of the *R̥gveda*. While praising Lord Indra, sage Ājigarti Śunaḥśyepa says:

अयमु ते समंतसि कपोत इव गर्भधिम् ।
वचस्तच्चित्र ओहसे ॥४॥

- RV 1.30.4

“ This is thine own. Thou drawest near, as turns a pigeon to his mate: Thou carest to for this our prayer.”

Pigeon was considered as the messenger of Nirṛti - evil omen. In the *R̥gveda* 10.165.1, sage Kapota Nairṛta prays in order to get safety from the arrival of a pigeon which was feared as misfortune:

देवाः कपोतं इषितो यदिच्छन्दतो निर्ऋत्या इदमाजगाम ।
तस्मा अर्चाम कृण्वाम निष्कृतिं शं नो अस्तु द्विपदे शं चतुष्पदे ॥
- RV 10.165.1

“Gods, what soe'er the Dove hither seeking, sent to us as the envoy of destruction, For that let us sing hymns and make atonement. Well be it with our quadrupeds and bipeds.”

Further the sage prays the pigeon to be harmless. It was expected to remove the pigeon from the close contact. People feared that the pigeon would destroy them so they expected that the pigeon should fly away from house.

मित्रावरुणाभ्यां कपोतान् ॥

- VS 24.23

“Let the pigeon be offered to Mitrāvaruṇa.”

The same reference is found in the *Maitrāyaṇī Saṁhitā*. (3.14.4). The *Sāmaveda* and the *Atharvaveda* (6.27,28,29) have a reference similar to that of *R̥gveda* 1.30.4. It was believed that a kind of poisonous insects or black magical spell might have been sent with those birds. The hymn AV (6.27) has a references similar to those found in the *R̥gveda*.

The sage Bhṛgu says:

ऋचा कपोतं नुदत प्रणोदमिषं मदन्तः परि गां नयामः ।
सं लोभयन्तो दुरिता पदानि हित्वा न ऊर्जं प्र पदात् पथिष्ठः ॥
- AV, 6.28.1

“ With the praise-verse (*ṛc*) drive ye the dove forth (*praṇodam*) ; reveling in food (*iṣ*) we lead a cow about, breaking up tracks hard to go in ; leaving us (our ?) sustenance shall it fly forth, swift-flying.”

B) References to Kapota in poetry and other texts

There are references to pigeons as pet birds or there are descriptions of passionate behaviour of pairs of pigeons. There are various images of a pigeon in the Purāṇic and classical Sanskrit literature. Sometimes there are unusual perceptions regarding the pigeon.

We will consider a few examples of Kapota from the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* and other texts. In the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* a demon namely Mālyavān says:

पाण्डुरा रक्तपादाश्च विहगाः कालाचोदितः ।
रक्षसानां विनाशाय कपोता विचरन्ति च ॥

- VR VI. 35.31 (*Vālmiki /Satavalekar, Vol.7, 1970, P.200*).

“ Nay, impelled by the Time-spirit, white and red-footed doves move about in the air boding the extermination of the ogres. “

In the *Agnipurāṇa* (244.1), a woman is said to be beautiful whose eyes are beautiful like that of a passionate pigeon. In the *Matsya Purāṇa* (73.29) there is a reference to the Hārīta bird. Hārīta is a green pigeon. The peaks of mountains near Benaras were said

to be full of cooing of pigeons. “पारावतध्वनिविकृजितचारुशृङ्गैः ॥ (73.33).

In the *Meghadūta* (Purvamegha, 140), the Yakṣa tells a cloud messenger to take rest at night on the roof a house where pigeons roost. In the *Kumārasambhava*, (4.27) when the God of love - Madana- was burnt to ashes by angry Śiva, his ashes' had the gray colour like that of the wings of a pigeon. It is obvious, that this must be a reference to a blue rock pigeon.

इति चैनमुवाच दुःखिता सुहृदः पश्य वसन्त किं स्थितम् ।
तदिदं कणशो विकीर्यते पवनैर्भस्म कपोतकर्बुरम् ॥

- KumāraS. 4.27

“And she (very much) afflicted, said to him: (o) Vasanta, look (here), what has remained of (your) friend! And those ashes (again) of variegated colour like that of a pigeon are being scattered in particles by the breezes!”

In the *Harṣacarita* (Ucchvāsa 6,) (Bāṇabhaṭṭa/Pathak, 1964, p.356), we find a reference to green pigeons. They were described as having a red forehead like that of a monkey. It was further said in the same part that there were jungle pigeons which had red wings and which has been attracted towards flesh and which had sat on the houses.

Pigeons are there from ancient times. Pigeons commonly nest in the houses and roost there. They are in a constant company of human being.

In the Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* (9.8), one of the positions of folded hands was said to be a 'Kapota'.

We find quite a different reference in the *Arthaśāstra*.

जायते प्लक्ष्मीजाशाल्कपोतादिव शाल्मलेः ।
उद्वेगजननो नित्यं पञ्चादपि भयावहः ॥

-*Kautiliya Arthaśāstra* 7.6.39

“As there is a danger to the cotton tree from the fig-seed-eating pigeon, (similarly), there is always a danger (for the King) (from the person who has come from the party of enemy) and he always remains as a threat.”

C) Superstitions regarding Kapota

We have seen the oldest references to pigeons where they were looked down upon as bringing ill omen or misfortune. From the Ṛgvedic times, such superstition was there in the society. People strongly believed in such beliefs.

भ्रातुः पत्न्यवमन्ता च कपोतत्वं प्रपद्यते । ——— ॥

-MārP 15.4

“One who insults brother's wife, becomes a pigeon in his next birth.”

The *Vasantarājaśākuna* discusses various omens indicated by the sight of Kapota and Pārāvata (8.43-45 and 8.47). Holā (dove) is said to be a type of Kapota. It is said that if dove is seen in the front side, it augures the attainment of wealth (8.43).

D) References to Kapota in the *Mrgapakṣiśāstra*

The author Harṣadeva says that there are three types of Kapota. He describes them in the following manner:

Pārāvata = पारावत

पारावतास्ते विज्ञेया ईषत्कृष्णाङ्गभासुराः ।
कन्धरे स्वल्पकृष्णाश्च ये भृशं श्लक्ष्णदेहकाः ॥
मनोज्ञपक्षतियुताः संततं भ्रमणोत्सुकाः ।
ह्रस्वचञ्चुपुटोपेतः ह्रस्वपादविभूषिताः ॥

- Śreṇī 31.509,510

“(Birds which have) blackish and beautiful body and neck, soft body, attractive wings, adorned with small beak and legs (and) who are always eager to wander, should be known as Pārāvata birds.

These birds are said to give out calls ‘ Tugu ‘ continuously.

Kalarava = कलरव

कलनादाश्च ते ज्ञेया ये भृशं कलनादकाः ।
श्वेतपक्षतियुक्ताश्च किञ्चित्तुंगशरीरकाः ॥
कण्ठे वक्षसि पुच्छे च नानाबिंदुसमन्विताः ।
स्थूलोदरा मदोद्विक्ताः स्वल्पकोपसमन्विताः ॥

- Śreṇī 31.516,517

“Those (birds) who give out sweet calls, who have white wings, a little bit long body, who have spots on (their) throat, breast and tail, have a big belly, a face (reflecting) passion and who are little-tempered, should be known as Kalarava.”

Kapota = कपोत

The Kapota types of birds are described (Śreṇī 31.521,522) as those having small body, legs, long wings and tail, blue colour, white throat, red or yellow beak.

This is how the author has described the pigeons which were commonly seen.

4) Mythological references to Kapota

In the *Mahābhārata*, there is a story of a pair of pigeons which offered their lives in order to serve their guest. The story is found in the *Śāntiparva*, *Āpadaddharmaparva*, (MBh.12.142-145).

In the *Kumārasambhava* (9.1) there is a reference to the god of fire (Agni) who was said to have taken the form of a pigeon and entered the cabin of Śiva. Its eyes were said to be red.

5) Ornithological information of Kapota

Commonly seen Blue Rock Pigeon - wild birds nest on cliff edges, ruins, niches in well walls. Semi-feral birds nest on buildings, rafters, roofs etc. This bird is well adapted to urban life.

Blue Rock Pigeon has two black wing bars, dark terminal band on the grey tail and shiny multi-hued sheen on neck and chest.

□

Śuka

1) Introduction

Each bird is known for its special trait. Śuka or the parrot is the favourite cage-bird right from ancient times. Now it is a crime to keep the parrot in the cage according to the wild life protection Act. Śuka was supposed to talk when trained, of course without understanding the sense. Śuka was many times described in the Sanskrit literature as creating awkward situation for the newly wedded bride. This bird is also seen in sculptures.

In the Jātaka tales, we find references to Śuka in Rādha Jātaka (145) (Cowell, 1990, Vol.I, p.309), Śuka Jātaka (255) (Cowell, 1990, Vol.II, p.203) and Vighāsa Jātaka (393) (Cowell, 1990, Vol. III, p.193). In the Rādha Jataka, the Bodhisattva was born as a parrot named Poṭṭhapāda who was loyal to his master. In the Śuka Jātaka, the Bodhisattva is in the form of a parrot that dwelt in the Himālayas. He was the King of several parrots who lived on the seaward side of the Himālayas. Once his son drank much of the mango juice and due to thr excessive drinking he felt sleepy. He fell in the ocean and then a fish caught him and devoured him. The Bodhisattva felt bad and said:

“ What is time the bird without excess did eat’
He found the way, and brought his mother meat.
But once he ate too much, forgot the mean,
He fell; and afterward was no more seen.”

(Cowell, Vol. II, 1990, p. 204)

(Actually this is a fact that due to over-eating chicks of birds may loose their capacity to fly swiftly. Thereby they can be easily killed.)

In the Tibetan tradition, in the text namely “ *The Buddha’s law among the Birds, a precious garland* “, the Śuka or parrot made the Great Bird Cuckoo-the Bodhisattva speak and preach. The parrot expressed his thoughts by saying:

“ The effects of many misdeeds in our past,
Have tied us to this suffering,
bound us, chained us.” (Conze, 1996, p.19).

Here the parrot is described as ‘ skilled in speech ‘. The Rose-ringed Parakeet and the plum-headed Parakeet were the popular cage birds. They were trained to talk and to perform tricks. In poetry, similies are found comparing the caged life of the parrot and human confinement in suffering. The Parakeets were once trained to recite Buddhist maxims and such birds were called ‘ Śākya-śāsana-kuśala ‘. (Bānabhaṭṭa, Tr. Pathak Jagannatha, 1964, p.423)

In Indian culture, various religious texts describe the śuka in different contexts. We will see a few examples. The *Gurugranthasāhib* says that the nose of Lord Kṛṣṇa was curved like the parrot’s beak. (1.190). At other place it is mentioned that by seeing beautiful Anasūyā, the parrot used to hide himself in the jungle. (नासा निहार बनि कीर लीन । २.१७)

Though it is prohibited and banned by the Forest Act to keep the caged birds, still the parrot is a popular cage bird. The bird is used by certain astrologers, to pick up the right card, from which future is predicted. In poetry and literature, similies are drawn with the caged life of the parrot, when describing human confinement. The Persian text titled 'The conference of Birds' ironically describes the Parrot which was " with sugar in her beak, dressed in a garment of green; earth's green carpet is the reflection of her feathers, Listen to her: 'vile men whose hearts are iron have shut me in a cage, so charming am I. " (Attar Farid Ud-Din, 1971, p.16)

2) Synonyms for Śuka

शुक्लिकेतुर्मेधावी श्रीमान् वाग्मी फलाशनः ।

दरणो दण्डिकीरौ च लोपालोपायिके समे ॥

- VaijK. 3.2.25

Śuka (शुक) = a parrot (probably the word is derived from the root verb 'suc' which means ' the bright one'.

Triketu (त्रिकेतु) = Meaning not clear.

Medhāvi (मेधावी) = one who is intelligent.

Śrīmān (श्रीमान्) = one who is charming.

Vāgmin (वाग्मिन्) = one who skilled in speech.

Phalāśana (फलाशनः) = one who eats fruits.

Daraṇa (दरणः) = one who breaks (nuts?).

Daṇḍikīrau (दण्डिकीरौ) = here there are two words 'Daṇḍin' which means carrying a stick. The other word is 'Kīra' and it seems to be an onomatopoeic word.

Lopālopāyika (लोपालोपायिक) = The meaning is not clear. (Lopā is explained as a particular bird in MW).

शुको मेधातिथिर्मञ्जुपाठकः प्रियदर्शनः ॥

मेधावी रक्तचञ्चर्यः श्रीमान्वाग्मी फलाशनः ।

नृपप्रियो राजशुकः शतपत्रश्चमर्यपि ॥

रक्तकृष्णोत्तमाङ्गास्ते रक्तपीतादिचञ्चवः ॥

नीलपीतश्यामरक्तचित्रवर्णा अनेकशः । —

- KalK. 11.139, 140, 141, 142

The synonyms other than those already mentioned are as follows:

Medhātithi (मेधातिथि) = The meaning is not clear.

Mañjupāthaka (मञ्जुपाठक) = One who utters sweet words.

Priyadarśana (प्रियदर्शन) = One who looks beautiful.

Medhāvin (मेधाविन्) = One who is learned.

Raktacañcu (रक्तचञ्चु) = One who has a red beak.

Nṛpapriya (नृपप्रिय) = One who is dear to the King.

Rājaśuka (राजशुकः) = A kind of parrot (with red stripes on the neck and wings according to MW).

Śatapatra (शतपत्र) = A kind of parrot (or a bird who has numerous feathers),

Raktakṛṣṇottamāṅga (रक्तकृष्णोत्तमाङ्ग) = Those with red and black head.

Raktapītāḍicañcava (रक्तपीतादिचञ्चवः) = Those who have red, yellow^{६४} beaks.

Further it is mentioned that the parrots are of various colours - blue, yellow, black, red and thus of variegated colours.

3) References to Śuka In Sanskrit Literature

A) Oldest references to Śuka

शुकेषु मे हरिमाणं रोपणाकासु दध्मसि ।
अथो हरिद्रिवेषु मे हरिमाणं नि दध्मसि ॥
- RV 1.50.12

“ To parrots and to starlings let us give away my yellowness,
or this my yellowness let us transfer to Haritāla trees.”

Here the yellowness refers to jaundice. The same verse with a slight variant is found in the Atharvaveda (AV. 1.22.4).

Whitney explains in the notes that the name ‘ropanāka’ is understood as ‘Kāṣṭhaśuka’ - apparently a kind of parrot; and ‘Haridrava’ as gopītanaka, apparently a yellow water-wagtail.

सरस्वत्यै शुक्ः पुरुषवाक् ॥
- VS 24.33

“ Let the parrot talking like a man be offered to the Sarasvatī.”

It is significant to note that the parrot is offered to Sarasvatī who is a river, later on regard to be the goddess of speech.

B) References to Śuka in Sanskrit Poetry

वृक्षशाखां समारुढः शुकोऽयं सह भार्यया ।
करेण लम्बयन् शाखां करोति सफलं शिरः ॥
- MatP. 87.15 (Sāvitrī Upākhyāna)

“ The parrot which was sitting on a branch of a tree, along with its female, hanging to the branch with its hands, makes its head fruitful (Saphala).” (This indicates a pun on the word ‘Saphala’ which means ‘being successful’ and here it means ‘getting a fruit’.)

This reminds us of the description of Indian Hanging-Parrot or Lorikeet. These parrots roost at night, inverted like a bat.

तत्रेन्द्रगोपकलितं शुकवक्त्रवर्णं — ॥२६॥
- GaruḍaP. 43.36

Here a gem having the colour like the beak of the parrot is described.

In the *Raghuvamśa*, there are references to the domesticated parrot. They were described as uttering sweet words. In the *Vikramorvaśīya*, the corsets of a woman (the Heroine) were described as dark green like a parrot’s belly. (शुकोदरश्याममिदं स्तनांशुकम् ॥ IV.17) The *Abhijñānaśākuntala*, has the references to the parrots staying in the pious heritage of the sage Kaṇva. In the *Campūbhārata*, we come across a usual pun on the words śuka and kirṅśuka:

किं शुकस्य वदने रुचिरत्वं किं शुकस्य हृदयेऽपि वशित्वम्
किंशुकस्य कुसुमेषु नदन्ती शंसति स्म मधुपालिरितीव ॥

“ A row of bees humming on flowers of the ‘ kiṁśuka’, (it is as if) saying ‘what charm is there in the parrot’s mouth (i.e. beak)? What self-control is there in the sage Śuka?” Here it is suggested that the beauty of the kiṁśuka or palāśa flowers has defeated the charm of the face of a parrot and loosen the self control of the sage Śuka.

The pleasant calls and talk of Śuka is praised in the Ratnāvalī (2.8)¹ and the Naiṣadhiyacarita (1.103)². In the Kādambari, there is a description of a parrot who had blue, yellow and red stripes on his throat³. (Bānabhaṭṭa/Kṛṣṇamohan Śāstri, [Purvardha], 1961, p.561). In the same vein, intelligent parrots and mynas⁴ are described in the second ucchvāsa. In the Harṣacarita, it is said that the mynas and parrots were teaching and by this way they were giving a chance for their teacher to take rest for some time⁵.

The texts like the Kāmasūtra mention the talk of parrot (1.4.21) and the Kuttānimata (246) refers to happy parrots.

C) References to Śuka in Architecture

From the ancient times, Śuka is a pet-bird. It was a favourite bird of kings and queens. The Viśvakarmāvāstuśāstra mentions a decorative frame of the door where there was a ‘Śukapaṭṭa’ (शुकपट्ट) - a slab or tablet (25.18) (which indicates the pictures or paintings or carving of the parrots).

We find a reference to the caged parrot in the Viśvakarmāvāstuśāstra (37.4) and in the Mayamata (29.188).

D) Superstitions regarding Śuka

There are a very few references to the superstitions and augury related to Śuka. For example:

— हते चैत्राशुके शुकः ॥

- MārP. 15.27

“ One who does the theft of a garment with variegated colour becomes a parrot (in his next birth).”

The Bṛhatsamhitā mentions the clouds that are coloured like the parrot (28.14). There is also a reference to the colour of the moon which has the colour like that of parrot’s eye. It is further said that if such a moon is seen, it suggests the rain. (28.11)

E) Description of Śuka in the Mṛgapakṣīśāstra

The author Harṣadeva mentions two species named as Śuka and Kīra. He describes Śuka as:

शुका गारुडनीलाङ्गा नितरां दीर्घपुच्छकाः ॥

मनोज्ञपक्षतियुगा वक्रनासाविभूषिताः ।

नातितुंगा नातिनीचा हृद्यवाचश्च ते मताः ॥

- Śreṇi 29 - 398,399

“Śukas are those that are blue like an emerald, long tailed. (Their) wings are beautiful, adorned with curved nose (or beak), not very tall or not very short and they utter sweet words.”

The ‘ Kīra ‘ birds are described as moderately tall, having a slender body, broad

wings and a short tail. (29.403,404)

4) Mythological references to Śuka

It is interesting to note that the Purāṇa is described as a deity whose face resembles a parrot.

पुराणं चम्पकाभासं शुकवक्त्रं च तुन्दिलम् ।
अक्षसूत्राभयं ज्ञेयं नानाभरणभूषितम् ॥

- Bhāratīya Sanskriti kośa Vol 5, Page 627

“The deity Purāṇa has a golden complexion like the Campaka flower, is parrot-faced and heafy. It has a rosary in the right hand (and) the left hand shows the Abhaya Mudrā (and) is adorned with various ornaments.”

