



The Symbolism of Birds in the World Cultures with special reference to India

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Abstract

There has been an important place for birds in human culture across various civilizations in the history of the world. The birds and their symbolism found in human society since ancient times indicate various meanings: spirituality, divinity, manifestations of gods/ goddesses/ deities, divine messengers, future predictions, warnings, immortality, courage, strength, knowledge, freedom, wisdom, love, peace, war, beauty, youthfulness, longevity, omen, intelligence, prosperity, fortune, protection, resilience, negativity and darkness etc. The birds with symbolism found in Indian culture include: eagle, owl, peacock, crow, vulture, pigeon, parakeet, cuckoo, swan, crane, roller, rooster and partridge etc. The various kinds of gods, goddesses, deities, devotees, companions, incarnations and messengers of divine associated with birds in Indian culture include: *Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma, Indra, Surya, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Durga, Meenakshi, Kamakhya, Kartikeya, Shani, Jatayu, Sampati, Yama, Vishavkarma, Kamdeva and Kabbhushundi* etc. The significance of birds as a part of human culture reflects their beauty in diverse symbolic meanings, associations with human life and their profound connections with humanity, nature and the divine.

Keywords: Birds, bird symbolism, Indian culture, world culture, literature

Introduction

The birds and their symbolism since ancient times has been a part of human cultures and found in traditions, myths, beliefs, religions and folktales around the world. Their symbolism is reflected in diverse meanings: spirituality, divinity, messenger, strength, courage, prediction, intelligence, wisdom, freedom, skill, communication, kingship, royalty, love, beauty, power, marital bliss, fidelity, loyalty, youthfulness, longevity, nobility, fertility, fortune, luck, omen, protection, resilience, negativity, reincarnation, immortality, rebirth, resurrection, war, peace, victory, ambition, duty, prosperity, romance, healing, adaptability, mystery, generosity and curiosity etc.

The bird symbolism has been reported among different cultures of the world: American, Christian, Celtic, Greek, Roman, African, Egyptian, Norse, Eastern, Japanese, Chinese and Indian etc.

There are some common birds associated with symbolism throughout the world: eagles, vultures, kites, falcons, pigeons, doves, peacocks, parakeets/ parrots, owls, cranes, swans, geese, ducks, partridges, crows, ravens, jackdaws, cuckoos, bluebirds, rollers, chickadees, blackbirds, roosters, pelicans, herons, penguins and woodpeckers etc.

The divinity is associated with birds in different cultures of the world: *Thunderbird* as a powerful spirit in Native American culture; *Athena* as goddess of wisdom in Greek mythology; *Apollo* as god of poetry in Roman mythology; *Thod* as god of writing and knowledge in Egypt mythology; *Odin* as god of war and wisdom in Norse mythology; *Impundulu* as god of thunder and lightning in African mythology; *Fenghuang* bird associated with an omen fortelling harmony in Chinese mythology; *Karasu* as divine messenger in Japanese mythology; and *Garuda* as mount of lord *Vishnu* in Indian mythology.

In Indian culture, bird symbolism is associated with the divine in various forms: vehicles/ mounts, incarnations, messengers, friends, companions, disciples and devotees. Some of the gods, goddesses, deities, sages, devotees, disciples and companions of the divine include: vehicles/

mounts of the divine- peacock, owl, eagle, swan; gods- *Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma, Krishna*; goddesses- *Sarswati, Lakshmi, Parvati, Chamunda, Meenakshi, Durga, Kamkhya*; deities- *Kartikeya, Indra, Surya, Agni, Shani, Yama, Vishavkarma, Kamdeva*; sages- *Kabbhushundi*; devotees/ companions of god- *Jatayu and Sampati*. (Dalal 2010; Krishna 2018;) ^[1, 2].

Methodology

The present study is based on the collection and interpretation of data available in the published research work and ancient literature of scriptures accessible on the internet, information on the websites of governmental/ non-governmental organisations and other reliable sources.

Birds in the World Cultures

Eagle

The eagle is a symbol of strength, courage, will power, ambition, duty and fortitude. In Native American culture, it is associated with powerful leaders, sacred healers and divine messengers. In Sumerian mythology, king *Etana* was thought to have been carried to heaven by an eagle. In the United States, Bald Eagle is an embodiment of freedom. In Christianity and the Bible, an eagle is a protector, savior and connected with the divine. It is a symbol of youth, strength, renewal and rebirth. In Celtic culture, the eagle is seen as one of the oldest of all creatures. It is associated with focus, wisdom and ancient knowledge. In ancient Greek, augury and ornithomancy practices utilized behaviour of birds to predict the future and an eagle's flight overhead was thought to be connected with signs from the gods. Further, in Greek mythology, an eagle is also a symbol of god *Zeus*. In the epic poems of Homer, eagles appear as emblems of heroes and as prophetic messengers of victory. In Japanese mythology, an eagle appears through the powerful spirits known as *Tengu* which have control over weather and may bring storms. *Moche* people of ancient Peru worshiped the eagle and often depicted eagles in their art. (Herrera *et al.* 1997; Filipek 2023; Brophy 2024) ^[4, 3, 5].

Crane

The crane is associated with tranquility, peace, longevity, wisdom and prosperity. In Native American culture, the crane is connected with weather and many tribes consider it as a symbol of good luck. In Chinese folklore, it is associated with longevity and the soul of the dead is often represented as riding to heaven on the back of the crane. In Japanese culture, it is associated with longevity and the emblem of joy. In Japan's marriage ceremony, a design incorporating both the crane and the tortoise used to symbolise happiness and longevity. Japanese folklore suggests that cranes can live for as long as a thousand years. In Celtic culture, the crane is connected with magic and the otherworld. The Irish god *Lugh*, thought to perform magical curses by hopping on one leg to imitate the crane. In African legend, a king was helped by a crane in an oasis and thus considered as a symbol of humility, leadership and regality. The crane dancing had been associated with both eastern and western cultures, as found in Siberia dressing in crane skins and performing funereal dances and likewise similar dances were associated with Chinese funerals also. In Australia, many of the aboriginal tribes included crane dances in their corroborees. (Johnsgard 1983; Clifford 2023) [6, 7].

Peacock

The peacock is connected with romance, beauty, luxury and vanity. The feather of the peacock is associated with protection from evil intentions and negative energies. It prevents curses and ill effects brought by others. In Christianity and the Bible, mention of a king *Solomen* is related with the peacock and bird is considered as a symbol of wealth and royalty. In Celtic culture, the peacock is associated with supernatural powers and eternity. In an omen, an encounter with a peacock is considered a sign to identify things that are holding someone back and confronting them. In ancient Greek, the bird is regarded as a symbol of immortality and in Hellenistic imagery, the goddess *Hera*'s chariot was pulled by peacocks. In Judaism, among *Ashkenazi* Jews, the golden peacock is a symbol of joy and creativity, with quills from the bird's feathers being a metaphor for a writer's inspiration. (Brophy 2024; Peafowl-Wikipedia 2024) [8, 9].

Crow

The crow is associated with intelligence, curiosity and adaptation. The crow and its relatives such as ravens and jackdaws are often thought of as signs of bad luck or danger. In ancient Greek traditions, the crow was related to augury and the bird was used as an oracle to predict the future. In Norse mythology, *Huginn* and *Muninn* are a pair of ravens that serve under the god *Odin* and fly all over the world to bring information. In Native American traditions, the crow is associated with wisdom, wit, selflessness, occasional mischief and is recognized as a sign of good luck. In Irish mythology, crows are associated with *Morrigan*, the goddess of war and death. In the Bible account (1 Kings 17:6), ravens were thought to bring food to *Elijah*. In Australian aboriginal mythology, the crow is a trickster, cultural hero and ancestral being. In Chinese mythology, the sun is related to the crow as a spiritual embodiment. (Clifford 2022; Corvus-Wikipedia 2024) [10, 11].