शुकः सुष्ठुमितं वक्ति व्यासं श्रोतृश्चहर्षयन् ।
सुपाठितः शुको यद्वच्छिक्षकं पार्श्वगानपि ॥

- BhāgP. Māhātmya 4.14

“The sage Śuka speaks in a well-measured manner, delighting (his father and teacher) Vyāsa and the listeners, in the manner of well-taught parrot (that delights) the teacher and also the side-singers.” The *Viṣṇupurāṇa* (1-21.15) tells about the origin of Śuka where Śukī was said to be the mother of the parrots.

In the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa* (Pratisarga Parva 17.17), there is a reference to a parrot which was saved by goddess Pārvati.

In the *Mahābhārata* (13.5), there is a story of a generous parrot. The story is known as ‘Śukavāsavasānvāda’. There was a parrot residing in a tree. This tree was dried up and was burnt due to the poisonous arrow shot by a hunter. The leaves and fruits of the tree were destroyed. But the parrot was faithful to the tree till the last moment and it did not abandon the tree. Lord Indra was pleased to see the kind-heartedness of the parrot. He praised the parrot and according to its wish made the tree green and flowering.

5) Ornithological information of Śuka

The commonly seen parakeets are the Rose-ringed Parakeet, the Plum-headed Parakeet and the Blue-winged Parakeet.

The Rose-ringed Parakeet gives out the calls like ‘keeak, keeak, keeak’ uttered in flight. It can recite words taught to it. It is a highly destructive bird to fruit groves and crop. It wastes and damages more than what is actually eaten.

The Plum-headed Parakeet gives out calls like ‘Tooi, tooi’ and they are uttered by the speedily flying flock.

The Blue-winged Parakeet is a noisy forest bird. Noisy Flocks speedily navigate through treetops, in frantic bursts of activity.

Notes

- 1 दुर्वारां कुसुमशरव्यथां वहन्त्या कामिन्या यदभिहितं पुरः सखीनाम् ।
तद्भूयः शिशुशुकसारिकाभिरुक्तं धन्यानां श्रवणपथातिथित्वमेति ॥
- Ratnāvalī 2.8
- 2 तदर्थमध्याप्य जनेन तद्वने शुका विमुक्ताः पटवस्तमस्तुवन् ।
स्वरामृतेनोपजगुश्च सारिकास्तथैव तत्पौरुषगायनीकृताः ॥
- Naiṣadhīyacarita 1.103
- 3 --त्रिवर्णरागमिन्द्रायुधमिव कुण्डलीकृतं कण्ठेन वहता
विद्रुमाङ्कुरानुकारिचञ्चुपुटेन मरकतद्युतिपक्षतिना मन्थरगतेन
शुकेनानुवध्यमाना----
- Kādambarī (Purvārdha)
- 4 जगुर्गृहेऽभ्यस्तसमस्तवाङ्मयैः ससारिकैः पञ्जरवर्तिभिः शुकैः ।
निगृह्यमाणा बहवः पदे पदे यजूंषि सामानि च यस्य शङ्किताः ॥
- Kādambarī, Kavivarnśavarṇana, P.6
- 5 'शुकसारिकारब्धाध्ययनदीयमानोपाध्यायविश्रान्तिसुखानि--- ।'
- Harṣcarita (P.79.)

□

Kokila

1) Introduction

The Sanskrit literature is rich with various references to the 'Kokila'. There is a great appreciation of its sweet calls. At the same time Sanskrit poets have observed the parasitic behaviour. We will discuss various aspects in this chapter. The Sanskrit poets have taken note of the fact that the male bird sings sweetly and not the female Kokila. So the words were used as 'Kokila' or 'Punskokila'. Very rarely the female bird is associated with the melodious calls. A reference may be made to a verse in the *Raghuvamśa* (8.59), where it is said that king Aja's wife Indumatī, while leaving for the heavenly abode, left her good qualities on the earth. It is said (कलमन्यमृतासु भाषितं - -- 1), she gave her sweet voice to a female cuckoo. However, it may be argued that for Indumatī it was but natural to bestow her qualities in the female beings. For this specific reason Kālidāsa has to use the word anyabhṛtā.

In the Tibetan text, namely, " *The Buddha's law among the Birds*", the Kokila or Cuckoo bird is extremely respected. Lord Avalokita had transformed himself into a cuckoo and did penance for many years day and night. He preached other birds the 'Dharma'. He said,

" I have surveyed this ocean of saṁsāra
And I have found nothing substantial in it.' - - - -

- - - " Reflect in earnest on impermanence
and on death, - koo !

commit in no way any evil deed, - koo !

Release within yourselves

the good and wholesome thoughts ! - koo ! - - - (Conze, 1996, p.17)

The cuckoo thus preached the highest truths. According to Edward Conze," for Japanese the cuckoo is the symbol of grief and its song represents the plaint of parted lovers. - - - The cuckoo is the holy bird for the Bon religion, as it inspires the shamans." In Tibetan tradition, the cuckoo was intuited as having magical powers. (Conze, 1996, p.50). As well as in Tibetan Folklore, cuckoo is a welcome and auspicious bird indicating warm weather (www.khandro.net/animal_birds.htm)

If we see the religious texts, the cuckoo is referred to in various contexts. For example, The *Gurugrantsahib* says that the voice of Lord Kṛṣṇa is like that of kokila (1.190,238).

—कोकिल देख कपोत मिली मुख कूँजत ए सुनिकै डरपाई ।— (2.924)

"A pigeon sees a cuckoo and goes near the bird but by seeing her pangs of separation, it becomes frightened."

In Greek mythology, there is a story where Zeus took the form of the cuckoo bird and went to his sister Hera.

2) Synonyms for Kokila

There are many names indicating one or the other characteristic of the bird.

वनप्रियः परभृतः कोकिलः पिकः ।

- A K 2.5.19

These names are covered by the other Lexicon and are explained further.

वनप्रियः परभृतस्ताम्राक्षः कोकिलः पिकः कलकण्ठ काकपुष्टः —।

- AbhiC 4.387¹

Vanapriya = One who likes the forest.

Parabhṛta = One who is reared and fed by others, particularly by a female crow is known as *para bhṛta*.

Tāmrākṣa = One whose eyes are red.

Kokila = The explanation in the text says, one who attracts mind by its koka or calls. The female cuckoo is known as 'kokila'.

There are other synonyms like,

कोकिले तु मदोल्लापी काकजातो रतोद्बहः ।

मधुघोषो मधुकण्ठो सुधाकण्ठो कुहूमुखः ॥

घोषयित्नुः पोषयित्नुः कामतालः कुनालिकः ॥

- AbhiC 4.387

Madollāpin = One who utters word in intoxication.

Kākajāta = One who is reared by the crow,

Madhughoṣa = One who gives out sweet calls.

Sudhākaṇṭha and Madhukaṇṭha = One who has sweet voice.

Kuhūmukha = One who is black-faced.

Ghoṣayitnu = One who gives out calls loudly.

Poṣayitnu = The meaning is not clear. (one who is causing to rear.?)

Kāmatāla = The meaning is not clear.

Kunālika = The meaning is not clear.

The 'Śabdakalpadruma' says,

“स्वनामख्यातकृष्णवर्णमधुरस्वरपक्षी ।

“The bird, famous by its name, black-coloured and of sweet voice.”

तत्पर्यायः । — परपुष्टः, कालः, वसन्तदूतः, ताम्राक्षः, गन्धर्वः, मधुगायनः, वासन्तः, कलकण्ठः, कामान्धः, काकलीरवः, कुहूरवः, अन्यपुष्टः, मत्तः, मदनपाङ्गकः इति राजनिघण्टुः ॥”

These words or synonyms are explained as -

Parapuṣṭa = One who is fed by others.

Kāla = One who is black-coloured.

Vasantadūta = One who is the messenger of vasanta season.

Tāmrākṣa = One who has red eyes.

Gandharva = One who is a heavenly singer.

Madhugāyana = One who sings sweetly.

Vāsanta = One who belongs to the vasanta season.

Kalakaṇṭha = One whose voice is sweet.

Kāmāndha = One who is intoxicated with passion.

Kākalīrava = One whose voice is soft and sweet.

Kuhūrava = One whose calls out as 'kuhu'.

Anyapuṣṭa = One who is reared by others.

Matta = One who is intoxicated.

Madanapāṭhaka = One who speaks out for Madana (deity of love).

The Kalpadrukośa gives almost the same synonyms in 11.135 to 139, except for a few different names like Madhurālāpa ('one who sings sweetly'), Kāmaga ('one who gets overwhelmed by passion') and Vanabhūṣaṇa ('one who is like an ornament of the forest'). The Vaijayanīkośa describes the Kokila as:

—काकपुष्टस्त्वन्यभृतस्ताम्राक्षः कोकिलः पिकः ।

वसन्तघोषो मधुवाक् कलकण्ठो वनप्रियः । — 113.26, 27

There are hardly any new word except Vasantagoṣa (वसन्तघोषः) means 'one who declares the Vasanta season.

3) References to Kokila in Sanskrit Literature

A) Oldest reference to Kokila

We do not find any direct reference to the 'Kokila' in the Vedas.

अन्यवापो ऽर्धमासानां, —

- VS 24.37, M.S. 3.14, 18

“(Let the) Anyavāpa bird be (offered) for the (deity) Ardhamāsa”.

In commentary, Mahīdhara says: 'अन्यवापः कोकिलाख्यः पक्षिविशेषोऽर्धमासानां पशुः।' Ardhamāsa means a half month. Anyavāpa' is explained as to be sown for others'. It may indicate the koel or the Indian cuckoo who is known for leaving an egg in the nests of other birds.

B) References parasitic behaviour and other characteristic features of Kokila

From the ancient times Sanskrit poets have taken note of the parasitic behaviour of a cuckoo.

ममाण्डानीति वर्धन्ते कोकिलानपि वायसाः ।

किं पुनस्त्वं न मन्येथाः सर्वज्ञः पुनमीदृशम् ॥

- MBh. 1.647*.1pr

Śakuntalā says to Duṣyanta,

“A crows rears the eggs of the cuckoo bird by relieving them his own, then how you cannot believe your own son when you knowing everything”.

1) The NārP (50.62) mentions the cuckoo's voice associates with the musical note in the Indian classical music. (It is said, “During the (spring) season when flowers bloom, the cuckoo coos the Pañcama note.”)

Further it is said in the Nārada-purāṇa (50.64): “the Pañcama note originates from the cardiac region, the head and the throat.” (It is a popular belief in India that the 'Pañcama' notes in Indian music is learnt from the 'kokila' bird. Texts like Saṅgītaratnākara (1.48) mention this belief).

2) The VāmP (Vol.1- 6.19), it is referred that during the season of 'Vasanta', the male cuckoo” sings sweetly.

3) Abhijñānaśākuntalā (5.22), While describing the parasitic



behaviour of the Kokila, Kālidāsa says:

स्त्रीणामशिक्षितपटुत्वममानुषीषु संदृश्यते किमुत याः प्रतिबोधवत्यः ।
प्रागन्तरिक्षगमनात्स्वमपत्यजातमन्यैर्द्विजैः परभृताः खलु पोषयन्ति ॥

“ Untaught [i.e. natural] cleverness of women is well seen [even] in [the case of] females that are not human; what then [in the case of those] who are possessed of understanding! The [female] cuckoos indeed get their young ones nourished by other birds, prior to their [being able to indulge in] flying into the sky!”

In the *Bhaminīvilāsa*, Jagannātha Paṇḍita refers to the similarity and the difference between the cuckoo and the crow and advises the cuckoo not to sing among the crows, otherwise he fears that the crows would kill the cuckoo.

4) एकस्त्वं गहनेऽस्मिन् कोकिल न कलं कदाचिदपि कुर्याः ।
सजात्यशङ्कयामी न त्वां निघ्नन्ति निर्दयाः काकाः ॥

- *Bhaminīvilāsa* 23

“ O cuckoo! while alone, in this forest, you should never utter sweet tunes; these cruel crows do not kill you considering you (by mistake) to be one of their own race.”

In another verse (no.27), of the *Bhāminīvilāsa*, the cuckoo is called Parapuṣṭa.

In the *Daśāvatāracarita*, the wicked ones are compared with the cuckoos, making a pun on words:

5) स्वकुलत्यागनिःस्नेहाश्चपला मलिनाः खलाः ।
कोकिला इव कुर्वन्ति परपक्षसमाश्रयम् ॥

- *Daśāvatāracarita*, 4.56

“Devoid of love on account of having abandoned their own family, swift, blackish, full of dusty illumined, they take recourse to the opponent side like the cuckoos seeking shelter under the wings of other birds.”

C) General references to Kokila

In the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, there are innumerable reference to the cuckoos showing their existence in the forests as adding to the beauty of the forests. We will see some such examples:

1) भास्करोदयकालोऽसौ गता भगवती निशा ।
असौ सुकृष्णो विहगः कोकिलस्तात कूजति ॥

- VR II. 52.2a (Valmiki/Satavalekar, 1968, p.339)

“The hour of sunrise is at hand and the glorious night has departed. Over there the very dark bird, the cuckoo, is uttering its notes. (Rāma says this to Lakṣmaṇa).”

2) मां हि शोकसमाक्रान्तं सन्तापयति मन्मथः ।
दृष्टः प्रवदमानश्च समाह्वयति कोकिलः ॥

VR V. 1.13

“ Indeed love torments me, overwhelmed as I am with grief; and engaging in a quarrel (with me), the cuckoo merrily challenges me.”

3) मत्कोकिलसन्नादैर्नर्तयन्नवपादपान् ।
शैलकन्दरनिष्क्रान्तः प्रगीत इव चानिलः ॥

- VR IV. I. 15a (Vālmiki/Satavalekar, vol.5, 1967, p.3)

“ Emerging from mountain caves and as though making the trees dance by the dulcet

notes of cuckoos in heat, the breeze has started singing as it were.”

There are many references also in the *Māhabhārata* (1.199.43;3.107.8;3.175.7), and *Purānas* indicating the sweet calls of the cuckoos, in the forests and making the forest more beautiful by their melodious notes.

In another context while discussing the duties and codes of conduct of the King, it is said:

तथा च मधुराभाषी भवेत्कोकिलवन्नृपः ॥

- MatP. 93.71

“The King should speak sweetly like the Kokila.”

4) The *Bhāgavatamahāpurāṇa* (10.90.21), appreciates the sweet notes of a cuckoo.

“O Cuckoo, blessed with sweet notes! Your melodious cooing is so sweet like nectar that it will infuse life into the dead. You imitate the sweet voice and utterances of our beloved Lord. Please tell me what pleasant services I may do to you to day.”

In the *Svapnavāsavadatta*, we find peculiar reference to the eye of the cuckoo. The jester (*vidūṣaka*) says,

5) अधन्यस्य मम कोकिलानामक्षिपरिवर्त इव कुक्षिपरिवर्त : संवृतः ।

- *Svapnavāsavadatta*; Act IV

“(A jester says:-) it is because as my ill-luck would have it, the inside of me is turning round and round like the eye of a cuckoo.” (It is not clear in what sense a jester is giving this example).

The mango trees and the cuckoos are seen to be necessarily co-related in the Sanskrit literature. For example:

6) पुंस्कोकिलश्चूतरसासवेन

मत्तः प्रियां चुम्बति रागहृष्टः ।——॥

- *RtuS*; VI.14

“The male cuckoo, intoxicated with the liquor of the juice of mango-blossoms kisses his mate with passionate joy.”

In the same text, there are many other references to the male cuckoos which sing delightedly in indistinct notes, in the month of Chaitra, spring. In the *Kumārasambhava*, it is said that by eating the blossom of the mango tree, the cuckoos got a sweet throat.

Many times the calls of the cuckoo are related to aggravate the feeling of separation. In *Abhijñānaśākuntala*, the cuckoo is said to say goodbye to Śakuntalā when she was leaving the hermitage to go to the palace of Duśyanta.

A disciple named Śārṅgarava, of the sage Kaṇva says after hearing the calls of Kokila,

7) अनुगतगमना शकुन्तला तरुभिरियं वनवासबन्धुभिः ।

परभृतविरुतं कलं यथा प्रतिवचनीकृतमेभिरीदृशम् ॥

- *Abhijñānaśākuntala* 4.10

“This Śakuntalā has (her) departure approved of by the trees- (her) kinsmen during the forest-residence-in as much as by these has been made such sweet cooing of the cuckoo

into an answer.”

In the Purāṇas as well as in the classical literature like the *Harṣacarita* (4th Uchchvāsa), the *Raghuvamśa* (8.59), the *Naiṣadhamahākāvya* (3.60) we find specific references to the extremely sweet voice of the cuckoo and its parasitic behaviour. In the 17th century, Venkatācārya composed a literary work titled ‘Kokilasandeśa’ where the cuckoo is the messenger. Melodious calls of kokila have inspired the Sanskrit poets to compose poems or wise sayings. An anonymous poet blames kokila by saying that the sweetness of the voice of the cuckoo is artificial as he abandons his foster parents. The poet says:

8) तवैतद्वाचि माधुर्यं जाने कोकिल कृत्रिमम् ।
प्रपोषितो यैस्तानेव जातफक्षो जहासि यत् ॥

- SuRBH; 116

“Oh, kokila, I know that sweetness in your voice is artificial. For you have discarded those birds who have reared you.”

These types of verses or Anyoktis form special feature of Sanskrit literature. In the *Pātañjala Mahābhāṣya*, it is said that if the kokila is departed from the jungle, it will certainly recall it (1-3-67). The ‘Vasanta’ season was called as ‘Avakokila’ because the kokila gives out more sweet calls (2-2-18). The calls of the kokila were termed as ‘Avakrośa’ or ‘Vyāhṛta’ (2-3-67). The female kokila was called as ‘Pikī’ (4-1-63).

D) References to Kokila showing superstition

भातृभार्या च दुबुद्धिर्यो घर्षयति पापकृत् ॥
पुंस्कोकिलत्वमाप्नोति स चापि नरकाच्च्युतः । — ॥

- MārP. 15.10

“One who misbehaves with brother’s wife by having bad intentions becomes a male cuckoo after falling from hell.”

The *Bṛhatsamhitā* (86.26) says that in the season of ‘Vasanta’ one should not rely on Kokila in telling some augury. (Perhaps in this season gives out calls more often. So it was thought to be difficult in understanding predictions).

D) Kokila as described in the *Mrgapakṣisāstra*

The text describes four types of ‘kokila’ in Śreṇī No. 29. These types are described very generally. For example, it is said that “the kokila birds like cool places, their bodies are fragrant, they give out sweet calls, their eggs are reared by the crows.” There is also a contradiction as it is said in one of the verses that ‘the eggs are mainly reared by the female birds.’ (Verse No. 424)

The kokila is described by using the words like Vanapriya, Parabhrta, Kokila and Pika.

Most of the descriptions of the kokila in this text are imaginary and it is very difficult to believe that the kokila birds like to eat rice and curds as claimed in verse No. 429.

4) Mythological references to Kokila

In the *Vikramāṅkadevacarita* (7.59)², it is said that the cuckoo helped Madana to disturb Śiva, who was engrossed in deep meditation. So Śiva got angry with the bird

and due to his anger the bird became as black as the half burnt lamp.

In the *Vratarāja* text (Visvanatha Daivajīa, 1878, pp.791-802) there is another story regarding the cuckoo.