Sparrow

The sparrow is symbolic of domesticity, gentleness, productivity and creativity. In Native American traditions, sparrows were used to explain the changing weather and animal behaviour. The bird is related to changing seasons, messengers, good news and positivity. In Christianity, sparrows are considered as sacred symbols of sacrifice. In Celtic traditions, sparrows are associated with magic, femininity and benevolent messengers to deliver one's intentions. The sparrow is often considered as a good luck charm and positive omen. In ancient Greek, Sparrows were associated with *Aphrodite*, the goddess of love. In the *Gospel of Matthew*, Jesus used 'sparrows' as an example of divine providence. In ancient Egypt, sparrows were represented in hieroglyphs to indicate small or bad. (Clifford 2022; House Sparrow-Wikipedia 2024) [12, 13].

Falcon

The falcon is associated with longevity, nobility and victory. The practice of falconry is thousands of years old. In ancient Egypt and Asian Steppes, practice of falcon domestication was prevalent for hunting small game animals. The falcons are among the fastest animals in the world and represent speed, power and superhuman ability. The peregrine falcon is often associated with aggression and martial prowess due to its striking hunting techniques. In Egyptian culture, the solar deity *Ra* and the sky god *Horus* are represented as a humanoid with a falcon's head which is a symbol of vision, protection and kingship. In Native American traditions, falcons represent courage, strength, protection and vigilance. The native Americans of the Mississippian culture used the peregrine falcon along with other birds of prey, in imagery as a symbol of aerial/ celestial power and buried men of high status in costumes related to the ferocity of raptorial birds. In Eastern culture, the Japanese word *Takagari* was used for falconry as a noble sport for men of higher status and it was considered as a symbol of status, wealth and nobility. In Celtic myths, falcons are connected with longevity, wisdom, age and knowledge. In an omen, an encounter with a falcon may be considered as a sign of protection from danger. (Clifford 2023; Peregrine falcon-Wikipedia 2024) [14, 15].

Owl

The owl is associated with insight, mystery, death, serenity, wisdom, magic and supernatural powers. In Native American myths, owls are connected with death, bad luck and malevolence. In some tribes, the hooting of owls was considered as a sign of incoming death. The bird is thought to be connected with ghosts and it also guards the passage between land of living and dead. In Christianity, owls are associated with wildness and in a biblical reference Isaiah 34:11, God's judgment of *Edom* refers to owls in the destruction of the city. In Celtic mythology, an owl is a symbol of beauty, fertility, betrayal and deception. In an episode of the Welsh text *Mabinogi*, Blodeuedd was transformed into an owl as a punishment. In African cultures and among the Kikuyu of Kenya, owls are considered as harbingers of bad luck, illness or death. In China, owls are omens of evil or misfortune. In Japan, owls are considered as lucky. In Sumerian and Babylonian culture, owls were associated with *Lilith*. In ancient Greek mythology, an owl is a symbol of *Athena*, the goddess of wisdom and craftsmanship. The Egyptian owl hieroglyphs

associate these birds with divine and the Egyptian owl god is considered as a guardian of occult knowledge. (Clifford 2022; Owl-Wikipedia 2024) ^[16, 17].