“Long back when Dakṣa Prajāpati performed a sacrifice, he invited all the gods except Śiva. Nārada told Śiva and Pārvatī about the great function. Pārvatī was the daughter of Dakṣa. She went for the function on her own but unfortunately she was insulted by her father. Out of anger and sadness she immolated herself in the sacrificial fire. Śiva was irritated to hear the news of the death of his beloved. He ordered Virabhadra to destroy Dakṣa’s sacrifice and cut his head.

Brahmā and Viṣṇu tried to pacify Śiva. So Śiva’s anger was cooled down. He gave a new life to dead Dakṣa but at that time he cursed Pārvatī for creating hurdles in the sacrifice, that she had to take the birth of the bird-the cuckoo. That is why she took the birth of a cuckoo and lived in the a forest known as Nandanavana.

Śiva said that those women who will pray to the cuckoo in the month of Āṣāḍha, will have a long life for their ‘husbands’. This is called the ‘Kokilāvratā’.

5) Ornithological Description of Kokila

The cuckoo is known as Asian koel. The male bird is black, and has crimson eyes. The female bird is spotted, barred, brown and pied. It is observed that the bird is parasitic and chicks are fed by crows and so also a blackish-brown female chick evicted from the nest and abandoned by the foster crows. In the initial stages the voice of the koel chicks is similar to that of the crow. It assumes the musical note later.

The bird is silent in winter and in summer, calls from dawn to dusk till midnight. (This has given rise to belief in India that the season of ripening mango fruits and the melodious calls of the koel are co-related.)

Notes

- 1 वनं प्रियमस्य वनप्रियः ॥1॥
परेण अन्येन म्रियते पुष्यते परभृतः काकीपुष्टत्वात् ।
अन्यभृत परपुष्टावपि ॥2॥
ताम्रे अक्षिणी अस्य ताम्राक्षः ॥3॥
कोकते चित्तं गृह्णाति कोकिलः “कल्यनि-’ (उणा ४८१) ॥
- 2 इहैव सङ्गः फलवान्वभूय त्वया महापातकिना पिकानाम् ।
यदर्धदग्धोल्मुककश्मलेन देहेन लोकस्य बहिश्चरन्ति ॥
- *Vikramāṅkadevacarita* 7.59

Krauñca and Sārāsa

1) Introduction

In various countries there are various cultural concepts regarding cranes. They were pet birds and were figured in poetry. In the poems of the sixth Dalai Lama there is a mention of a crane. He says,

“If only white cranes, Do grant me wings ;
I shall not go far; only to Lithang, then home.”

(Houston G.W., 1982, p.52)

He promised this to his love but he never returned. We come across many similar references to cranes in other literature

In Australia the fascinating dance of ‘Brolga’ forms the basis of aboriginal dances. In a Chinese legend the crane was a bird ridden by immortals. It symbolizes happiness and longevity. Many Chinese emperors liked to keep cranes and enjoyed literary pieces depicting them.

In the Jaina religion it is believed that the symbol (Lanchhana) of the fifth Tīrthankara-Sumatinātha is the Krauñca (crane). In the Buddhist literature the crane is found in the mystical context. It is one of the birds that meditated on the discourse of the Buddha. The Great crane expressed highly philosophical thoughts. It said:

One must observe unsullied moral purity
as the root of all dharmic action.
One must observe the need to abandon
whatever belongs to this world,
and that includes
the bonds of life in the various heavens.
One must observe that indolence and
sloth hinder the doing of good.
One must observe that the demon of meanness
hinders generosity.

Let these things also enter well into your minds. (Conze, 1996, p. 21,22)

Some of the references in the Sanskrit literature create confusion because sometimes the description of the bird is given but its details may point to the sārāsa crane.

The sārāsa cranes appear in Sanskrit literature almost everywhere when there are description of various lakes, rivers, monasteries and natural scenes. Usually the riverbanks are described as charming due to the presence of majestic sārāsa cranes. For example:

समुद्रमहिषीं गङ्गां सारसक्रौञ्चनादिताम् ।
आससाद महाबाहुः शृङ्गवेरपुरं प्रति ॥

- VR II. 50.26 a (VR/Satavalekar, Vol.2, p.330)

“In the vicinity of Śṛgaverapura, Śrī Rāma - the mighty armed-one, reached the Gaṅga - the principal consort of an ocean, which was rendered noisy by sārāsas and krauñcas (cranes).” The hole in the Rṣyamukha mountain had cranes, swans and sārāsa cranes coming out of it by having coloured themselves because of the pollens of lotus flowers. (VR IV.49.8)¹. This particular place (a cave named as Rkṣhabila) was said to be in the Vindhya range of mountains. The Aśokavana was melodious due to the calls of sārāsa cranes (VR VII. 42. 12 a).

In the *Mahābhārata*, Arjuna is said to have these birds on the plains of Himālayās (Mbh. 3.39.18 a). The rivers like Mandākinī, Yamunā and Gaṅgā are said to have been habituated by sārāsa cranes. The Purāṇa literature is also no exception to this. The resounding, resonant calls of the cranes were particularly noted by the Sanskrit literature.

In the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, the process of creation and evolution of the world is described where the world of birds and animals is named as Tiryag Yoni which is on the eighth rank. The list of birds is given where there is a reference to the sārāsa crane (3.10.24). The *Garuḍapurāṇa* while describing the qualities of a ruby (Padmarāga) says that some of the precious stones have the colour like that of the eyes of the sārāsa cranes. (39.11)

The *Manusmṛti* does not approve of the flesh of the sārāsa crane as good for eating. (5.12)

The *Kirātārjunīya* (6.4), the *Daśakumāracarita* (5th part), the *Kādambarī* (Pampāsarovaravarṇnam), the *Gajendracampū* (2.8) have specifically noticed the calls of the sārāsa Cranes.

2) a) Etymology and Synonyms of krauñca

क्रौञ्चः कुञ्चः ।

- AbhiC, 4.95

कुञ् क्रौञ्चः ।

- AK, 2/5/22

The word Krauñca appears to have been derived from the root V Kruñc(1 P) ‘to call, cry, make sound’. The *Amarakośa* gives a synonym and Kruñ is derived from the same root. The *Abhidhānacintāmaṇi* gives the etymology of the word Kruñca : Krauñca: ‘Krauñca is derived from the root V ‘krun’. It further states a number of synonyms of the word: Kruñca, Krauñca and Kauñja. The second and the last words are obscure.

b) Synonyms for sārāsa crane²

1 — अथ लक्ष्मणसारसौ ।

लक्ष्मणो रसिकः कामी काकुवाक्कामिवल्लभः ॥

नीलकण्ठः पुष्कराह्वो लक्ष्मणा लक्षणापि च ।

- KalK, 11.124, 125

“Lakṣmaṇa is one having a particular mark.

Sārāsa is one residing in the lake (sarasa).

Rasika is one who is elegant.

Kāmin is one who is infatuated.

Kākuvāk is the one who gives out calls like 'kā ku'. It seems to be an onomatopoeic word.

Kamivallabha is one who is an infatuated male partner."

2) The *Anekārthasaṅgraha* (3.802) gives a synonym - puṣkarākhyā. (This is the word used for the bird and also for the lotus).

3) रक्तमूर्धा पुष्कराहवः सारसो लक्ष्मणोऽपि सः ॥

- KośK, Śirhādivarga. 71

"The head (of the sārāsa) crane is red, it is known as 'Puṣkara'. The words sārāsa and lakṣ maṇa are explained earlier.

4) सारसस्तु लक्ष्मणः स्यात् पुष्कराख्यः कुरङ्करः ॥

- AbhiC, 4/394³

"One which moves (in water) is sārāsa and it is usually in lakes".

"One which has a particular mark is Lakṣmaṇa."

"Sārāsa is the bird called Puṣkara".

"One which makes sound kuram."

शेषश्चात्र - = Other names are mentioned here.

The word 'dīrghajānuka' is used in the sense of sārāsa. This shows that sarāsa is one who has long-legs.

"Mithuna means a pair. Sārāsa is one which lives in pair (maithuni) one which is loving, impassioned is Kāmin. He is full of passion and has a red head.

"A female bird has a particular mark and so it is known as 'Lakṣmaṇā'."

3) References to krauñca and sārāsa in Sanskrit literature

A) Oldest references to the Krauñca

1) अश्वत्थः क्षीरं व्युपिबत् क्रुङ्डाङ्गिरसो धिया ।

- *Kāthaka Saṁhitā* 38.1

"Using his knowledge kruñ-angirāsa drank milk (separated from) water."

2) इन्द्राग्निभ्यां क्रुञ्चान्मित्राय मदगून ।

- VS 24.22

"Let the kruñca be offered for Indra and Agni."

3) 'वाचे क्रुञ्चः' ॥ - VS 24.31 and 'वाचे क्रौञ्चः' ॥ - TS 5.5, 12.1

"Let the kruñca be offered for 'Vāc' - the deity of speech."

The Tāṇḍya Brāhmaṇa refers to the crane many times. For example,

4) वागात्मकं खलु क्रौञ्चं साम । क्रौञ्चं भवति ॥

- *Tāṇḍya Brāhmaṇa* 13, 9.10

"Indeed the Krauñca Sāman is of the nature of speech. It is krauñca." (Here 'krauñca' is the name of the Sama).

The *Jaiminīya Upaniṣada* refers to the crane as follows,

5) — क्रौञ्चसाम्नो वृणे ब्रह्मवर्चसमिति । — 1, 16, 2, 12

B) i) Description of Krauñca in epic and classical poetry

The bird krauñca has got a legendary place in Sanskrit literature as the sage

Vālmīki was moved by witnessing it's tragic killing by a hunter and the painful incident proved to be the inspiration to him to compose the epic *VālmīkiRāmāyaṇa*.

A famous verse in the Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa refers to the pair of cranes most probably the sārāsa crane. The sage Vālmīki got inspiration when he saw the lamenting bird. The sage said,

तस्याभाशे तु मिथुनं चरन्तमनपायिनम् ।
ददर्श भगवांस्तत्र क्रौञ्चयोश्चारुनिःस्वनम् ॥
- VR I. 2.9

“Close to that descent the glorious sage actually perceived in that forest a pair of cranes moving about, never parting from one another and making a charming noise.”

वियुक्ता पतिना तेन द्विजेन सहचारिणा ।
ताम्रशीर्षेण मत्नेन पत्रिणा सहितेन वै ॥

- VR I. 2.12c (Valmiki/Bhatt G.H., Vol.I, 1960, p.24, [136*])

“(A female bird wailed as) she was parted from her mate and companion, the bird, that was endowed with a coppery head was inflated with passion and courting had distended its wings.”

मा निषाद प्रतिष्ठां त्वमगमः शाश्वतीः समाः ।
यत्क्रौञ्चमिथुनादेकमवधीः काममोहितम् ॥
- VR I.2.14

“May you not have peace of mind for endless years fowler, since you have killed one of the pair of cranes, infatuated with passion.”

In the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* we find many references to the cranes and their association with lakes and rivers. The Pampā lake was said to be charming with aquatic birds singing melodiously. (VRIV. 1.43) The Sahya mountains were said to be inhabited by the ducks and cranes. (VR VI. 4. 85) (Vālmīki/Satavalekar, vol.7,1970, p.25) The palace of queen Kaikeyī was said to be full of notes of cranes and swans. (VR II.10.12). While describing the fight between Indrajita and Lakṣmaṇa, it is said:

तयोस्तु घनुषी श्रेष्ठे बाहुभिः परिषोपमैः ।
विकृष्यमाणे बलवत्क्रौञ्चाविव चुकूजतुः ॥

- VR VI. 90. 51 (Vālmīki/satavalekar, Vol.8, 1973, p.113).

“While being stretched at full length with violence by their arms, which resembled a pair of iron bludgeons the excellent bows of the two warriors. For their part emitted a piercing sound like a pair of cranes.” (The quality of sound suggested here may be related to the demoiselle cranes.)

Sometimes the occurrence of the cranes is mentioned in Sanskrit literature which may suggest their migration. For example,

जलं प्रसन्नं कुसुमप्रहासं क्रौञ्चस्वनं शालिवनं विपक्वम् ।
मृदुश्च वायुर्विमलश्च चन्द्रः शंसन्ति वर्षव्यपनीतकालम् ॥

- V R IV. 30. 53(Valmiki/Satavalekar, Vol.5,1967, p.210)

“Pellucid water (in the river, lakes etc.) smiling joyfully in the form of (lotus and other) flowers and made noisy with the cries of cranes, fully ripe paddy fields, nay, the gentle breeze and the cloudless moon betoken the time of passing away of the rains.”

The cranes mentioned here might be demoiselle cranes or common cranes which are winter migrants.

In the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, various types of flight with respect to height are discussed (VR IV. 58. 26-29), where cranes and ospreys are said to be third in the order of height.

As the hunter was cursed by sage Vālmiki because he had killed one of the pair of cranes infatuated with passion. The *Campūrāmāyaṇa*, the *Uttararāmacarita* (II.5) narrate the same story of cranes. From the description the bird appears to be the Indian sārāsa crane since it is the only resident and breeding crane in India. Many times we find mixed references to the cranes and sārāsa cranes in Sanskrit literature).

We find a different metaphor in the epic *Mahābhārata*, for example,

क्रौञ्चपृष्ठारुणं रौद्रं बाणजालं व्यदृश्यत ।

- Mbh. 8. 35. 45c

“The net of the arrow spread in the sky looked red and fierce like the upper body of the crane.”

The classical Sanskrit literature is full references to the cranes.

प्रालेयाद्रेरुपतटमतिक्रम्य तांस्तान्विशेषा-

न्हंसद्वारं भृगुपतियशोवर्त्म यत्क्रौञ्चरन्त्रम् ।

तेनोदीचीं दिशमनुसरेस्तिर्यगायामशोभी

श्यामः पादो बलिनियमनाभ्युद्यतस्येव विष्णोः ॥

- MeghaD (Purvamegha) -60

“ Having passed beyond (after enjoying the sight of) the various objects of curiosity near the skirt of the Himālaya proceed to the north, looking beautiful by your length extended crosswise like the dark foot of Viṣṇu when ready to put down Bali, by the opening in (mount) krauñca the gate of flamingos and the very path of glory of the most eminent of the Bhrgus (Paraśurāma).”

Krauñca (क्रौञ्च) is found in other contexts like ‘*Krauñcavyūha*’ which shows a peculiar, strategic formation of the army. We find such references in the *Mahābhārata*. The *Krauñcavyūha* is described as “ The Krauñca disposition has eight strategical positions, the face, eyes, head, neck, stomach, left flank, right flank and thighs. In the disposition formed by Bhīṣma, Droṇa stood at the face. Aśvatthāmā and Kṛpa stood at the eyes, Hārdikya at the head and Sūrasena at the neck. The king of Prāgjyotiṣa stood at the stomach of the formation. The Tuṣaras, Yavanas, Śakas and Cūpuvas guarded the right flank Śṛtayus and Bhūrīśravas kept the thighs.” (Vettam Mani 1980; p. 417)

‘Krauñcadvīpa’ was supposed to be one of the islands of seven islands. There is a mountain called Krauñca. A mythological story is related to this name. The story is found in the *Mahābhārata* (III.214.31a)⁴.

There is a story as to how Kārtikeya and Paraśurāma pierced the mountain with the arrow. In this particular verse there is a reference to the cleavage through which swans and vultures fly to Mahāmeru.

The other texts like the *Bṛhatsaṁhitā* repeat the same idea that krauñca and sārāsa birds adorn the lakes and rivers. For example,

क्रौञ्चकाञ्चीकलापाश्चकलहंसस्वनाः ।
नद्यस्तोर्यांशुकायत्रशफरीकृतमेखलाः ॥
- BrS 56.6

“In places where there are rivers adorned by lines of cranes (curlew) serving as a girdle with beads, full of sweet music of the swans (teal) with the watery sheet for robes and with the ilisha fish for belts”.

B) ii) Description of sārāsa in Sanskrit poetry

Sārāsa cranes enjoy a special attention in Sanskrit epics and poetry. In the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*, ‘Prasavaṇa mountain’ and *Kiṣkindhānagarī* is referred to,

बाष्पसंछन्नसलिलाः रुतविज्ञेयसारसाः ।
हिमार्द्रवालुकास्तीरैः सरितो भान्ति साम्प्रतम् ॥
- VR III. 15.22

“With their water shrouded in mist and the cranes inhabiting them discernible (only) by their cries, the streams are perceptible at this time (only) through their banks with their sands wet with frost.”

This is the area of river Godāvarī and it suggests the stating of Hemanta season.

अद्याहं मार्गणैः प्राणानादास्ये जीवितान्तकैः ।
सलिले क्षीरमासक्तं निष्पिबन्निव सारसः ॥
- VR III. 18.5

“Today I shall take the offender’s life with my deadly arrows, even as a sārāsa drains off the milk mixed up in water while heartily drinking it.”
Surprisingly a quality of differentiating milk from water is attached to the Sārāsa crane.

समीक्ष्य विमलं व्योमं गतविद्युब्दलाहकम् ।
सारसाकुलसंघुष्टं रम्यज्योत्स्नानुलेपनम् ॥
- VR IV.28.1

“Vividly perceiving the sky to be clear and free from lightening and clouds, crowded with the Sārāsa birds and resonant with their cries and illuminated with lovely flight.”

This is the area of river Godāvarī and it suggests the beginning of Hemanta season.

The Khara demon says this to ‘Śūrpaṇakhā’.

सारसारावसंनादैः सारसारावनादिनी ।
याश्रमे रमते बाला साऽद्य मे रमते कथम् ॥
- VR IV.29.7

“(Rāma said to himself) “In what way does that youthful lady of mine-whose voice resembles the notes of a crane, nay, who diverted herself in the hermitage with the cries of cranes uttered with the intention of calling their mates-divert herself now?”

विपक्वशालिप्रसवानि भुक्त्वा प्रहर्षिता सारसचारुपङ्क्तिः ।
नभः समाक्रामति शीघ्रवेगा वातावधूता ग्रथितेव माला ॥
- VR IV.30.47a (Vālmiki /Satavalekar, Vol.5, 1967, p.209)

“Overjoyed to eat ears of fully ripe paddy (and holding them in their beaks) a charming row of cranes takes its flight across the sky with a dashing speed like a knotted garland carried by the wind.”

In the *Svapnavāsavadatta*, there is a reference to the sārāsa cranes in the dialogues of King Udayana, Vidūṣaka and Ceṭī (a lady-servant), in the Kousāmbī city. They praise the beautiful flight of the sārāsa cranes.

ऋज्वायतां च विरलां च नम्रोन्नतां च सप्तर्षिवंशकुटिलां च निवर्तनेषु ।
निर्मुच्यमानभुजगोदरनिर्मलस्य सीमामिवाम्बरलस्य विभज्यमानाम् ॥

- SvapD, 4.2

“ Now straight and extended, now thinning out, now sinking low and now rising high and now twisted like the constellation of the Great Bear and it takes a turn, looking like a boundry-line that divides the sky which is spotless like the belly of a serpent when its slough is being shed.”

In the other reference in the same drama ceṭī says to Padmāvati-

“प्रेक्षतां प्रेक्षतां भर्तृदारिका एता कोकनदमालपाण्डुरमणीयां सारसपङ्क्तिं यावत् समाहितं गच्छन्तीम्।
“ Behold princess, behold this flight of sārāsa cranes advancing steadily, white and charming like a wreath of pink water-lilies.”

In the *Raghuvamśa*, Kālidāsa describes how the queen Sudakṣiṇā and the King Dilīpa were going to the hermitage of Vaśiṣṭha, they saw sārāsa birds.

श्रेणीबन्धाद्वितन्वदिभरस्तम्भां तोरणस्रजम् ।
सारसैः कलनिर्द्वादैः क्वचिदुन्नमिताननौ ॥

- Raghu, 1.41

“ At times raising up their faces at the sārāsa birds, who sweetly warbled, and by flying together in a line seemed to form a garland at the archway without supporting pillars.”

In the other text we find a beautiful description of flocks of the sārāsa birds.

शनैः श्यानीभूताः सितनलधरच्छेदपुलिनाः
समन्तादाकीर्णाः कलविरुतिभिः सारसकुलैः ।
चिताश्चित्राकारैर्निशि विकचनक्षत्रकुमुदै-
र्नभस्तस्यन्दन्ते सरित इव दीर्घा दश दिशः ॥

- *Mudrārākṣasa*, 3.7

“ The extensive ten quarters spread down the sky like rivers, [flowing on from the month of Śravaṇa] that have gradually become separate [also punningly, those that have become narrow in their beds], with sandy banks in the form of white strips of clouds scattered about on all sides, with flocks of sārāsa birds, cackling sweetly and indistinctly (and) heaped at night with full-blown nightlotuses in the form of constellations of variegated forms ”.

These were some of the representative examples of references to the sārāsa cranes. There are many other such verses on the texts like the *Harivamśa*, the *Kirātārjunīya*, the *Navasāhasāṅkacarita*, the *Meghadūta*, the *Ṛtusamhāra*, the *Harṣacarita*, and the *Daśakumāracarita*.

C) i) Reference to krauñca in Indian music and prosody

The *Nārada-purāṇa* (Śikṣānirupaṇa -61) says

‘क्रौञ्चो वदति मध्यमम् ।’

“The Krauñca utters the Madhyama notes.”

पदैः स्वरैः क्रौञ्चपदः प्रतितालेन गीयते ।
स्वरन्यासः स तत्राम्ना छन्दसा मुक्तको ऽथवा ॥
- *Saṅgītaratnākara* 4.219

“A group of musical notes (Svaranyāsa) namely Krauñcapada with the help of Pada and Svāra. It is in the same metre known as ‘Krauñcapada’ or in the free metre”.
क्रौञ्चपदा is described as a metre with 25 syllables in a quarter.

ii) Reference to sārāsa in Indian music

मयूरचातकच्छागक्रौञ्चकोकीलदुर्दराः ।
- *Saṅgītaratnākara*, Section 3 .250

The seven notes commencing with Ṣaḍja are produced respectively by the peacock, cātaka, goat, heron, cuckoo, frog and the elephant.

[Shadja - peacock, Ri - chataka, Ma - crane, Pa - black bird]

D) i) Description of krauñca in the *Mṛgapakṣiśāstra*

The author Haṁsadeva describes the krauñca and sārāsa in great details.

क्रौञ्चास्ते श्वेतपक्षा ये रक्तवर्णागैर्युताः ॥

“The cranes have white wings and have red colour.”

नितरां दीर्घपादाश्च दीर्घचञ्चुपटद्वयाः ।

किञ्चित्स्थूलशरीराश्च किञ्चित्परुषदर्शनाः ॥

“(They) have long legs, long beak. (They) are little hefty and look rugged.”

गद्गददक्क्रेकारकराः स्वल्द गमनका मताः ।

दृढकर्कशपक्षाढ्या गगने दूरगामिनः ॥

“(They) make the sound ‘Krenkāra’ and walk in a tottering way They fly at a long distance with their strong and rough wings.”

मन्दाश्च मन्दनादाश्च स्वयूथसहचारिणः ।

कोपे प्रचण्डवेगाश्च वैरिपक्षिविनाशिनः ॥

“(They) are slow (in movement), make sound slowly, live in flocks are short tempered and destroy their enemy birds.”

मांसभक्षणलोलाश्च सन्ततं निद्रयान्विताः ।

माध्याह्ने सलिलक्रीडारताश्च परिकीर्तिताः ॥

- *Mṛgapakṣiśāstra*, 2.246-250

“(They) love eating flesh, like to sleep all the time, but they like to play in water in the afternoon.”

ii) Description of sārāsa in the *Mṛgapakṣiśāstra*

सारसाः कृष्णवर्णास्तु श्वेतरक्ताङ्कनैर्युताः ॥

“The sārāsa cranes are black in colour and have white and red spots.”

पक्षयोर्वक्षसि भृशं क्षुद्रनासापुटा मताः ।

क्षुद्रपादसमोपेताः नितरां शान्तमानसाः ॥

“On wings and breast (Their) nostrils are small, legs are small (and) are very much peaceful.”

जलावगाहनासक्ता माध्याह्न तु विशेषतः ।
सन्ततं लक्ष्मणोपेताः स्वर्णच्छायनखा मताः ॥

“(They) like to play in water sepecially during afternoon; the lakṣmaṇas (are) always accompanied by (each other); their nails have the brightness of gold.”

पद्मेन्दीवरकल्हारकुसुमेषु निवासिनः ।
वसन्ते कामसम्पन्नाः सन्ततं रतिकाक्षिणः ॥

“(They) like to reside in the company of lotuses like Padma, Indīvara, Kalhāra. Their courting period is during the Vasanta season.”

मृदुस्पर्शाश्च नितरां प्रायः कलरवा मताः ।
जलवासैकनिरता नयनानन्ददायिनः ॥

- *Mṛgapakṣiśāstra* 2.115-119

“(They) are very soft and (their) sound is sweet. (These) aquatic birds give pleasure to the eyes of the seer. “

E) i) Superstitions regarding krauñca

Sanskrit literature contain references suggesting an auspicious or inauspicious of the krauñca and the sārāsa.

The *Mahābhārata* opines that the rivers which are resounded by the calls of the sārāsa cranes, Goddess Lakṣmī lives there. (Mbh.13.11.15c). One of the Gaṇas or attendants (Mbh. 10.7.19c) of Lord Śiva are said to be crane-faced (Krauñcamukha). There is a holy place named as ‘Krauñcapadī’ where it is prescribed that one should after Piṇḍa to become pure. In the *Mahābhārata*, a belief is seen that the sight of cranes is auspicious.

ज्येष्ठं पितृसमं चापि भ्रातरं योऽवमन्यते ।
सोऽपि मृत्युमुपागम्य क्रौञ्चयोनीं प्रजायते ॥
- Mbh.13. 112. 77a

“One who insults the elder brother equal to one’s father is born as the krauñca after one’s death.”

क्रौञ्चः कार्पासिकं हत्वा — ॥
- Mbh. 13.112.100c

“One who steals away a cotton cloth one becomes a crane (in his next birth).”

ज्येष्ठं पितृसमं वापि भ्रातरं योऽवमन्यते ॥
नरकात्सो विभ्रष्टः क्रौञ्चयोनीं प्रजायते ।—
- *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* 15.14, 15

“One who insults the elder brother, becomes a crane in the next birth after staying in the hell.”

The *Agnipurāṇa* describes the cranes as nocturnal. (231.17)

कार्पासतान्तवं (हत्वा) क्रौञ्चो — ॥

- *Manusmṛti*, 12.64

“One who steals away a cotton cloth becomes a crane (in his next birth).”

The *Manusmṛti* orders a person who kills the crane to offer a three year old calf to a Brahmin. (11.134) as a ‘Prāyaścitta.’

ii) Superstitions regarding sārāsa

The *Nārādapurāṇa* says that if one kills sārāsa crane one should observe fasting for the next twelve days. (Tithīnirṇaya.81)

4) i) Ornithological information about krauñca

Common crane

Field character = The bird is large, long-necked, head and upper neck blackish with a dull red naked patch on nape. Its flight feathers are black and a mass of gray plumes is above the tail.

It is a winter visitor bird to India. Most commonly seen in Western India.

These birds mostly spend their day and night on river sandbanks, fly out each morning and evening to feed in cultivated fields.

Their calls are loud.

Demoiselle Crane

It is a gray coloured crane with a black head and a black neck. Large flocks are seen in young gram and wheat fields and on tank margins.

This crane is also a winter visitor to India. During the midday heat their flocks rest either on the sandbanks of rivers or margins of jheels soar in circles at great heights. These cranes fly in broad 'V' formation. Their calls are loud and musical and resemble the sound of a high-pitched trumpet of far-reaching quality.

ii) Ornithological information of sārāsa

It is a large, tall, gray bird with long bare red legs, and naked red head and upper neck. They are seen in pairs near cultivation and marshlands. They essentially dwell on open, well-watered plains. They are said to live in pairs for life and sometimes accompanied by one or two young birds. Their conjugal devotion has won a popular reverence.

Their calls are loud, far-reaching, trumpeting and uttered from ground as well as when they are on wings. During breeding season, pairs display a spectacular dance which was the favourite subject for painting.

Sārāsa crane is a resident of India.

Notes

1 तत्र क्रौञ्चाश्च हंसाश्च सारसाश्चापि निष्क्रमन् ॥
जलाद्राशिक्रवाकाश्च रक्ताङ्गाः पद्मरेणुभिः ॥
- VR IV. 49.8

2 सरसि भवम् ।
स्वनामख्यातपक्षी । तत्पञ्चाय । पुष्कराहः । इत्यमरः । 2.5.22 ॥
गोनर्दः । । लक्ष्मणः । लक्षणः । सरसीकः । सरोत्सवः । इति शब्दरत्नावली । रसिकः । कामी ।
- Śabdakalpadruma, Page 339
पुष्कराहवस्तु सारसः । — ॥ - Amarakośa 2/5/22

3 सरति सारसः “सृवयिभ्यां णित्” (उणा - ५७०) इत्यसः, सरसि भवो वा ॥1॥
लक्ष्मीरस्त्यस्य लक्ष्मणः ॥२॥

पुष्करस्य पदस्य आख्या ऽस्य पुष्कराख्यः ॥३॥
कुरमिति शब्दं करोति कुरङ्करः ॥४॥
सारसे दीर्घजानुकः ॥
गोनर्द मैथुनी कामी श्येनाख्यो रक्तमस्तकः ॥
सारसी लक्ष्मणा ।
लक्ष्मीरस्त्यस्या लक्ष्मणा 'लक्ष्मणी' इत्येन्ये ॥१॥

- 4 बिभेद स शरैः शैलं क्रौञ्चं हिमवतः सुतम् ।
तेन हंसाश्च गृध्राश्च मेरुं गच्छन्ति पर्वतम् ॥
Mbh. (III. 214.31a)



Haṁsa

1) Introduction

In Indian literature and mythology, Haṁsa is a noble bird, praised by many poets and is depicted on religious monuments. Haṁsa is the vehicle of Brahma-the creator and of Sarasvatī- the goddess of learning. According to ornithologists, it is very rare that swans appear in India. Thus it becomes difficult to identify 'Haṁsa' as a 'Swan' or as a 'goose'. Kālidāsa gives a picturesque description of intermixed flocks of birds in the confluence of Gaṅgā and Yamunā rivers. The water of these two rivers is different in colour and it is visible at Prayāga (Allahabad). Kālidāsa says,

क्वचित्खगानां प्रियमानसानां कादम्बसंसर्गवतीव पङ्क्तिः ।

-Raghu XIII.55

“(The currents of Gaṅga and Yamunā look) like a row of (swans) that love the Mānasa lake intermixed with kādamba i.e.geese of dark-grey wings. - -”

The migration of swans was pointed out in Sanskrit literature. The 'Krauñcarandhra' in Sanskrit literature is identified with the 'Niti Pass'. From this gate or place the wild geese take their way along the passes when they cross the Himalayas. The geese return to India in October which is the beginning of autumn. This event is reflected in various Sanskrit compositions.

It is a traditional belief that the haṁsa could separate milk from water and partake only of the milk leaving the water. The metaphor of 'haṁsa' is applied to the philosophers of the highest order and of the highest intellect.

Buddhist literature honours 'Haṁsa' in various contexts. The '*Dhammapada*' contains beautiful expression that says:

उच्युञ्जन्ति सतीमन्तो न निकेते रमन्ति ते ।

हंसा व पल्लवं हित्वा ओकमोकं जहन्ति ते ॥

- *Dhammapada* 91

“They depart with their thoughts well-collected, they are not happy in their abode; like swans leaving their lake, they leave their house.”

Verse No. 175 in the '*Dhammapada*' says: “Swans fly through the sky; through the air they go by reason of their supernormal power - - - .”

The Jātaka stories narrate the stories where the Bodhisattva is born as a golden goose. (Jataka stories No. (136 [Cowell, 1990, Vol.I, p. 292], 379 [Cowell, 1990, Vol.III, p. 159], 502 [Cowell, 1990, Vol.IV, p. 264], 533 [Cowell, 1990, Vol.V, p.175]). In these stories he displays his wisdom.

The *Pañcatantra* and the *Hitopadeśa* have the stories where we find the personified images of the haṁsa or swan.

In many parts of the world, we find the stories about swans in folklore and mythology. For example, in Greek mythology, it is believed that Jupiter approached Leda in the disguise of a swan.

In this chapter, an attempt is made to compile various images of the 'haṁsa' in Sanskrit literature.

2) Synonyms for the Haṁsa

Nirukta (14.29) tries to explain the word 'haṁsa'. It is said that हंसः इति । हंसाः सूर्यरश्मयः ।

Rays of the sun were called haṁsa. It is further said:

हंस इव श्रेणिशो यतन्ते । हंसाः हन्तेः घ्नन्ति अध्वानम् । (4.11).

“Swans go in rows. (The word haṁsa is to be derived from the root Vhan 'to go', as the swans go on (their) way.”

The synonyms are:

चक्राङ्गो धवलगरुन्मराल-हंस-चक्राङ्का अपि कलकण्ठ-केरवौ च ।
आरक्ताननचरणः स धार्तराष्ट्रः ॥69॥
तैर्मल्लिकाक्षो मलिनैरथायं पीतैरिमैः स्यात्कलहंससंज्ञम् ।
कादम्बको धूसरपक्ष एष कारण्डवः स्यान्मरुतो ऽच्छपक्षः ॥70॥
वारला वरला हंसी वारटा वरटापि सा । — ॥71॥

- KośK

Cakraṅga (चक्राङ्ग) = One who is curve-necked.

Dhavalagarutmarāla (धवलगरुत्माराल) = Dhavala^{garut is} one having white wings. Marāla is one who is red with a little yellow.

Haṁsa (हंस) = A goose, gander, swan or flamingo.

Cakrāṅka (चक्राङ्क) = One who is curved-bodied.

Kalakaṅṭha (कलकण्ठ) = One who has pleasing tone or voice.

Kerava (केरव) = One whose voice is like 'ke'.

Āraktānācaraṇa (आरक्ताननचरण) = One whose face and legs are red.

Dhārtarāṣṭra (धार्तराष्ट्र) = The sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭri.

Mallikākṣa (मल्लिकाक्षः) = Mallikākṣa are those (types of goose) with dark coured or brown legs and bill.

Kalahāṁsa (कलहंस) = Kalahāṁsa are these swans who gives out sweet calls like 'kal'.

Kādambaka (कादम्बक) = With reference to a goose it means a kind of goose with dark grey wings.

Kāraṇḍava (कारण्डव) = (According to MW) a goose whose wings are not shaded or not dark.

Vāralā or Varalā or Varatā or Vāratā are the words for a female goose.

The *Abhidhānacintāmaṇi* (4.391), the *Vaijayantīkośa* (3.7,8,9) and the *Kalpadrūkośa* (11.121,122,123) and other texts¹ give almost similar synonyms. The *Kalpadrūkośa* (11.121) mentions a synonym 'Mauktikāśana' which means one who eats pearls. This is a mythical concept related to the swans.

3) References to Haṁsa in Sanskrit Literature

A) Oldest references to haṁsa

There are innumerable references to swans in Sanskrit literature. We find the oldest references in the Vedas.

ई॒र्मा॒न्ता॑सः॒ सिल्कि॑म॒ध्यमा॑सः॒ सं शू॑र॒णासो॑ दि॒व्यासो॑ अ॒त्याः ।
हं॒सा इ॒व श्रेणि॑शो॒ यत॑न्ते॒ यदा॑क्षि॒षुर्दिव्य॑म॒ज्मम॑शवाः ॥

- RV 1/ 163/ 10

“ Symmetrical in flank, with rounded haunches, mettled like heroes, the celestical courses, put forth their strength like swans in lengthened order, when they, the steeds, have reached the heavenly causeway.”

श्व॑सि॒त्यप्सु॑ हं॒सो न॒ सीद॑न् क्र॒त्वा चेति॑ष्ठो॒ विशा॑मु॒षुर्भु॑त् ।

- RV 1/65/ 9

“ Like a swan sitting in the floods he pants; wisest in mind mid men he wakes at morn.”

आ हं॒सासो॑ न स्व॑स॒राणि॑ गन्त॒न् मधो॑र्म॒दाय॑ मरुतः॒ सम॑न्यवः ॥

- RV 2/ 34/ 5

“ - - - O Maruts, of one mind, like swans who seek their nests, come to the rapturous enjoyment of the meath.”

हं॒सा इ॒व श्रेणि॑शो॒ यता॑नाः॒ शुक्रा॑ वसा॒नाः स्वर॑वो॒ न आ॑गुः ।
उ॒न्नीय॑मानाः॒ क॒विभिः॑ पु॒रस्ता॑द् दे॒वा दे॒वाना॑मपि॒ यन्ति॑ पाथः ॥

- RV 3/8/9

“ Like the swan’s that flee in lengthened like the pillars have come to us arrayed in brilliant colour. They, lifted up on high, by sages, eastward, go forth as Gods to the God’s dwelling places.”

हं॒सासो॑ ये वां मधु॑मन्तो॒ अ॒स्त्रिधो॑ हिर॑ण्यपर्णा॒ उहु॑व॒ उष॑र्बुधः ।

- RV 4/ 45/4

“ The swans ye have are friendly, rich in store of meath, gold-pinioned, strong to draw, awake at early morn ”

हं॒साविव॑ पत॒त॒मा सु॒तां उप॑ ॥

- RV 5/ 78/ 1-3

“(The Aśvins are said to) fly hither like two swans unto the juice we shed.”

स॒स्वश्चि॒दिध॑ त॒न्वाः शु॒म्भमा॑ना॒ आ हं॒सासो॑ नील॑पृ॒ष्ठा अप॑प्तन् ।

- RV 7/ 59/ 7

“ Decking the beauty of their forms in secret the swans with purple backs have flown down hither.”

हं॒साविव॑ पतथो॒ अ॒ध्वगा॑विव॒ सोमं॑ सु॒तं म॑हि॒षेवा॑व॒ गच्छ॑थः ।

- RV 8/35/8

“ Ye fly like swans, like those who travel on their way; like buffaloes ye seek the Soma we have shed. “

हं॒सैरिव॑ स॒खिभि॑र्वावददि॒भर॑श्मन्म॒यानि॑ न॒हना॑ व्यस्यन् । - ॥

- RV 10/67/3

“ Girt by his friends who cried with swan like voices, bursting the stony barriers of the prison.”

बी॒भत्सू॑नां॒ स॒युजं॑ हं॒समा॑हुर॒पां दि॒व्यानां॑ स॒ख्ये च॑रन्तम् ।

RV 10/124/9

“ They call him swan, the abhorrent floods companion, moving in friendship with celestial waters.”