Swan

The swan is associated with beauty, grace, purity, romance and femininity. Some stories connect swans to magic and witchcraft as well as love and royalty. These birds mate for life and thus symbolize marital bliss, fidelity, devotion and parenthood. In some cultures, swans are associated with loss of love. In a Greek fable, the swan is linked to poetry and swan as a tragic heroine associated with domed romance, sacrifice and death. In Greek mythology, *Castor and Pollux* were born from the union of *Leda* and Zeus in which Zeus appeared to *Leda* in the form of a swan. The swan is often depicted in Greek art as a symbol of virility and amorousness. But in some cultures, the black swan in comparison to the white swan is connected to betrayal and evil. In Native American traditions, swans are sacred to many tribes which use their feathers to make ceremonial fans and Jewelry. These feathers play an important role in shamanism, medicine, healing, magic and rituals. In Christianity, the swan is an emblem of the love of god and symbolises purity and grace. In Celtic myths, swans represent beneficent and healing power of sun and are associated with magic and the otherworlds. In many Gaelic and Irish tales, swans appear as messengers of love. In Scottish and Gaelic mythologies, the word for swan is *eala* which is very similar to the sun and associated with light and purity. In Siberia and Ireland, killing of swans is thought to bring misfortune and death. The swan is also linked with connection to higher consciousness. An encounter of a swan indicates the meeting of a soulmate for love, trust and a loyal relationship. (Brophy 2024; Swan - Wikipedia 2024) ^[18, 19].

Pelican

The pelican is a symbol of triumph, revitalisation, generosity and loyalty. In Native American traditions, pelicans are connected with medicine and some tribes connect these birds with weather also. In Celtic symbolism, the Gaelic (Irish, Manx & Scottish) sea god *Manannan Mac Lir* is associated with sea birds including pelicans and is related with protection for sailors. In Christianity, pelicans represent selflessness, self sacrifice, love and nurturing. In a hymn 'Adoro te devote' Saint Thomas Aquinas describes Christ as the loving divine pelican and one drop of whose blood can save the world. In ancient Egypt, the pelican was associated with death and afterlife. In Jewish diet chart, pelicans are not considered fit for consumption. The *Moche* people of ancient Peru worshiped nature and often depicted pelicans in their art. (Brophy 2024; Pelican-Wikipedia 2024) ^[20, 21].

Penguin

The penguin represents love, generosity, thoughtfulness, loyalty and romance. The bird also represents fidelity and sacrifice in some faiths. The penguins are often also portrayed as friendly, smart and comical figures. In Maori mythology, the diminutive fiordland penguin known as *Tawaki* is a powerful god related with adventures. The *Tawaki* is associated with a myth in which it walked among humans until it revealed its divinity by wearing lighting. Penguins have been the subject of many books and films

such as *Penguins of Madagascar*, *March of the Penguins*, *Farce of the Penguins* and *Mr. Popper's Penguins* etc. In the mid-2000s penguins became the most publicised species that form lasting homosexual couples. (Brophy 2024; Penguin-Wikipedia 2024) ^[22, 23].

Bluebird

The bluebird is a symbol of hope, love, cheerfulness and happiness. In Native American tribes, it is a symbol of light, positivity, transformation and humility. In traditional Iroquois cosmology, the call of bluebird is believed to ward off the icy power of *Sawiskera*, the spirit of the winter and causes *Sawiskera* to flee in fear and the ice to recede. In Navajo folklore, the bluebird is associated with the sun and the morning. The Pima people relate the bluebird with humility and transformation. The Ojibwe people associate bluebirds with rainbows. In Russian and French fairy tales, bluebirds bring about good news and joy. In Korean traditions, bluebirds are considered as messengers of god and true lovers. In Chinese folklore, the bluebird is related as the messenger of *Xi Wangmu*, the queen goddess of the west. (Clifford 2022) ^[24].

Quail

The quail is a symbol of community, fertility, resilience and cooperation. In Native American culture, the quail represents modesty and humility. The Pima people of Arizona have a myth that features quails for sneakily cutting off some meat from the Coyote. In Celtic culture, the bird is connected with the hunt and the otherworld. It is considered as a symbol of transition, sacred hunt and supernatural. In Christianity, it symbolises the idea that the god provides for the faithful. Finding a quail feather represents adaptability, perseverance and communication. In Chinese mythology, the *Fenghuang* is an immortal bird associated with quails and the quail symbolises harmony, courage and leadership. In Greek mythology, the quail is connected with the female titan *Asteria*, the goddess of divination, dream interpretation and the nighttime. *Asteria* is also the mother of Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft. According to legend, *Asteria* transformed herself into a quail when desired and chased by Zeus. (Brophy 2024) ^[25].