हंसः शुचिषद् — ।
- VS 10/24

“(The Sun God is pure like) like the holy swan”

सोमाय हंसानालभते — ।
- VS 24/22

“The swan (is the offering) for the Soma”.

हंसो वातस्य — ।
- VS 24/35

“Let the swan be offered to Vāta or wind god.”

The Śukla Yajurveda (21.29) describes the horses of the Sun, standing in rows, just like the flock of swans.

The Atharvaveda (11.6.21) explains the 'Prāṇa' (spirit, vitality) in terms of 'haṁsa'.

B) References to the migration of the Haṁsa

It is a remarkable fact that migration of swans was accurately noted and written in Sanskrit literature. We will see few such references. The migratory route of swans was also observed. Kumbhakarna says:

चपलस्य तु कृत्येषु प्रसमीक्ष्याधिकं बलम् ।
छिद्रमन्ये प्रतद्यन्ते क्रौञ्चस्य खमिव द्विजाः ॥
- VR VI. 12. 33^a

“Observing the superior strength of an enemy who is hasty in actions, others for their parts look for his weak point even as swans seek the fissure in the krauñca mountain (in order to cross it).”

While describing a big army it is said that swift flying swans leave the Mānasa and occupy the river Gaṅgā.

पाञ्चालैर्मानसादेत्य हंसैर्गङ्गेव वेगितैः ।
- Mbh. 8. 43.64^c

In the Kumārasambhava,(1.30), it is said that in the season of śarad flocks of swans come to the river Gaṅgā.

In the Brahmapurāṇa, there is a description of India (Bhārata Varṣa), where there is a reference to a country named Haṁsamārga (a way of swans). Can we locate this country near Kashmir? This point will be discussed afterwards. In the Vāmana Purāṇa, it is said:

श्रुत्वैव मेघस्य दृढं तु गर्जितं
त्यजन्ति हंसाश्च सरांसि तत्क्षणात् ।
- 1 :Śrīharilalitavarṇana

“Having heard the sound of clouds, swans immediately leave the lakes (due to the occurrence of rainy season), as they do not like the muddy water”.

Now there are few verses which show a necessary relation between the swans

and the Mānasa lake.

प्रालेयाद्रेरुपतटमतिक्रम्य तांस्तान्विशेषान्
हंसद्वारं भृगुपतियशोवर्त्म यत्क्रौञ्चरन्ध्रम् ।
तेनोदीचीं दिशमनुपतेस्तिर्यगायामशोभि
श्यामः पादो बलिनियमनाभ्युद्यतस्येव विष्णोः ॥

- Meghadūta-Pūrvamegh 60

“Having passed beyond (after enjoyed the sight of) the various objects of curiosity near the skirt of the Himālaya proceed to the north, looking beautiful by your length extended crosswise like the dark foot of Viṣṇu when ready to put down Bali, by the opening in (mount) Krauñca, the gate of flamingos and the very path of glory of the most eminent of the Bhṛguṣ (Paraśurāma)”.

कर्तुं यच्च प्रभवति महीमुच्छिन्नामवध्यात्
तत् श्रुत्वा ते श्रवणसुभगं गर्जितं मानसोत्क्राः ।
आ कैलासाद्विसकिसलयच्छेदपाथेयवन्तः
संपत्स्यन्ते नभसि भवतो राजहंसाः सहायाः ॥

- Meghad - (Pūrvamegha) 11

“And on hearing that thunder of yours which is grateful to the ear and which has the power to make the earth covered with mushrooms and fertile, the royal swans, eager to go to the lake Mānasa, and having a stock of bits of shoots of lotus-stalks to serve them as provisions on their journey will become your companions in the sky as far as the mountain Kailāsa.”

पश्चात्सरः प्रतिगमिष्यसि मानसं तत्
पाथेयमृत्सृज बिसं ग्रहणाय भूयः ।
मां तावदुद्धर शुचो दयिताप्रवृत्त्या
स्वार्थात्सतां गुरुतरा प्रणयिक्रियैव ॥

- Vikramorvaśīya, IV.31

(Pururavs says), “(Oh swan) please return to the Mānasa lake afterwards and please forgo lotus stalk that you have for eating. Take me out of my sorrow (by giving me) the news of my beloved. Because for the good people, helping their dear once is greater than their own cause.”

The *Harṣacarita* (3rd Uchhvāsa) mentions that in the arrival of autumn, swans become the guests of all.

The references to the habitats of swans occur repeatedly in the Sanskrit literature. For example, the river Godāvāri (*Prasannarāghava* 6.10; *Uttararāmacarita* 3.37; the river Gaṅgā (*Harṣacarita* 1,2,5,6,8-Uchhvāsa; *Kirātārjunīya* 6.6); the lake Pampā (*Uttararāmacarita* 1.31); the river Sarayū (16.56, 19.40) are said to be inhabited by swans. The lake Mānasa is most of the times correlated to the residence of swans, right from the Purāna literature and also in the texts *Raghuvamśa* 6.26, *Meghadūta - Uttaramegha* 81; *Kirātārjunīya* 5.13; *Naiṣadhamahākāvya* 1.129; *Ratnāvalī* 2.9; *Vikramāṅkadevacarita* 5.45.

C) Philosophical references to haṁsa

The symbol of swan was frequently used in the philosophical context.

In the *Nādabindūpaniṣad*, orṅkāra is compared with the swan. In the other upaniṣad called ‘*Bhikṣuka*’, the two types of monks were referred to as Haṁsa and

Paramahaṁsa. In the *Kṣurikopaniṣad*, the soul is compared to the swan:

पाशं छित्त्वा यथा हंसो निर्विशङ्कः खमुत्क्रमेत् ।
छिन्नपाशस्तथा जीवः संसारं तरते सदा ॥22॥

“As the swan having cut the fetters, (and with a mind) free of doubt, ascends to the sky, so floats the soul in the world breaking (all worldly) bonds.”

Swan was believed to be the symbol of supreme soul. It is also said that great sages were residing in the Mānasa lake by taking the form of swan who came to meet Bhīṣma. (ततः सम्पातिनो हंसास्त्वरिता मानसौकसः- Mbh. 6.114.91a). In another verse, haṁsa is compared to the Paramātmān.

शुचिश्रवा हृषीकेशो घृताचिर्हंस उच्यते ।
- Mbh. 12.43. 7^a

Brahmā took the form of the swan and preached the sages. That discourse is known as Haṁsagītā. Paramahaṁsa is a person who has achieved the highest degree of knowledge.

पुरा किल महाबाहो धर्म परमकं प्रभो ।
यत्नेन हंसरूपेण ब्रह्मणेऽभ्यास्य माधव ॥3॥

- Bhāgavatamahapurāṇa ,17.11.3

“(Uddhava says), O Lord, Mādhava, of mighty arms long time back you assumed the form of a swan and taught Brahmā the supreme law.”

The *Bhāgavatamahāpurāṇa* has two philosophical references to the swan.

हंसः स्यात् सारमादत्ते यः श्रोता विविधात्कृतात् ।
दुग्धेनैक्यं गतात्तोयाद् यथा हंसोऽमलं पयः ॥

- BhāgP (Bhāgavatamāhātmya), 4.13

“As a swan separates immaculated milk from water that has become one (i.e. mix) with milk, (in a similar), the listener who takes the essence from a variety of learning (lit. whatever is learnt by hearing), is (therefore) called ‘a swan’.”

The capacity of the swan to separate milk from water and accepting only milk is completely imaginary or it is a sort of poetic convention (Kavisāṅketa). Though it is not found in reality, the notion has extremely impressed the Sanskrit poets and is seen reflected in literature.

नीरक्षीरविवेके हंसालस्यं त्वमेव तनुषे चेत् ।
विश्वस्मिन्नधुनान्यः कुलव्रतं पालयिष्यति कः ॥

- *Bhāminīvilāsa*, 12

“Oh Swan! if you even are disposed to be idle in separating milk from water, who else on earth will fulfill your family vow?”

D) Poetic Appreciation of swans

From the Purāṇic times the pictures of ‘haṁsa’ were depicted on the flags of warriors. (*Vāmanapurāṇa* 9.38) The attendant of Lord Kārtikeya of (haṁsa-mukha) ‘swan-faced’ (Mbh.10.7.19c). The Karṇaparva in the *Mahābhārata* has a story about a swan and a foolish crow (8.28.11-55). In this story the swans are said to be the residents of the Mānasa lake (8.28.20) and they are described as flying swiftly as the mind. (8.28.54). The crow gets defeated by the swiftly flying swans.

The swan was a favourite bird that was used in allegories and metaphors frequently in Sanskrit literature. A holy place namely 'Harṁsaprapatana Tīrtha' is said to be a sacred place at Prayag on the banks of Gaṅgā. (Mani V., 1980, p.307). Various Purāṇas depict the impressive and serene beauty of swans. In the *Kurmapurāṇa*, there is reference to the mountain named as 'Harṁsa'. The *Bhāgvatamahāpurāṇa* compares the sound of the conch of Śrīkrṣṇa to the calls of Kalaharṁsa birds (11.1.2).

We shall take a review of some of such representative examples:

पाण्डुरैः सलिलोत्पीडैः कीर्यमाणैः सहस्रधा ।
शारदाग्नैरिवाकीर्णं गगनं हंससम्लवैः ॥

- VR I. 43.22c

“With volumes of white foam that were being tossed about in numberless particles the sky looked as if overcast with autumnal clouds, crowded with (flocks of) flying swans.”

The voice of Rāma was compared to the cackling of a swan in rut (Harṁsamattasvara - VR II. 49. 13a) whereas the voice of Bharata whose voice was choked with tears and emotions was said to resemble to the cackling of a Kalaharṁsa (VR II. 82.10a).

सुप्तैकहंसं कुमुदैरुपेतं महाहृदस्थं सलिलं विभाति ।
घनैर्विमुक्तं निशि पूर्णचन्द्रं तारागणाकीर्णमिवान्तरिक्षम् ॥

- VR IV. 30. 48a

“Adorned with waterlilies, the water in the big pond with a solitary swan lying asleep on it, looks delightful like the sky completely bereft of clouds, nay, (illuminated by) the full moon and spangled with a host of stars at night.”

प्रकीर्णहंसाकुलमेखलानां प्रबुद्धपद्मोत्पलमालिनीनाम् ।
वाप्युत्तमानामधिकाऽद्य लक्ष्मीर्वराङ्गानामिव भूषितानाम् ॥

- VR IV. 30. 49a

“The loveliness of the best of tanks, with their broken girdle of swans scattered here and there and their wreaths of full-blown lotuses, and therefore looking like lovely women adorned with jewels, stands enhanced today.”

The lake 'Vaikhānasa (VR IV. 43. 33c) was said to be inhabited by beautiful swans shining brightly as the rising sun:

चन्द्रांशुकिरणाभाश्च हाराः कासांचिदुदगताः ।
हंसा इव बभुः सुप्ताः स्तनमध्येषु योषिताम् ॥

- VR V. 9. 48a

“The pearl necklaces of some women, which had come out, shone like the rays of the moon, appeared like swans lying asleep in the space between their breasts.” (This is what Hanūmān saw in the palace of Rāvaṇa in the course of his quest for Sītā)."

In the *Vikramorvaśīya*, the King says (4.34)-“O swan, restore my beloved to me, since you have stolen her gait.” He further says in a depressing mood, (4.30):

मेघश्यामा दिशो दृष्ट्वा मानसोत्पुकचेतसाम् ।
कूजितं राजहंसानां नेदं नूपुरशिञ्जितम् ॥

“This is verily not the jingling of anklets but the cackling sound of the swans, who seeing the quarters darkened by clouds, are anxious in their hearts to fly to the Mānasa lake.”

There is another excellent metaphor,

एषा मनो मे प्रसभं शरीरात्पितुर्मध्यममुत्पतन्ती ।
सुराङ्गना कर्षति खण्डिताग्रात्सूत्रं मृणालादिव राजहंसी ॥

- Vikramorvaśīya 1.20

“ This nymph of heaven, flying up through the middle space of her father, bears off forcibly my heart from the body, like a female swan (before soaring into the air) tears away a fibre from a lotus stalk, the end of which is already broken.”

The *Kumārasambhava* (1.34) mentions that the ‘royal swans gave their graceful gait to Pārvati’. The *Rāghavapāṇḍaviya* (1.17) compares ‘the success as spotless as the white swan’. We find the similar description in the *Vikramāṅkadevacarita* (5.9).

While describing the charming landscapes the Sanskrit poets inevitably mention the existence of swans in order to increase the beauty of nature. Kālidāsa, in his ‘*Rtusambhāra*’ says (3.1): “ autumn comes charming with the cries of infatuated swans serving as the tinkling of anklets “ or in 3.11 he says: “ the lakes all at once make the heart yearn, looking lovely with infatuated pair of swans.” Whereas in the ‘*Kumārasambhava*’ (10.33). A reference to a similar description in *Raghu* (13.55) has already been made.

It is said in the *Veṅṛisambhāra* (1st act) that ‘ the water was whitened by the swans.’ The *Sūtradhāra* (narrator) in the *Veṅṛisambhāra* says,

सत्पक्षा मधुरगिरः प्रसाधिताशा मदोद्धतारम्भाः ।
निपतन्ति घातैराष्ट्राः कालवशान्मेदिनीपृष्ठे ॥

- *Veṅṛisambhāra* 1.6

“ The swans having good wings and sweet notes, decorating the directions (as they fly), with their activities wild with joy, fly down (i.e. come down) to the surface of the earth.”

The beautiful gait of the swans was highly praised (*Raghuvamśa* 8.59; *Harṣacarita* 4th Uchhvāsa). The swan was depicted as the messenger in the poetry titled ‘*Haṁsadūta* or *Haṁsasandeśa*’ written by Venkaṭadeśika. The ‘*Kuṭṭanīmatākāvya*’ describes the ‘embrace’ (हंस-समाश्लेषण) named after the swan (Verse No. 580).

The other poet says in the *Anyokti*:

पुरा सरसि मानसे विकचसारसा लिखल-
त्परागसुरभीकृते पयसि यस्य यातं वयः ।
स पल्वलजले ऽ धुना मिलदनेकभेकाकुले
मरालकुलनायकः कथय रे कथं वर्तताम् ॥

- *Bhāminīvilāsa* - 2

“ Tell (me) how the best of the race of swans, who had passed his former days on the Mānasa lake in the water, made fragrant by the pollens falling from the rows of full blown lotuses, should now dwell in the water of a puddle full of frogs, gathered together?”

In the *Pratimānātaka* (1st part) , a reference is made to the female swan, with her garment of white Kāśa flowers (a species of a grass- *Saccharum Spontaneum*) roams about on the sandy bank.

In the classical dance tradition of Bharatanāṭyam there are hand gesture (*Mudrā*)

named as ‘Haṁsāśya and Haṁsapakṣa’ - (*Bharatnātyaśāstra* 9.7).

The ‘*Uttararāmacarita*’ (4th part) indicates that ‘the calls of haṁsas are sweet because they eat the pollens of lotus flowers.’

The *Bṛhatsamhitā* describes the rivers as if smiling beautifully in the form of the swans. (56.7).

An island in the eastern sea was named as ‘Haṁsadvīpa’. It is referred to at many places, for example in the *Kathāsaritsāgara*. A type of swan, which has black beak and feet were known as Dhārtarāṣāṭra (धार्तराष्ट्र). In the *Kādambārī* (Punḍarikavarṇana), swans are mentioned in many contexts. There were white swans kept in royal places, and they were called as Bhavanahaṁsa (भवनहंस). In the *Kādambārī* and in the *Naiṣadhīyacarit*, golden swans were referred to. They were believed to be heavenly. In the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, they were described as having golden body, their eyes were like pearls and beak was like a coral.

E) References to haṁsa in the *Mṛgapakṣīśāstra*

The author Haṁsadeva describes that there are seven types of Haṁsas or swans. But they seem to be only descriptive synonyms. Here I have given the meaning of some of the verses regarding the swans. There are groups of verses describing the types of the swans.

1) Haṁsa =

मनोजगतियुक्ताश्च गगने वेगशालिनः ।
दीर्घग्रीवासमायुक्ताः सततं हृष्टमानसाः ॥
रक्तपादतलाः प्राया रक्तचञ्चूपटद्वयाः ।—
- Śreṇī 22.29,30

“(Haṁsas) are swift in speed and very fast when they fly in sky. (They have) long neck and are always happy, (they have) red soles and mainly red beak.”

2) Cakrāṅga = “Cakrāṅga birds are described as having a small body and small beak, red wings, back, plumage and legs. (Śreṇī 22.32,33).”

3) Mānasavāsin = These haṁsas stay in the Mānasa lake and they have white body like pearls and red beak. (Śreṇī 22.38)

4) Rājahaṁsa = These haṁsas have white wings and their beak and legs are red. They like to reside in cold climate. (Śreṇī 22.43,44).

5) Mallikākṣa = This types of haṁsas have greyish eyes, black and white body and red beak and legs. (Śreṇī 22.48,49) There are various spots on their body.

6) Kādamba = These birds have glittering white and bluish body. (Śreṇī 22.52)

7) Kalahaṁsa = Kalahaṁsas have slightly bluish body, red beak and white organs. (Śreṇī 22.57).

Whether these types suggest particular species or not is a subject for the study.

F) References to haṁsa related to augury

Generally the swan was believed to be an auspicious bird since it is the carrier of Goddess Sarasvatī and God Brahmā. The *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa*, Gaṇapati-Khaṇḍa (16.27), says that if the Rājahaṁsa is seen on the left side it is auspicious.

The *Bṛhatsamhitā* opines that one should take one's (puṣyasnāna) auspicious bath where the Kalahaṁsas give out melodious calls (48.10). The swan-shaped meteor

is said to be suggesting good omen. (33.10) It is indicated that the man who walks like a swan becomes a King (68.115) umbrella which is covered by the feathers of a swan is auspicious. (74.1). Deities reside in the lake where the birds like haṁsa and Kāraṇḍava give out calls (56.5).

The *Vasantarājaśākuna* describes four types of haṁsa as - Rājahaṁsa, Mallika, Dhārtarāṣṭra and Kādambas in its commentry on verse no. 8.4.. This verse further says that if the swans are seen in all directions, it suggests good omen (8.4). The series of calls of swans has different omens: the first call tells that one will confront a thief; the second suggests that one will get wealth; the third indicates some fear; the fourth suggests occurrence of war and the fifth tells that one will be favoured by the King. (8.5).

4) Mythological references to Haṁsa

There is a story describing the process of creation in the *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa*. Prajāpati kāśyapa was the son of Marīci. He married to the eight daughters of Dakṣa. Amongst these wives Dhṛtarāṣṭrī gave birth to swans, geese and ruddy geese. (VR 3.13.19). Swan is always looked upon as one having heavenly qualities. It is always associated with deities, where it is supposed to be the carrier of Brahmā and Sarasvatī (daughter of Brahma) got this carrier as a gift from her father.

There are other references too. We will consider a few of these². In the *Kūrmapurāṇa* (Khaṇḍa 1, 4-Prakṛtasargavarṇana), a swan is said to be the symbol of Sanātana (infinity). In the *Kūrmapurāṇa* (12.99), a goddess has the name as 'haṁsākhyā' in the *Devīmāhātmya*. *Agnipurāṇa*, (18.50), a swan is said to be the carrier of Sāvitrī.