Nightingale

The nightingale symbolises love, springtime, rejuvenation and romance. In Celtic mythology, the nightingale is connected with *Rhiannon*, a Welsh goddess of femininity and queenship. *Rhiannon* is said to enchant visitors to the otherworld with her choir of magical songbirds. In China, the nightingale is connected with a king, who found the bird as the greatest singer. In Greek mythology, according to the legend and *Metamorphoses* (book vi) of Ovid, the bird is associated with sisters *Phelomela* and *Procne* in which *Philomela* was transformed into a nightingale bird. The nightingale is used symbolically in the *Baha'i Faith* to represent the founder Baha'u'llah and its singing is revered for its beautiful quality in Persian music and literature. In literature, the nightingale bird is associated with love, sacrifice and unconditional healing. The beauty of nightingale's songs comes from the theme of the story *The Nightingale* written by Hans Christian Anderson in 1843. In Persian and Turkish poetry, the love of a nightingale for a rose is used as a metaphor for the poet's love for the beloved and the worshiper's love for the god. The nightingale is

depicted on the reverse of the Croatian coin *kuna* minted between 1993 to 2009. (Brophy 2024; Common Nightingale-Wikipedia 2024) ^[26, 27].

Hummingbird

The hummingbird is associated with joy, love, healing and hard work. In Native American traditions, some tribes consider these birds as healers and helping spirits. In the Cherokee legend, a hummingbird retrieves the tobacco plant from the evil goose to save the life of an old woman. In Mojave folklore, people lived underground in darkness until the hummingbird found a path to the upper world. The Hopi tribes have hummingbird kachina and in Hopi hummingbird legend, the bird asked the god of fertility to save the land. Thus, in Native American stories, the bird is associated with healing, wisdom and endurance. An encounter with a hummingbird is considered a good omen to foretell good news and positive changes. The ancient Celtic symbolism believes that birds are messengers between mortals and the gods. In China, birds are associated with good news and according to *Feng Shui*, hanging hummingbird charms in homes or offices bring good luck and success. The *Aztecs* referred to as Mesoamerican civilization used to wear hummingbird talismans, artistic representations of hummingbirds and fetishes made from the actual hummingbird parts as an emblem for vigor, energy and propensity to do work. The *Aztec* god of war *Huitzilopochtli* is often depicted in art as the hummingbird. The land of the hummingbird i.e. Trinidad and Tobago displays a hummingbird on its coat of arms. (Clifford 2023; Hummingbird- Wikipedia 2024) ^[28, 29].

Cardinal

The cardinal is connected with faith, balance, romance, cheer and festivity. In Native American traditions, the northern cardinal known as redbird can carry both good and bad news. In Cherokees, the bird is believed to be the daughter of the sun and can predict the weather. The bird is a symbol of wisdom, good fortune and weather prediction. An encounter with a bird in some tribes is considered as a sure sign of rain. In Roman mythology, the cardinal is represented as a messenger of Jupiter. In Celtic traditions, birds are related to supernatural phenomena. In ancient Greek mythology, the cardinal symbolism is connected with the sun god *Apollo* and is also associated with *Phoenix*. In the United States, Canada and Mexico, the bird is considered as a symbol of love and loyalty. In Catholicism, the bird is considered as a divine messenger and emotionally uplifting one. (Clifford 2022; Literary Devices 2024) ^[30, 31].

Chickadee

The chickadee is associated with joy, communication, expression, courage and creativity. In Native American traditions and Cherokee mythology, chickadees are birds that guide spiritually human beings. In an Iroquois myth, the chickadee appears as a wise and sacred hunter. The birds indicate honesty, guidance, success and correct paths. An encounter with a bird may be considered as trustworthiness. (Brophy 2024) ^[32].

Woodpecker

The woodpecker is associated with recognition, rhythm and communication. In Native American tribes, the bird is a symbol of protection, guidance, intelligence, knowledge and

helping spirit. In Celtic traditions, the bird is related to supernatural phenomena and is associated with vitality, fertility and messenger. An encounter with a woodpecker may be a sign of connection with others. In Roman mythology, the woodpecker is sacred to the god *Mars* and worshiped in ancient Italy as a minor god. It was also an agricultural deity associated with the fertilization of soil. The woodpecker was revered by Latin people who abstained from eating its flesh. The woodpecker was one of the important birds in Roman and Italic augury. In the territory of Aequi, another Italic people, *Mars* had an oracle of great antiquity where prophecies were supposed to be spoken by a woodpecker perched on a wooden column. (Clifford 2022; Mars (mythology)-Wikipedia 2024) ^[33, 34].

Dove

The dove is a symbol of peace, freedom and love. In Native American cultures, doves are associated with safe homecoming, protection, spiritual guidance and death. In Christian Iconography, a dove also symbolizes the Holy Spirit in reference to Matthew 3:16 and Luke 3:22, where the Holy Spirit is compared to a dove at the Baptism of Jesus. In Celtic mythology, doves are connected with saints and symbolise divinity, femininity and purity. In Ireland, Saint *Columa* is referred to as the Church Dove. In Greek mythology, the bird is associated with *Aphrodite*, a goddess of love and beauty. In classical antiquity, doves were sacred to the Greek goddess *Aphrodite* which frequently appears with doves in ancient Greek pottery. In ancient Mesopotamia, doves were symbols of *Inanna-Ishtar*, the goddess of love, sexuality and war. In ancient Levant, doves were symbols for the Canaanite mother goddess *Asherah*. In Japanese mythology, *Hachiman*, the syncretic divinity of archery and war, is associated with the dove as spirit. In Mandaeism, white doves symbolise the spirit and their sacrifices are also performed during some Mandaean rituals. In Judaism, according to the biblical story, a dove was released by *Noah* after the flood in order to find land. The *Talmud* compares the spirit of God hovering over waters to a dove that hovers over her young. (Clifford 2022; Dove as symbols-Wikipedia 2024) ^[35, 36].

Heron

The heron is considered a symbol of grace and beauty. In Native American tribes, the heron is associated with patience and good luck, whereas sighting of the bird is considered a sign of a successful fishing trip. Further, herons and egrets are considered symbols of peace and tranquility. According to the Cherokee legend, the American Egret *tskwayi* is a peace emblem whose wings/ feathers are worn by athletes. In some legends, wise egret serves as a mediator of conflict between animal and spirit. In Christianity and the Bible, the heron is considered unclean and unfit for human consumption. Further, herons are associated with Christian virtues such as patience, silence and purity. In the Celtic traditions, the heron and the egret represent supernatural forces between land and water. As per myths, herons are votive animals of *Rhiannon*, the goddess of waters and lakes. In Greek myths, the heron is referred to as the messenger of god and harming a heron could bring bad luck. In Iliad, the goddess *Athena* sends a heron to support the hero *Odysseus*. In ancient Egyptian mythology, the *Bennu* bird, an important symbol resembling a heron or egret, is associated with the sun god *Ra* as well as

Atum. In Japan, the *Shirasagi* in which *Shira* means white and *sagi* refers to egrets and herons is a common subject in art, poetry and storytelling. (Clifford 2023)^[37].