The *Agnipurāṇa* (74, Devapūjapaddhati) mention a list of 10 types of animal carriers where the swan is one of them. In the *Raghuvarṇsa* (V.75), Kālidāsa says that the elephant of Gods, namely Supratika gets up from his sleep after hearing the calls of the royal swans.

The *Kādambarī* describes the king Śūdraka, comparing him with Brahmā: "कमलयोनिरिव विमानीकृतराजहंसमण्डलः ।" - "Kavivamśavarṇanam." (Bānabhaṭṭa/ Krishnamohan Śāstri, 1961, P.11).

While describing the Saptamātrkā lakṣaṇam, the text called Kāśyapaśilpa says,

दक्षिणाभयशूलं च वरदं चाक्षमालिकाम् ।

शतपद्मासनानीता (सीना) हंसवाहनकौतुका ॥ 46.72

Here Brahmānī is said to have a swan as her vehicle.

5) Ornithological references to haṁsa

The Bar-headed Geese are supposedly the revered and much admired swans of the Mānasa lake. These geese are also called as Rājahaṁsa. They breed in Ladakh. These are overall a pale grey geese with white head, face and throat. The two dark bands on the back of the head are conspicuous. Their vibrant call 'Aang aang' forever remains memorable.

White Mute Swans are said to be seen in the extremely cold areas in Arunachal Pradesh, but no definite, new records are available. Perhaps the occurrences were sighted during the phase of migration. This information is obtained from a personal communication with Mr. Vijay Swami of Itanagar- Arunachal Pradesh.

Notes

1 मानससंश्रयाः ।

सितपक्षाश्च चक्राङ्गा विशेषास्तत्र केचन ॥227॥

राजहंसास्तु ते चञ्चुपादैः स्युर्लोहितैश्च ये ।

मलिनैर्मल्लिकाक्षास्ते कादम्बाः कलहंसकाः ॥228॥

- PNM, Pariccheda 3

Harṁsa or swans are said to reside in the Mānasa lake.

हंसास्तु श्वेतगरुतश्चक्राङ्गा मानसौकसः ॥23॥

राजहंसास्तु त चञ्चुचरणैर्लोहितैः सिताः ।

मलिनैर्मल्लिकाक्षास्ते धार्तराष्ट्राः सितेतरैः ॥24॥

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हंसः स्यात् मानसौकसि ॥12॥

- *Medinī kośa*

2 तत्र ह वा एनं देवार्षिर्हंसयानेन पितरं भगवन्तं

हिरण्यगर्भमुपलभमानः — ॥9॥

- BhāgP, Adhyaya 1, Skandha 5

यमाहुः पुरुषं हंसं प्रधानात्परतः स्थितम् ।

हिरण्यगर्भं कपिलं छन्दोमूर्तिं सनातनम् ॥39॥

- *Kūrmapurāṇa*, Khaṇḍa 1, 4-Prakṛtasargavarṇana

गौरी चर्तुमुखी ब्राह्मी अक्षमालाम्बुगन्विता ।

कुण्डाक्षपत्रिणी वामे हंसगा शाङ्करी स्थिता ॥

- AgniP. 50.18

ब्रह्मन्नागच्छ हंसस्थं स्रुक्स्रुवव्यग्रहस्तक ॥

- AgniP. 56.29

“Brahmā is said to be mounted on the swan.”

हंसपद्मासनां रक्तां चतुर्वक्त्रां चतुर्भुजां ।

अङ्गाक्षमालिनीं दक्षे वामे दण्डकमण्डलुम् ॥

- AgniP. 72.27

Here Brāhmī Sandhyā is said to be sitted on the swan.

त्रिशूलिनं वृषे चेशं कूर्मेऽनन्तं तु चक्रिणम् ।

ब्रह्माणं हंसगं ध्यायेच्चतुर्वक्त्रं चतुर्भुजम् ॥

- AgniP. 96.32

Here also Brahmā is said sitting on the swan.

Various vehicles of different gods are listed in the *Agnipurāṇa*. For example:

पैतामहस्तथा हंसो वृषभः शंकरस्य च ।

दुर्गा सिंहश्च पान्तु त्वां यमस्य महिषस्तथा ॥

- AgniP. 219.47

In this Śloka, the vehicle of Brahmā is said to be the swan.

मदपटुनिनदद्विर्बोधितो राजहंसैः

सुरगजं इव गाङ्गं सैकतं सुप्रतीकः ॥75॥

- *Raghuvarṁśa* V. 75

The *Mayamata* says:

ऋषयः परिवारास्तु हंसारूढः कुशध्वजः ।

आसीनो वा स्थितो ब्रह्मा पद्मासनमुदाहृतम् ॥7॥

रक्तपद्मासनासीना हंसवाहनकेतुका ।--- ॥217॥

- Adhyāya 36

तां हंसमालाः शरदीव गङ्गां महौषधिं नक्तमिवात्मभासः ।

(स्थिरोपदेशामुपदेशकाले प्रपेदिरे प्राक्तनजन्मविद्याः ॥)

- KumāraS., 1.30



Cātaka

1) Introduction

Cātaka is believed to be an auspicious bird in India. There are proverbs in which 'waiting for a long time or longing for somebody' is compared to the cātaka bird waiting for raindrops. It is a popular belief that the cātaka bird drinks the water given by rains. There are very rare descriptions of cātaka bird in the Sanskrit literature. The similies regarding this bird are numerous and this bird is mainly described in a metaphorical or figurative manner.

2) Synonyms of Cātaka

स्तोकः स्याच्चातके स्वल्पे — — ॥

- *Dharaṇīkośa*, 'ka'-group 20

The word stoka is used in the sense of cātaka as well as 'a little'.

चातको बप्पीहः स्तोकः स्यान्नभो ऽम्बुपः ॥

- PNM ; III. 230

घनारावः स्तोककश्च पप्पीहो जलरञ्जकः । —

- *Kośa* ; *Sīrhādīvarga* - 77

The word ghanārāva can be explained as 'one who cries for clouds'.

The word 'Pappiha' may be a re-sanskritization of the word 'Bappiha'. The *Deśināmamāla* says 'बप्पीहो चातकः।' According to MW, 'Papi' means 'drinking'. The word comes from root verb V I 'pa' means to drink up. The meaning of the word Jalarāñjaka is not clear.

— दिवौकाश्चातके सुरे ॥

धाराटश्चातके चाश्वे — ॥

- *Anekārthatilaka*, 3.138, 147, 273

The word divaukas (is used in the sense of) cātaka and a god because both of them are supposed to be dwelling in the sky or heaven. cātaka is thus a divine bird.

Accoring to MW dhārāṭa is one who is fond of rain drops (a cloud filled with drops) or one roams in the showers

अथ शारङ्गः स्तोककश्चातकः समाः ॥

- AK 2.5.17

“Śāraṅga means having a dappled body or variegated colour or being spotted.”

चातकः स्तोकको बप्पीहः शारङ्गो नभो ऽम्बुपः ॥

- *AbhiC*, 4. 395

चतते याचते मेघाम्भश्चातकः ॥1॥

“One who prays for rainwater is cātaka.”

स्तोकं कायति काश्यते याचते वा स्तोककः, स्तोकं कमस्येति वा ॥२॥

“Stokaka means one who begs for a little (water), or one who has a little happiness.”

नभोऽम्बुपानाद् वाः पानमीहते बप्पीहः पृषोदरादित्वात् ॥3॥

(The bird is called bappīha), because of its drinking of the water from the sky; one who desires the drinking of (rain-) water is bappīha, as it belongs to a group of words beginning with Pr̥sodara.

सरति सारङ्ग सह आरङ्गति वा, यूथचारित्वात् ॥4॥

“Sāraṅga (is so called because it) moves or (because it) moves together (with others), on account of his moving in a flock.”

नभस्यम्बु पिबति नभोऽम्बुपः ॥5॥

“One who drinks the water from the sky.”¹

3) References to Cātaka in Sanskrit literature

A) Oldest references to Cātaka

Though we do not find the reference to the cātaka in the Vedas, there are references to it in the epics.

B) Metaphorical or figurative references to Cātaka

There is a strong belief that the cātaka bird drinks the water from the clouds and that it does not touch water on the ground. There is no logical reason behind this particular belief. Perhaps a particular posture of cātaka bird and its occurrence before the rainy season may have given rise to this belief. This belief was very much popular in the masses and also among Sanskrit poets. (Bird observers have watched the bird drinking water in puddles).

The references to cātaka and its so-called habit of drinking the rain water occur very frequently. As a matter of fact it is one of the poetic conventions that are peculiar to Sanskrit literature in particular. Some references are mentioned here.

एवमादि नरश्रेष्ठो विललाप नृपात्मजः ।
विहङ्ग इव सारङ्गः सलिलं त्रिदशेश्वरात् ॥
- VR IV . 30. 13a

“ In this and (many) other ways did the son of a monarch (i.e.) Śrī Rāma the best among men, wail after the manner of cātaka bird seeking water from the King of Gods (i.e. Indra).”

पापात्मायं दशग्रीवो वध्यतां पापनिश्चयः ।
काङ्क्षितं चातकस्येव धर्मान्ते मेघदर्शनम् ॥
- VR IV . 100. 47a

“ Let this ten-headed (monster), of sinful mind and sinful resolve be killed. His death is sought by me as the sight of a cloud by a cātaka bird at the end of summer.”

अखिलोपेक्षया यस्तु कृष्णशास्त्रश्रुतौ व्रती ।
स चातको यथाऽम्बोदमुक्ते पाथसि चातकः ॥
- BhāgP ; 4.12 (Bhāgavatamāhātmya)

“The (devotee) who with indifference to everything else takes a vow (to be intent) upon listening to the Science (in the form of the praise of) Lord Kṛṣṇa (alone) like the cātaka who (is intent) upon the water delivered by clouds only; hence he (is called) cātaka.”

तृष्णकुलैश्चातकपक्षिणां कुलैः प्रयाचितास्तोयभरावलम्बिनः ।
प्रयान्ति मन्दं बहुधारवर्षिणो बलाहकाः श्रोत्रमनोहरस्वनाः ॥
- R̥tuS ; 2.3

“Being asked (water) by the flocks of thirsty cātaka birds, and hanging (low) with (their) watery burden, clouds, (about) to pour down in large streams, are slowly moving on, making a noise pleasant to the ears.”

मन्दं मन्दं नुदति पवनश्चानुकूलो यथा त्वं
वामश्चायं नदति मधुरं चातकस्ते सगन्धः । ---

-MeghaD, (Purvamegha), 10

“Since a favourable breeze very gently impels you on, and this cātaka here, full of hilarity is sweetly singing on your left, “

अम्भोबिन्दुग्रहणचतुरांश्चातकान्वीक्षमाणाः — ॥

- MeghaD, (Purvamegha), 22

“(The siddhas looking) at the cātaka skilled in catching the drops of rain-water, -”

—जननीं दधारासौ स्वलीलया धनमुक्तं तोयबिन्दुं चञ्च्रेव चातकः ।

- Gaṇeśapurāṇa 88.19b

“He supported (his) mother, with his (gentle) ease, like the cātaka bird catches with his beak a drop of rain delivered by a cloud.”

चातका न पिबन्ति महीतोयम् । -

- *Kulārnavatantra* ; 1.84.6

“The cātaka birds do not drink the water on the ground.”

अतः खलु दिव्यरसाभिलाषिणा चातकव्रतं गृहीतम् ।

- *Vikramorvaśīya* ; 2nd Act

“That is why, covetous of divine love, you undertook the vow of cātaka (that longs for water from heaven.)”

ग्रीष्मे भीष्मतरैः करैर्दिनकृता दग्धोऽपि यश्चातक -

-स्त्वां ध्यायन् धनवासरान् कथमपि द्राघीयसो नीतवान् ।

दैवाल्लोचनगोचरेण भवता तस्मिन्निदानीं यदि

स्वीचक्रे करकानिपातनकृपा तत्कं प्रति ब्रूमहे ॥

- *Bhāminīvilāsa*; 33

“(O cloud!) the cātaka bird, though scorched by the terribly hot rays of the sun in summer, passed the long days with great difficulty calling you to mind, and now when happily you are in the range of his sight, if you are pleased to favour him with a shower of rain whom are we to blame?”

सन्त्येवास्मिञ्जगति बहवः पक्षिणो रम्यरूपा -

स्तेषां मध्ये मम तु महती वासना चातकेषु।

यैरध्यक्षैरथ निजसखं नीरदं स्मारयद्भि-

श्चित्त्तारूढं भवति किमपि ब्रह्म कृष्णाभिधानम् ॥

- *Śāntavilāsa*; 11

“There are many beautiful birds in this world; but of them all I am greatly attached to the cātaka; for it is through his devotion, that, by being reminded of the cloud, his friend, the indescribable Brahman which goes by the name of Kṛṣṇa finds its way into my mind.”

त्वमेव चातकाधार इति केषां न गोचरः ।

किमम्भोदवरास्माकं कार्पण्योक्तिं प्रतीक्षसे ॥

- *Nitiśataka*; 80 Bharṭhari

“ (O cloud) you are the only support for the Cātaka bird, who is not aware of that !
Then why best cloud you except our pitiful begging?”

रे रे चातक! सावधानमनसा मित्र ! क्षणं श्रूयतां
अम्भोदा बहवो हि सन्ति गगने सर्वेऽपि नैतादृशाः ।
केचिद् वृष्टिभिरार्द्रयन्ति वसुधां गर्जन्ति केचिद् वृथा
यं यं पश्यसि तस्य तस्य पुरतो मा ब्रूहि दीनं वचः ॥

- *Nitiśataka*; 82 Bharṭhari

“ O friend Cātaka, please carefully listen to me for a moment, there are lots of clouds in the sky but they are not similar. Some wet the earth by showers, some roar unnecessarily. (so) do not beg pitifully in front of every (cloud) that you see.”

सोऽहं तृष्णातुरैर्वृष्टिं विद्युत्वानिव चातकैः ।
अरिविप्रकृतैर्देवैः प्रसूतिं प्रति याचितः ॥

- KumS; 6.27

“(Mahādeva says) “ As a thirsty cātaka begs the cloud for drops of water, like that the gods who are troubled by the demons want a son born of me.”

तदन्यतस्तावदनन्यकार्यो गुर्वर्थमाहर्तुमहं यतिष्ये ।
स्वस्त्यस्तु ते निर्गलिताम्बुगर्भं शरद्धनं नार्दति चातकोऽपि ॥

- Raghu 5.17

“Then I, having no other work (expect this one) shall try to get from other (sources), the money for (the fees to be paid to) the teacher; even the cātaka the rain-bird craves not rain from emptied clouds.”

कच्चित्सौम्य व्यवसितमिदं बन्धुकृत्यं त्वया मे
प्रत्यादेशात् खलु भवतो धीरतां कल्पयामि ।
निःशब्दोऽपि प्रदिशसि जलं याचितश्चातकेभ्यः
प्रत्युक्तं हि प्रणयिषु सतामीप्सितार्थक्रियैव ॥

- MeghaD (Uttaramegha), 53

“Have you undertaken, O you amiable one, this business of me your friend? I don't think this solemn silence of yours is due to a rejection or repudiation (of the proposal). Being requested you give water to the cātaka birds without making any sound. The performance of desired ends is itself a reply of the noble to the suitors.”

Besides these references, there are many references to the cātaka bird in texts like (Jaina) *Padmapurāṇa*, *Triṣaṣṭiśalākāpuruṣacarita*, *Śivānaṇḍalaharistotra*, *Bhallāṭaśataka*, *Isanaśivagurudevapaddhati*, *kulārṇavatāntra*, *Vidagdhamukhamaṇḍana*, *Suratotsava*, *Saduktikaṃāmṛta*, *Mallināthacarita*, *Bhojaprabandha*, *Kuvalayānandakārika*, *Śivalilārṇava*, *Rasagaṅgadhāra* and *Pavanadūta*.

There are a number of subhāṣitas in Sanskrit literature in the form of Anyoktis or moral sayings. In this typical form of poem, the verse is addressed to a bird or an animal or any other non-human entity but the message in the verse is meant for the human being.

In the *Subhāṣitaratnabhāṇḍāgāra*, there are around twenty verses describing and praising cātaka's habit of accepting only the rain-water. Here are a few examples.

एक एव खगो मानी वने वसति चातकः ।
पिपासिते वा म्रियते याचते वा पुरंदरम् ॥148॥

- SurBh 5-148

“There is only one bird, full of pride lives in a forest, it, being thirsty, dies or begs (water) only to Purandara (Indra).”

अवश्यकारणैः प्राणान्धारयत्येव चातकः ।

प्रार्थनाभङ्गभीतोऽपि शक्रादपि न याचते ॥151॥

- SurBh 5.151

“Due to necessary reasons, cātaka holds his life because he does not even begs (for water) to Śakra (Lord Indra) for the fear of his request being turned down.”

In the text named ‘*Kāvyaśaṅgraha*’ there are sixteen verses on the cātaka. They are divided in two parts- ‘*Purva-Cātakaṣṭaka*’ and ‘*Uttaracātakaṣṭaka*’. These references express the (Kavisanketa) poetic convention regarding cātaka’s desire to drink the only rainwater.

C) References to Cātaka in the *Mṛgapakṣiśāstra*

The *Mṛ gapakṣiśāstra* of Hamsadeva does not describe the cātaka bird in scientific details. The author believes in the ancient concept that the cātaka bird drinks only the rainwater (24.155). He has described the cātaka and stokaka birds separately. The cātakas are black, red or red-black (24.254) and the stokakas are of various colours, and they have small body, red wings and black organs.

D) Augury and superstitions regarding Cātaka

— तोयहर्ता च चातकः ॥

- MārP.15.31

“ One who steals water becomes the cātaka (in his next birth).”

A similar belief is reflected in the *Garuḍapurāṇa* (34.18) and *Manusmṛti* (12.67). The *Bṛhatsaṁhitā* says (86.27) that in the month of Śrāvaṇa, one should not think of good or bad omens in case of the cātaka birds.

4) Ornithological information to Cātaka

Cātaka is called as pied crested cuckoo. It is a crested black and white, beautiful bird. It has a parastic behaviour. It is chiefly arboreal but occassionally descends to ground and hops about in search of food, grass hoppers, berries or hairy catterpillars. It is observed that it is parastic chiefly on babblers of the Turdoidea group.

As mentioned ‘The Book of Indian birds (Ali Salim,1996, p.176) cātaka is a rains visitor to us (excluding the part of South India and Srilanka).

Notes

1 घनारवश्च वापीहः सारङ्गो मेघजीवनः ।

वर्षप्रियस्त्रिशंखः स्यात्स्तोको बभ्रुर्हरीतकः ॥

- *Kalpadrukośa*; 11.146

चातकः - चतते याचते जलमम्बुदमिति । — स्वनामख्यातपक्षी । तत् पर्यायः स्तोककः सारङ्गः

मेघजीवनः इति राजनिघण्टुः ॥ तोककः । इत्यमरः २/५/१७ शारङ्गः ६ इति भरतः

- Ś K, Page 440

चातकस्त्वम्बुजोऽनम्बु : पौरेन्द्रः स्तोककः खगः ॥

- VaijK 3.32

Some Miscellaneous Birds

Introduction

Besides the birds described so far there are some other birds mentioned in the Sanskrit literature. Here I have discussed about some birds as the information about these birds is scanty, comparing that of the birds discussed so far. We find frequent mention of these birds without further details. These birds are important from mythological or philosophical point of view. Many of them are referred to in Sanskrit literature right from the Vedic period till date.

Below is given the information about some of these birds :

- Laṭūṣaka (Shrike) - लटूषक
- Cāṣa (Roller) - चाष
- Khañjana (Wagtail) - खञ्जन
- Tittira (Partridge) - तित्तिर
- Kapiñjala (Partridge) - कपिञ्जल
- Cakora (Partridge) - चकोर
- Vārdhrinasa (Hornbill) - वार्ध्रीनस
- Ṭiṭṭibha (Lapwing) - टिट्टिभ
- Śārikā (Myna) - शारिका
- Kurara (Osprey) - कुरर
- Balāka (Crane / Heron) - बलाक

According to MW, 'tittira', kapiñjala and cakora are species of a partridge; 'tittira' means a partridge, kapiñjala means the Francoline Partridge and cakora means the Greek Partridge. In folklore, there are stories about birds that are seen reflected in the ancient fables. For example, in the *Hitopadeśa* there is a story of a Lapwing (ṭiṭṭibha or koyaṣṭi) who vowed to drink and empty the ocean to find its eggs which were misplaced by the waves. The Hill Myna was and is still a popular cage bird known for the astonishing ability of its imitating the human voice. This characteristic is indicated by its Sanskrit name 'Puruṣavākśārī'. The quarrelsome nature of a common Mynas is indicated by the word 'Kalahapriyā' - one who is fond of quarrel!

The words like 'tittira' or 'ṭiṭṭibha' are onomatopoeic reflecting the calls of these birds. An attempt is made here to show various characteristics of the birds.

Laṭūṣaka

There are several references to birds in the Sanskrit literature. Many birds can be traced to 2500 BC. It is often difficult to exactly identify the particular species that is mentioned in the ancient literature, if and when proper description of the bird is not available. In such cases, one may allot the ancient name to a particular present day bird, based on its name, if the name is descriptive of a peculiar habit of the bird. In other cases, one has to go back from the present name of the bird, analyzing step by step the derivation of the present name from the earlier versions, strictly in accordance with the rules of grammar, till one arrives at the root verb in the Sanskrit language.

This is a tedious process. These processes may not always be possible and a particular name may remain ambiguous and one has no option but to let it remain so. Rarely, the task is easy, when the ancient name is retained till the present day.

Some of the synonyms of *Laṭūṣaka*, found in Marathi, are indicative of its characteristics- for example the name *Khāṭik* the butcher, or '*Naklyā Khāṭik*' the butcher who performs mimicry points to the behaviour of the shrike, like that of a butcher. Another name, which has a special reference to one of the popular ancient Indian epics, is '*Gāndhārī*'. The epic is the *Mahābhārata*, *Gāndhārī* is the name of the blind-folded Kaurava Queen. She chose to wear a mask over her eyes, probably to share the same life as her blind husband *Dr̥tārāṣṭra*. The Southern Grey Shrike (*Lanius meridionalis*) is called *Gāndhārī* in Marathi language, a befitting name to this masked pied bird. The oldest reference to the Shrike in Sanskrit literature is in the *Mahābhārata* (12.173.29) where it is mentioned as '*Laṭūṣaka*'.

It is interesting to mention here that the Sanskrit name for a club or a staff with a skull at the top is '*Khaṭvāṅga*'. '*Laṭvā*' which is the Sanskrit name for the shrike, probably originated from '*Khaṭvāṅga*'. The Sanskrit name for the butcher is '*Khaṭṭika*', probably a sanskritized form of the Marathi name '*Khāṭik*' for the butcher bird, from its habit of impaling and wedging prey on thorns or in the forks. The name '*Laṭvā*' is mentioned in ancient Sanskrit lexicons, like '*Kalpadrakośa*' (verse 167) and '*Koṣakalpataru*' (verse no. 94 *Siṃhādivarga*). In these lexicons the shrikes are grouped with Flycatchers and Bulbuls.

The shrikes are well known mimics. The Long-tailed Shrike (*Lanius schach*), Bay-backed Shrike (*L. vittatus*) and Southern Grey Shrike (*L. meridionalis*) which are commonly found in Maharashtra, are all mimics of bird calls. The Sanskrit name for the shrikes '*Laṭvā*' (a small bird) or '*Laṭūṣaka*' are possibly derived from the root verb '*laṭ*' or '*raṭ*', which means 'to talk like a child, to prattle or to cry'. Shrikes are known for their harsh chuckles and mimicry. '*Laṭvāka*' has probably two constituents namely '*raṭ*' - to shout or to yell and '*vāc*' - to speak. This explanation may not be in accordance with classical Sanskrit grammar, but such words are accepted as sanskritized versions. According to another derivation of '*Laṭūṣaka*' is formed from the word '*laṭ*' meaning to yell and '*uṣas*' meaning morning and evening light. Thus the bird that is vocal and hunts from daybreak till late evening is the '*Laṭūṣaka*' or the shrike. (Dave K.N., reprint 2005, p. 57).

There are numerous references to the shrike in the ancient Indian medicine i.e. *Āyurveda*, in connection with preparation of drugs ('*Carakasamhitā*', *Sūtrasthāna* 27.49), ('*Suśrutasamhitā*' *Sūtrasthāna* 46.67). The minute observation of ancient Indians is to be appreciated here, since they have classified shrikes in the class of pecking birds ('*Pratuda*'). The Sanskrit texts describe the '*Pratuda*' class as birds that hit, beat or pierce the prey with their beaks prior to eating! Modern ornithology has also confirmed this habit of shrikes. Shrikes are also mentioned in a medieval text '*Vasantarājaśākuna*' (8.49) which is devoted to augury. Here the shrike is called '*Ladvā*'. The text mentions a belief that if the shrike is seen or heard in front of a person, the omen grants him his wish.

Cāṣa

1) Oldest reference to cāṣa

साकं यक्ष्म प्र पत चाषेण किकिदीविना ।
साकं वातस्य भ्राज्या साकं नश्य निहाकया ॥
- RV10.97.13; V S 12.87

“Fly, Spirit of Disease, begone, with the blue jay and Kingfisher.
Fly, with the winds impetuous speed, vanish together with the storm.”²³

अग्नीषोमाभ्यां चाषान् — — ।
- VS 24.23, MS 2.14,4

“Let the Cāṣa birds be offered for the Agni and Soma.”

चाषान् पित्तेन — — ।
- VS 25.7

“Let the Cāṣa deities be satisfied by the offering of the Pitta.”

2) Synonyms to cāṣa

चाषः किकीदिविः । — —
- AK 2.5.16

“Cāṣa and Kikīdivi are the two names for Nīlakaṇṭha bird.”

(Kikīdivi, Kikidivi, Kikidiva, Kikīdivī, Kikīdiva, Kiki, Diva are the other variations).

चाषे किकीदिविः ।
- AbhC. 4.395

The word Cāṣa is explained in the *Ramaśramī* commentary on AK in the following manner: “Cāṣa (is called so, far) it is eaten by śyena. The word is derived from the root V cas ‘to eat’. The word kikidivi appears to have been derived from the root V div ‘to gamble’ (?). The explanation or the so called etymology given here is not convincing; however, is the word might have same connection with the sound ‘kiki’ that the bird makes.¹

किकिदीविः स्वर्णचूडश्चाषो राजविहङ्गमः ।
मणिकण्ठश्चित्रवाजो विशोकः पूर्णकूटकः ।
- VaijK. 29

Svarṇacūḍa (स्वर्णचूड) = One having golden crest.

Rājavihaṅgama (राजविहङ्गम) = ‘Shining’, i.e. ‘bright coloured’ i.e. ‘a blue jay’.

Maṇikaṇṭha (मणिकण्ठ) = a blue jay.

Citravāja (चित्रवाज) = one who is decorated with variegated feathers.

Viśoka (विशोक) = one who removes sorrow. (i.e. one whose sight is auspicious.)

Pūrṇakūṭaka (पूर्णकूटक) = The meaning of this word is not clear. Probably it means a bird with ‘a full head’, ‘Kūṭa’ means head, summit, the bone of the forehead with its projections or prominences etc. The bird-Blue Jay is described as one having a rather biggish head. Thus the synonym ‘Pūrṇakūṭaka’ probably describes the physical

appearance of the Cāṣa bird.

The KaṭK (11.152, 153) gives the following words:

Nandivardhana (नन्दिवर्धन) = one who is promoting happiness.

Svastika (स्वस्तिक) = one who is auspicious, holy.

Aparājita (अपराजित) = one who is not defeat.

Mahāyogin (महायोगिन) = great yogi

Nilāṅga (नीलाङ्ग) = one who is blue.

Punyadarśana (पुण्यदर्शनः) = one whose sighting is holy.

दिवी: किकी राजपक्षी किकिदिवि: किकीदिवि:।

चाषश्चासश्चाथ भासो भाषो भासन्त इत्यपि ॥

- KośK; Simhādivarga 85

Divi (दिवि) = 'heaven-dwelling'. (?)

Kikī (किकी) = one who eats by tearing into pieces or one who gives out calls 'Kiki' - an onomatopoeic word.

Rājapakṣi (राजपक्षी) = A shining bird.

Kikidivi (किकिदिवि) = explained earlier.

Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* (4.2.45), there is a reference to cāṣa or nīlakaṅṭha bird. On the basis of this reference Agnihotri (Agnihotri, 1963, p.307) thinks that the word 'kiki' means the cocoa tree. The Blue Jay nests in a natural tree hollow or barbet or woodpecker hole. Thus the bird may reside in a Nārīka or the cocoa tree which has given it the name 'Kikīdivi'. 'Divi' perhaps means a heaven-dwelling one referring to the nest of this bird on the heighted trees. But this explanation is farfetched, for the habitat where these birds nest have different geographical distribution, where it is exceptional to find its nests in palm-like trees.

3) References to cāṣa in Sanskrit poetry

In the *Mahābhārata* (9.44.71), cāṣavakra was said to be an attendant of Lord Skanda.

—चाषपक्षत्विषि तमसि — ।

- H C, Uṣhāvāsa I

“ In the darkness that is as (bluish) black as the colour of the wings of the Indian roller.”

Cāṣa is believed to be associated with Viṣṇu. In Andhra pradesh, on the 'Dasahara' day, the bird (Pala Pittai-in Telugu) is worshipped for its being auspicious. I have not come across any evidence contributing this cultural tradition in Sanskrit literature. This statement is based in a personal communication with Prof. P.G. Lalye.

4) References showing augury regarding cāṣa

गृहाद्गम्य यदा चाषो व्याहरन्पुरतः स्थितः ।

नृपावमानं वदति वामः कलहं भोजने ॥

- AgniP. 231.21

“If the blue jay comes out of the house and makes the sound remaining in front, it indicates humiliation for the king and (making sound) on the left (indicates) quarrel and gaining food.”

The text ‘*Vasantarājaśākuna*’ contains a chapter (chapter No. 9) describing various auguries caused by the sight of the cāṣa bird. The cāṣa bird is said to give bliss (9.1)

5) References to cāṣa in Mṛgapakṣisāstra

The author Hamsadeva describes two types of cāṣa birds:

नितरां नीलवर्णागास्ते चाषाः संप्रकीर्तिताः ॥

- 31.531

“Cāṣa birds are known as completely blue in colour. “

They give out calls like ‘kren, kren’ (31.533)

‘Kikīdivi’ birds are:

मस्तके पक्षतिप्रांते वक्षस्यापि विशेषतः ।

किंचिच्छ्वेतास्तथान्यत्र नीलवर्णविभूषिताः ॥

- 31.531

“They are slightly white on (their) head, specially on breast and are adorned with blue body.”

6) Ornithological Information of cāṣa

In India, European Roller, Roller or Blue Jay and Broadbilled Roller are seen. The European Roller is a brightly coloured blue and brownish bird with large head and stout bill. The Roller or Blue Jay is a strikingly blue bird, with the big head, the heavy black bill, the rufous-brown breast, pale blue abdomen and under tail.

The Broad-billed Roller is dark greenish brown and purple blue black roller with backish head and large the pale blue round patch on wing conspicuous in flight.

Khañjana

1) Introduction

A bird Khañjana was used in describing the beauty of ladies. The BrahmaVP.(4.197, *Śrīkr̥ṣṇajanmakhaṇḍa*), says: “(Rādhikā-spiritual consort of Śrīkr̥ṣṇa) is said to be having a sweet voice like that of a Khañjana bird.” (According to MW ‘gañj’ cl.I P means to give out a particular sound. In case of a bird Khañjana it may be a sweet chirping). The *Rāghavapāṇḍaviya* (2.14) says that a Khañjana bird could not surpass the beauty of the lovely eyes of Sītā or Draupadī.

A bird ‘khañjarīṭa’ is a black white coloured bird. The root in ‘खञ्जनक is V ‘Khañj’ ‘to limp’. It is a kind of Vātaroga (a disease caused by imbalance of Vata). Khañja suggests of ‘Gatvaikalya’- the defect. It is not clearly understood why this bird is used in the simile describing the graceful walking of beautiful women.

2) Synonyms of khañjana

The *Amarakośa* (2.5.15), *Kośakalpataru* (4640) and the *Abhidhānacintāmañi* (4.394) give the word ‘Khañjarīṭa’-meaning a wagtail. The *Kalpadrukośa* (11.150) gives ‘Kaṇāṭina’ (कणाटीन) and ‘Kaṇāṭira’ (कणाटीर) which mean ‘a wagtail’. This particular word cannot be explained. But there is a word ‘Karnēṭirā’ (कर्णेटिरा) which means ‘whispering into the ear’. That may refer to the ‘pink’ or ‘pink pink’ calls of a Forest wagtail.

Another word is 'Triśaṅkuka' (त्रिशङ्कुक) which denotes the posture in which King 'Triśaṅku' stood in the heaven, on his being hurled down head-foremost by the Gods and was arrested in his course and remained suspended in the sky. The bird-wagtail has a peculiar habit to "run about in short spurts with brisk mincing steps, picking up tiny insects, occasionally springing into the air to capture a fleeing midge. Flies in undulating curves-a few quick wing flaps followed by a pause - - -". (Ali Salim, 1996, p.292). Similar observation in ancient times might have been the cause behind the synonym 'Triśaṅkukaḥ'.

Another synonym in the *Kalpद्रुकोśa* is 'Śikhādrśya' (शिखादृश्य). It is probably a wrong formation of a compound; in the sense of 'adrśyasikha' - the one whose crest is not seen. The yellow headed wagtail is said to have a crown in winter and not in the other season. This might have given the name 'Śikhādrśya' where it is indicated that the crest of the bird has disappeared.

The *Vaijayantikośa* describes the Khañjana as 'cañcala' (चञ्चल) which means unsteady, quivering etc. and has having Kṛṣṇavakṣas (कृष्णवक्ष) - the black breast.

3) Superstition regarding khañjana

खञ्जः पललहरणे काष्ठहृद् घुणकीटकः ॥३०॥

- MārP, Chapter 15

"One who steals bran or husks of grain becomes a wagtail (in his next birth) and one who steals wood (becomes) a termite."

4) References to khañjana regarding augury

The *Bṛhatsamhitā*, devotes a full chapter describing the consequences of seeing the wagtail. It is described in the following manner:

स्थूलोऽभ्युन्नतकंठः कृष्णगलो भद्रकारको भद्रः ।

आकंठमुखात्कृष्णः संपूर्णः पूरयत्याशाम् ॥

- BrS. 45.2

"A Khañjana bird is large in size. It has a long neck, a black throat, it is known as 'Bhadra' and it brings good luck. The Khañjana bird which is black from its face up to its throat fulfills our wishes."

कृष्णो गलेऽस्यबिन्दुः सितकरटान्तः स रिक्तकृद्रिक्तः ।

पीतो गोपीत इति क्लेशकरः खञ्जनो दृष्टः ॥३॥

"If a wagtail bird has a black spot on its throat, has a white spot between the forehead and the ear it causes bad luck. A yellow coloured wagtail is also called as 'gopīta' and is seen as troublesome."

In all there are 16 verses in which various consequences of the sight of the wagtail have been described.

In the text namely *Vasantarājasākuna*, there is a chapter (Chapter 10th) on the auguries about the Khañjana bird. In 10.5 the author describes four types of the Khañjana bird -

- 1) Samantabhadra (समन्तभद्र) 2) Prabhadrā (प्रभद्र)
- 3) Anubhadra (अनुभद्र) 4) Ambarabhadra (अम्बरभद्र)

There are physical descriptions of the wagtails having black and white colours. It seems that mainly a pied variety is mentioned.

5) References to khañjana in the *Mṛgapakṣīśāstra*

The author Hamsadeva has described two types as 'Khañjarīṭa' :

कृष्णकाया नितरां दीर्घपुच्छकाः ॥

- Śreṇī 35.635

“(The birds) have black body and long tail. The other variety of 'Khañjana' has a bluish colour.”

6) Ornithological references to khañjana

The types of a wagtail that are seen India are: (Ali salim, 1996, pp. 291-294).

- 1) Forest Wagtail = The olive brown bird with pale supercilium and eye-ring. It has blackish brown wings with large yellow spots or patches forming two prominent bands. The tail is dark brown white edged the colour is white with yellow wash below.
- 2) Yellow Wagtail = It is a slim, lively, long-tailed bird mainly yellowish or olive - green above constantly wags its tail up and down.
- 3) Yellow headed Wagtail = In summer the male has a bright yellow head. In winter the male and the female have a crown and back grey, under parts yellowish white.
- 4) Grey Wagtail = A sprightly, slim long tailed bird chiefly grey and yellow.
- 5) White Wagtail = In winter plumage the black bib is much reduced, the chin and throat being white like the under part.
- 6) Large Pied Wagtail = A large wagtail of black and white plumage, with a prominent white eyebrow.

Tittira

1) Oldest references to tittira

In the *Vaidika kośa*, the word Tittira is explained as तिलयाव चित्रितः तिलचित्रः , तिदिचर तित्तिर.

— वर्षाभ्यः॑ तित्तिरीन् — ॥
- VS. 24.20

वर्षाभ्यः॑ तित्तिरान् — ॥
- MS. 3.14.1

In the mantra from both of these saṁhitās of the *Yajurveda*, the bird partridge is to the rainy season.

A similar reference is also found in the *Śatapathbrāhmaṇa* (—वर्षाभ्यस्ति॑त्तिरी॒निति॑ — ॥ 13.5.1.13).

In the *Nirukta* the word is explained as

तित्तिरिः तरणात् । तिलमात्रचित्र इति वा ।

“The word tittiri is (derived from (the root V Tṛ meaning) to float (on the surface of water). Alternatively, (it is so called, for) it has spots (on its body) of the size of sesame.”

The synonyms of tittira are kapiñjala, vartaka and lava that are rather confusing, as they can be translated as quails or francolins.

2) Superstitious references to tittira

— आसवं चोरयित्वा तु तित्तिरित्वमवाप्नुयात् ॥
- MārP. 15.24

“One who steals the āsava (decoction or liquor) becomes a partridge in his next birth”.

यद्वा तद्वापि पारक्यं स्वल्पं वा यदि वा बहु ।
हत्वा वै योनिमाप्नोति तैत्तरो नात्र संशयः ॥
- GaruḍP. , 34.25

“One who steals belongings of others big or small, obtains the birth as a partridge, there is no doubt about that).”

3) References to the tittira in the *Mṛgapakṣisāstra*

The author Hamsadeva describes the tittira as,

नितरां हृद्यनादा ये ये कंठे श्वेतवर्णकाः ।
रक्ताः कृष्णास्तथा धूम्रा विशालच्छदभूषिताः ॥
- Śreṇī 36.682

“(The tittira birds are those who) have extremely pleasing voice, who have the white neck, who are of red, black or smoky colour and who are adorned with large feathers.”