Blackbird

The blackbird is associated with transformation, mystery, magic, communication and intelligence. In Native American tribes, the bird is seen as the messenger of the spirit world and brings news or guiding souls. The Hopi and Cherokee tribes consider the blackbird as a connector between the underworld and your true self. In Celtic traditions, the blackbird is related with the world of living and dead. Further, it is also a symbol of prophecy and otherworld insights. In Christianity, the blackbird is often seen as temptation or sin due to its dark colour. In ancient Egypt, the blackbird was associated with rebirth and renewal. In Japan, the blackbird is a sign of good luck for happy marriages. Further, it has been associated with the god *Izanag* which is thought to guide souls to heaven or to their next incarnation. (Harrison 2021)^[38].

Birds in the Indian Culture

Eagle

The eagle with the Sanskrit name *Garuda* is the vehicle/ mount of lord *Vishnu*. It is a symbol of strength, power, courage, wisdom and knowledge. The bird is also associated with deities *Indra* and *Surya*. In Buddhism, the golden winged bird *Garula* is shown as listening to the sermons of Buddha and described as a being with good wings and intelligence. In Jainism, *Garuda* is a *Yaksha* or guardian for *Shantinatha*. (Krishna 2018; *Garuda-Wikipedia* 2024)^[2, 39].

Peacock

The peacock has a Sanskrit name *Mayura*. The bird is a symbol of beauty, grace, pride and spiritual victory. In Hindu mythology, the peacock is known as the vehicle of lord *Karkeya*. The lord *Krishna* is depicted with peacock feathers adorning his crown. The peacock is also identified with *Lakshmi*, the goddess of wealth. Therefore, feathers of the peacock kept inside the house are thought to bring luck and prosperity to the family. The feathers of the peacock are also considered sacred and used to dust the religious images and other articles. Some tribes of India such as Bhil, Ahir, Khand and Jat community worship peacock as sacred totem. The Warli tribe fixes bird feathers in a pot to represent their god *Hirva*. In Buddhist mythology, the peacock is a symbol of compassion and watchfulness. A story in *Ramayana* states that the deity *Indra* took shelter under the peacock wing and was also transformed into a peacock at another occasion. (Krishna 2018; Dokras 2020)^[2, 40].

Vulture

The vultures mentioned in epic *Ramayana* as *Jatayu* and *Sampati* were related as helpers/ devotees of lord *Rama*. *Jatayu* sacrificed his life to save *Sita*, wife of lord *Rama* during a fight with king of Lanka *Ravana*. *Sampati*, an elder brother of *Jatayu* who was unable to take flight, also served lord *Rama*. *Sampati* confirmed the abduction of *Sita* to Lanka and her imprisonment in the forest of ashoka trees. Therefore, vulture is considered as a symbol of bravery and devotion to the divine. The vulture is also used as a metaphor indicating the destructive nature of time as it feasts on the remains of existence (Yog Vashishta English Volume 1-4 Chapter XXIII). (Krishna 2018; *Jatayu, Sampati-Wikipedia* 2024)^[2, 41].

Owl

The owl in mythology is considered as the vehicle/ mount of goddesses *Lakshmi* and *Chamunda*. In Indian folklore, the owl is associated with wisdom, fortune, prophecy, witchcraft and medicine. The sight of an owl or hearing its calls is also believed to be an invitation of death or some other evil. A barn owl entry in the house is considered a good omen related to possible flow of wealth. Some owls are killed during special occasions like Diwali by black magicians to gain magical powers and keep away bad luck. Further, amulets are also made from bones, beaks and talons of owls for protection against evils. The food made from owls or meat of owls was believed to have medicinal properties for treatment of some diseases. (Krishna 2018; Sharma *et al.* 2020; *Owl-Wikipedia* 2024)^[2, 42, 17].