Kapiñjala

1) Oldest reference to kapiñjala bird

वसन्ताय कपिञ्जलानालभते — ।
- VS 24.20

“(The priest) immolates kapiñjala birds for the sake of the season- Vasanta”.
A similar reference is found in the MS (3.14.1).

— वसूनां कपिञ्जलः — ॥
- VS 24.38, TS 5.5, 16, 1

“The kapiñjala bird is meant for the Vasus”.

— सोमपानं शिर आसीत् स कपिञ्जलोऽभवत् — ॥
- *Kāthakasārṅhitā* 12.10

“The head (of Viśvarūpa which) was (used for) drinking the Soma juice became a kapiñjala bird”.

2) Etymological reference to kapiñjala

कपिञ्जलः कपिः इव जीर्णः । कपिः इव जवते । ईषत् पिङ्गलः वा । कमनीयं शब्दं पिञ्जयति इति वा ।
- *Nirukta*, Chapt 3, part 18

= कपिञ्जलः = कपिम् + जलः,
जलः = जीर्णः old

A dust coloured bird like that of a monkey.

जलः = जवते to run

क पिञ्जलः = कः = ईषत् = little bit

पिञ्जलः = पिङ्गलः = yellowish, auburn coloured.

The colour of this bird is yellowish.

क = कमनीयम् = One which has nice shape

पिञ्जलः = पिञ्जयति = to utter

This bird makes sweet sound and the *Kausikasūtra* (śakunaśānti 46.53-54) also mentions it.

3) References showing augury in case of kapiñjala

वामः कपिञ्जलः श्रेष्ठस्तथा दक्षिणसंस्थितः ॥

- AgniP. 231.24

“While going out if a kapiñjala bird is seen on your right and left sides, it is very a good omen.”

4) Synonyms of Kapiñjala (a partridge)

तित्तिरिस्तु खरकोणः । ---

- AbhC. 4.407

The tittira is (known as) the kharakoṇa.

The commentary on the AbhC. says,

तरत्यम्भसि तित्तिरिः “तृप्रम्यादि” - ॥ (उणा-611) ॥

“One which floats on water is Tittira.

खरं कुणति शब्दायते खरकोणः ॥२॥

“‘Khara’ means harsh, sharp, and ‘Kuṇ’ is to sound. One who gives out sharp calls is Kharakoṇa. (This is the bird - Francolin).

खरकोणश्चित्रपक्षो गौरस्त्वेष कपिञ्जलः ।

वार्तिरस्तु सचित्रः स्याद्वर्तकस्तु ततोऽल्पकः ॥

- KośK; Siṃhādivarga 98

“Citrapakṣa (चित्रपक्ष) = One who has variegated wings.

Kapiñjala (कपिञ्जल) = One who is white is called as कपिञ्जलः

Vārtira (वार्तिर) = It is said to be a kind of quail.

Sacitra (सचित्र) = One who is colourful.

Vartaka (वर्तक) = A kind of quail.

Alpaka (अल्पक) = One who is small.

(विषदर्शनमृत्युश्च) खरकोणस्तु तित्तिरिः । ---

- PNM. 3.239

“Tittira is known as Kharakoṇa and it dies by seeing the poison.”

Amarakośa (2.5.35) mentions only one word वर्तकः (vartaka) for the partridge.

5) Mythological references to kapiñjala

There is a story about the origin of this bird in the *Devībhāgvatamahāpurāṇa* (6.2.1-53). ‘Once Tvaṣṭā created Triśiras (one having three heads) to kill Indra. Triśiras recited the Vedas with one head, drunk wine with the second head and looked wickedly at the world with the third head. Indra became envious of him and he fell him down by his weapon (Vajrāyudha). By the orders from Indra a person called Takṣaka cut off the three heads of Triśiras with his axe. The three heads fell down and three types of birds were emerged from them. From the head that recited the Vedas, came the bird kapiñjalas; from the head that drank the wine, came the birds kalapiṅgalas and from

the head that looked at the world wickedly came the birds tittiris.

The *Taittirīya Saṁhitā* of the *Yajurveda* has a story regarding Tittira birds. Tittira birds are the partridges.

The knowledge discarded by the sage Yajñavalkya was accepted by some of the Brahmins, in form of the tittira birds. This knowledge came to known as the *Kṛṣṇayajurveda* (i.e., the *Taittirīya Saṁhitā*).

Cakora

1) References to cakora in poetry showing their beauty

The *Kālikāpurāṇa* says that eyes of Lord Śiva are like the Cakora (Śiva-Gauri Vivāhavarṇana, verse 35).

The *Raghuvamśa* describes the queen Indumatī (6.59) as ‘Cakorāṣī’ (चकोराक्षी) (= one who has eyes like the Cakora) and ‘Mattacakoranetrā’ (मत्तचकोरनेत्रा) (= one who has eyes like that of the intoxicated Cakora) (Raghu. 7.25).

The *Vikramāṅkadevacarita* says (11.34) that ‘the cakora birds have eaten the red moonlight of rising moon, and because of that their eyes have become red.’

2) Synonyms for cakora

ज्योत्स्नाप्रिये चलचञ्चु-चकोर-विषसूचकाः ॥

- AbhiC., 4.405

These synonyms are explained as,

ज्योत्स्ना प्रिया ऽ स्य ज्योत्स्नाप्रियस्तत्र ॥१॥

“One who adores the moonlight”.

चला चञ्चुरस्य चलचञ्चुः ॥२॥

“One whose eyes are unstable”.

चकते ज्योत्स्नया तृप्यति चकोरः “कङ्किचकी-”

(उणा - ४३३) इत्योरः ॥३॥

“One who is satiated or contended by the moonlight is cakora”.

विषं सूचयति विषसूचकः, ॥४॥

“One who indicates the poison (mixed in food).”

The *Paramānandīyanāmamālā* (3.237) says that cakora utters pleasant word (mañjuśabda) and the *Koṣakalpataru* (Siṁhādivarga 93) adds one more synonyms as ‘tāmrākṣya’ - one who has red eyes. (It was believed that the eyes of the cakora turn red when they look on poisoned food).

3) References to cakora in the *Mṛgapakṣīśāstra*

The author Harṁsadeva has described black and blue and spotted Cakora bird and a Bṛhat-cakora bird-which are mainly white. (Sreṇī 24.131-142). According to the Sanskrit dictionary of M. Monier Williams ‘cakora’ is a greek Partridge.

Vārdhrinasa

1) References to vārdhrinasa

The *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* (5.9.13) mentions that Hanūmān saw the flesh of vārdhrinasa bird in the palace of Rāvaṇa. In the footnotes on chapter 11 from

Sundarakāṇḍa a verse is referred to as,

कृष्णग्रीवो रक्तशिराः श्वेतपक्षो विहङ्गमः ।
स वै वार्ध्रिणसः प्रोक्तः ॥

- *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*

“The bird who has black neck, red head and white wings, is called as vārḍhrinasa”.
(Vālmīki/Satavalekar, 1967,6.11.16a, p. 96).

वार्ध्रिनसस्य मांसेन तृप्तिर्द्वादशवार्षिकी । —

- AgniP.117.49

“(By) offering the flesh of the Vārḍhrinasa bird the ancestors (Pitar) are satisfied for twelve years”.

In the *Pratimānātaka*, Rāvaṇa says that the flesh of vārḍhrinasa is good for men.

2) Ornithological references to vārḍhrinasa

In India common Grey Hornbill, Malabar Grey Hornbill, Rufous necked Hornbill, Wreathed Hornbill, Indian Pied Hornbill, Malabar Pied Hornbill and Great Pied Hornbill are observed.

Ṭiṭṭibha

1) References to Ṭiṭṭibha

The Sanskrit name ‘ ṭiṭṭibha ’ is an onomatopoeic word which describes the perfect calls of the lapwing. In the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (III.75.12a), we come across references to the deep jungles which are full of calls of the lapwings. In the *Mahābhārata* (12.115. 4a), it is advised that the good person should straightaway neglect the person who always grumbles like the lapwing.

2) References to ṭiṭṭibha in the *Mṛgapaṅkṣīśāstra*

The author Hamsadeva has described the ‘ Koyaṣṭi ’ birds (36.693) as having black, white and red colours. It is probably the red-wattled lapwing.

3) Ornithological references to ṭiṭṭibha

There are Yellow-wattled Lapwings and Red-Wattled Lapwing that can be commonly seen.

Sārikā

The sārikā or the myna bird is found innumerable times in Sanskrit literature mainly as a favourite cage bird.

In the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* (V. 13.13a) (भृशं लालप्यते बाला पञ्जरस्थितसारिका ॥) a sārikā which has kept in the cage is referred to. Elsewhere it is said that the sārikā birds which are kept in houses were making noise as ci-ci-ku-ci-ci. (V R VI. 35. 32b (सारिका वेश्मसु स्थिता : । Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa VI. 35. 32b).

In the Meghadūta, sārikā is said to be speaking sweet words. (मधुरवचनां सारिकां पञ्जरस्थां —॥७०॥ - Uttara-megha)

It was believed that one who insults his parents becomes sārikā bird in the next birth. (MārḅP.15.3). In the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* the concept of augury is seen regarding sārikā. It is said that on the chariot of Rāvaṇa hundreds of mynas sat and they made

harsh noise which augured his ill-fortune. (VR 6.94.12)

The *Mṛgapakṣīśāstra* text describes the *sārikā* (29.410) as having yellow, blue and red colours.

The *sārikā* is said to augur about the possibility of quarrels with a thief, with a friend, with wife or with father (*VasantarājaŚākuna* 8.17).

According to the ornithological information we can observe Common Myna, Southern Myna, Bank Myna and Brahminy Myna.

Kurara

1) Synonyms for Kurari / Kurara

मेषी तु कुररी रुजा ।
जालकिन्यविला वेणी— ॥
- AbhiC., 4.343

It is explained as,

मिषति मेषी ॥ ११।

‘Miṣa’ means to wink and ‘Miś’ (मिश्) means to sound or to be angry. मिष One who gives out calls is मेषी

कुरति शब्दायते कुररी — ॥ १२॥

“One who gives out calls like ‘Kura’ is ‘Kurari’.

रुजति रुजा ॥ १३॥

“One who injures, breaks is ‘Rujā’”.

अथोत्क्रोशो मत्स्यनाशनः कुररः ॥
- AbhiC. 4.401

उच्चैः क्रोशत्युत्क्रोशः ॥ ११॥

“One who gives out loud calls is ‘Utkrośa’”.

मत्स्यान् नाशयति मत्स्यनाशनः ॥ १२॥

“One who destroys fishes is ‘Matsyanāśana’”.

कुरति करः “मृद्युन्दि -” ॥ (उणा दि - ३९९)”

“One who utters a sound is ‘Kurara’”.

‘कुर’ इति शब्दं राति वा ॥ १३॥

“One who gives out the calls Kura is Kurara”.

2) Philosophical reference to Kurara

The *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* (VI.39.11a) talks about a jungle that was full of calls of ospreys. In the *Mahābhārata* (12.475* 3pr.) and in the *Bhāgavatamahāpurāṇa* (9.11.2), there is an philosophical reference to the osprey. The ‘osprey’ is given the status of the teacher. There is a story of the bird that was chased by other birds because it was carrying a piece of meat in its beak. It tried to lot to avoid the attacks by other birds but when it threw away the meat it became carefree. This is how a man is entangled in the feelings of happiness or unhappiness but when he becomes neutral towards such feelings, he immediately feels a joy of freedom and becomes contemplated.

3) References to kurara describing its sorrowful cry

The *Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa* describes the lamenting of Sitā as it was like the calls of a kurara.

एतैः सर्वैरभिज्ञानैरभिज्ञाय सुदुःखिता ।
विजगर्हेऽत्र कैकेयी क्रोशन्ती कुररी यथा ॥
- V R VI. 32. 3a

“- - - by means of these distinguishing marks, the aforesaid Sitā felt sore distressed and, crying like a female osprey began to reproach Kaikeyī for this (as follows) - - ”

मया विहीना विजने वने सा रक्षोभिराहत्य विकृष्यमाणा ।
नूनं विनादं कुररीव दीना सा मुक्तवत्यायतकान्तनेत्रा ॥
- VR III. 63. IIc

“Being dragged by ogres after surrounding her, bereft of me, in the lonely forest that lady of large and lovely eyes must have surely uttered a loud cry like a female osprey, afflicted as she was.”

In the *Mahābhārata* (5.172. 23a . 7. App. 8. 128 pr.) it is said that Ambā cried like a Kurarī.

In the *Raghuvamśa* (14.68) as well as in the *Vikramorvaśīya* (I), there are references to the osprey highlighting its outcry.

4) Ornithological reference to Kurara

Osprey is silent in winter and gives out musical whistle in breeding period. It is a fish-eating hawk and usually nests close to water.

Balāka

1) References to balāka in Sanskrit poetry

We find the references to the balāka or Cranes particularly when there are beautiful, picturesque descriptions of nature.

कामगं रथमास्थाय शुशुभे राक्षसाधिपः ।
विद्युन्मण्डलवान्मेघः सबलाक इवाम्बरे ॥
- VR 3. 33.10a

“Having taken his seat in that chariot, which could go wherever one liked, the ten-headed Rāvaṇa, the suzerain ruler of ogres, cast his splendour like a cloud in the sky encircled with lightening and accompanied by a flock of cranes.”

मेघाभिकामा परिसम्पतन्ती सम्पादिता भाति बलाकपङ्क्तिः ।
वातावधूता वरपौण्डरीकी लम्बेव माला रुचिराम्बरस्य ॥
- VR 4. 27.21

“ Flying with speed in a flock with a longing to meet the cloud (their beloved), the highly rejoiced row of cranes looks like a long garland of excellent lotuses shaken by the wind and adorning the charming sky.”

In the *Mahābhārata* there is a story of a crane or a heron named Nāḍijaṅgha (3.191-10). The conch of Lord Kṛṣṇa was described as white as the colour of a crane - (बलाकवर्णान् दाशार्हः पाञ्चजन्यं वनादयत् । MBh.7.75.31c).

The *Manusmṛti* prescribes (7.106) that the King should (shrewdly) think like the crane.

2) References to balāka in mythology

In the *Bhāgvatamahāpurāṇa* (10.26.8) there is a reference to the demon who came in the form of a crane. The *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa* (9.9.) contains a story of sage Viśvāmitra who was cursed to become a heron or a crane because he troubled the people who performed sacrifices.

3) Reference to balāka showing superstition

— चोरयित्वा पयश्चापि बलाका सम्प्रजायते ॥

- MārP. 15.22

“One who steals milk is born as a crane (in his next birth).”

4) Ornithological information of balāka

There are Little Egrets, Cattle Egrets that are white birds and the descriptions in Sanskrit literature about the whiteness of balāka birds can be applied to these birds.

NOTES

1 चष्यते भक्ष्यते श्येनेन चाषस्तत्र ॥१॥

‘Cāṣa’ meaning eating aggressively.

किकीति कुर्वन् दीव्यति किकिदिवि: “छविछिवि - ॥

(उणा - ७०६) ॥ इति वौ निपात्यते । ‘द्वे नाम्नी’

इत्यन्ये । किकिदीविरपि ॥२॥.

□

Concluding Remarks

We have taken a brief survey of variety of aspects of the bird references in Sanskrit literature. It presents a broad perspective and tells about a richness of the Sanskrit language as a major source of Indian tradition and culture. The span right from the Vedas till the medieval period (17th -18th C) includes nearly 2000 texts. One should be aware that we do not have any Sanskrit text that can be termed as an ornithological text in the modern sense. It is certainly important that we do find informative references to birds. This information is scattered. It is but natural that the period when these texts were written did not have the scientific discipline of ornithology. Therefore the point of view was different. Still we can try to identify the references to birds according to their information that is now available. This attempt will give us a true picture of wild life in ancient times. Such references need to be compiled and documented.

A sort of personified approach is seen in a book titled '*Mrgapakṣiśāstra*' written Haṁsadeva (probably 13th C), translated by Shri. Maruti Chitampalli and Pt. Narasimhaśāstri Bhatkhande. The text contains an information that cannot be called purely scientific. Psychological aspects are imposed on birds. The very approach towards avian life is different. But it is a rare text written on birds and animals and that is important.

K.N. Dave has done a voluminous work for years compiling the data that resulted in his book '*Birds in Sanskrit Literature*'. This book gives us a comprehensive picture of references to birds in ancient times. Unfortunately he however takes the synonyms of the birds to be different types or species. Ayurveda has its own method of classifying birds based on their behavioural observation of eating habits and their way of hunting. It would therefore be a conceptual blunder to assume that in ancient India the classification of birds can be explained flawlessly on the basis of modern ornithological knowledge. Dave has a preconceived notion while interpreting the synonyms. We cannot make such an identification on definitive level.

We cannot superimpose modern concepts like ornithology, environmental awareness, restoration and conservation of nature. Scientific classifications based on series of direct observations and field work on ancient Indian Sanskrit texts. Our approach should be open to understand the contemporary importance of each text. We should think neutrally about the glimpses of correct information that are reflected in the garb of metaphors, allegories, poetic ideas. Then only we shall be able to see the enchanting observations made by our curious ancestors. Though we cannot identify the species of the birds definitively, we feel awe and respect for Sanskrit poets and writers for their attempts to understand, to respect nature and to express and to preserve it in words. It is also a unique feature that has enabled conservation of natural wealth in the most informal way. It is important to note that some of the birds that are mentioned in the R̥gveda can be seen even now. There are hardly any examples of extinction of birds that are found through the medium of available Sanskrit literature. We can highlight these points through such study,

It is interesting and useful to know how our ancestors thought of nature and of

bird life in particular. It is an attempt to study ancient Indian texts from the ethno-ornithological perspective. Some of the important observations, routes of migration, descriptions of birds are explored from such a study. Bio-diversity in ancient India can be shown through the study of ancient literature. Such study can provide innovative insight and introduce new research areas. We can try to identify the birds and their descriptions with the aid of existing knowledge. In this thesis, an attempt is made to study the birds in the Sanskrit literature from the point of view mentioned above.

Human life is necessarily linked with the environment. We have referred to some of the reflections of birds in Sanskrit literature. The relationship of a human being to nature is threefold: nature as a teacher, nature as a spiritual force and nature as a way of life. The basic principle behind this relationship is the respect for every form of life. When every link functions harmoniously, the balance in nature is maintained.

Birds and animals were used as motifs and symbols to preach the *Dharma*. We also find various birds personified in stories which give rise to mythology. We find the roots of particular belief-systems in myths. It is therefor important to document the bird and animal myths.

The traditions have tried to conserve nature in a different garb. Our ancestors have understood that the protection of nature is protection of self. It is now, more than ever, very important for us to think about the environment and the restoration of the imbalance caused by our interference and negligence. Culture plays an important role in this mission. We need to preserve our culture through various means of presentations and to attract people to a particular philosophy. In this connection the words of His Holiness the Dalai Lama may be found relevant:

“ If peace does not become a reality in the world and if the destruction of the environment continues as it does today, there is no doubt that future generations will inherit a dead world. We are the generation with the awareness of a great danger. We are the ones with the responsibility and the ability to take steps to concrete action before it is too late.” (‘Religion and conservation’; Pub. by World Wide Fund for nature-India; Delhi, 1st paperback edition, 1999. p.38).

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