Crow

The crow in mythology is considered as a messenger between the physical and the spiritual world. It is believed that the crow carries our offerings to the departed souls or ancestors. In Indian mythology, the bird is also considered as an associate or vehicle of deity *Shani* and astrology recommends that feeding crows during *Shani Dasha* is necessary to ward off the evils. The crow in folk tales is related with deity *Jayant* for feeding him during the time of honoring the ancestors. The practice of offering food or *Pinda* to crows during ancestral ceremonies or *Shraddha* on special days for ancestors or *Pitru Paksha* as an offering and sacrifice to the ancestors is still in vogue in Indian culture. The crow is also associated with the goddess *Dhumavati* and she is often depicted as riding a crow usually in the cremation ground that invokes fear. The crow is also known as the manifested form of sage *Kakabhushundi*, a devotee of lord *Rama*. (Krishna 2018; Manohar- Indian Crow; *Corvus-Wikipedia* 2024)^[2, 43, 11].

Crane

The crane or Sarus crane is a sacred bird and has an important place in Indian mythology and culture. It is believed that Sarus crane pairs for life and death of one partner leads to the death of another partner also. It is a symbol of unconditional love, fidelity, togetherness, marital bliss and long-life relationship. There is a tradition in some parts of India like Gujarat for newly-wed couples to see a pair of sarus cranes for happy married life. According to the legend, poet *Valmiki* cursed a hunter for killing a mate of the sarus crane pair and wrote the first couplet *Sloka* of epic *Ramayana*. The tribes of Gondi people classified as 'five-god worshippers' consider sarus cranes as sacred. The meat of sarus was considered taboo in ancient *Hindu* scriptures. The presence of this bird is also considered as the sign of rainfall and healthy wetlands. (Kumar & Kanaujia 2017; *Sarus crane-Wikipedia* 2024)^[44, 45].

Swan

The swan pronounced as *Hamsa* in Sanskrit is considered as the pure, clean, wise and clever bird. It is a symbol of knowledge, wisdom, intelligence, enlightenment and divineness. The bird is known as the vehicle of *Sarswati*, a goddess of wisdom and truthful knowledge. It symbolises the purity par excellence or *Sattva Guna* and power of discrimination between good and bad. As mentioned in *Vedic* literature, the bird also represents a wise person who has attained the great spiritual capabilities and highest state

of pure consciousness *Paramhansa*. The swans are said to reside in lake *Manasarovar* and believed to possess some powers like being able to eat pearls. (Chhawchharia 2021; Swan-Wikipedia 2024) ^[46, 19].

Chukar

The chukar partridge has a Sanskrit name *Chakor* or *Chakora* and mention of this name dates back to the *Markandeya Purana*. The bird is believed to feed or live on *Swati Nakshatra* or beams of the moon *Chand*. On the occasion of full moon night, the bird cries passionately, constantly gazes on the moon and shed tears of unrequited love. The chukar is a symbol of intense love and devotion. The association of Chukar *Chakor* and Moon *Chand* inspired a number of love stories in Indian culture. (Chukar Partridge- Wikipedia 2024) ^[47].

Pigeon

The pigeon in Hindu mythology named *Kapota* mentioned in a folktale about the immortality of a pair of birds linked with lord *Shiva* and goddess *Parvati* in Amarnath cave. The bird is a symbol of peace, love and devotion. It is associated with immortality, victory and divinity. The pigeons appear as messengers of heavenly divine beings and also to foretell new happenings to occur in the future. The pigeons symbolise man's spirit released from the body in ecstasy or death. The pigeon is also related with the goddess *Lakshmi* and wealth. In *Mahabharata*, there is a story about a pair of pigeons who offered their lives to save the guests (Mahabharata 12.142-145). (Patyal 1990; Krishna 2018) ^[48, 2].

Parakeet

The parakeet with the Sanskrit name *Suka* / *Thiththi* is a symbol of wisdom and learning. As the parakeet or the parrot bird can mimic human speech to a great extent which is considered as a divine gift and blessing from the goddess *Sarswati*. In Indian folktales, the bird is celebrated as a messenger, storyteller and teacher. The bird is also associated with *Kamadeva*, the deity of love, attraction and desire who is often depicted as mounting the parakeet in the *Hindu* Iconography. An Indian Tamil saint *Andal* is also related to the parakeet. It is a sacred bird to the goddess *Meenakshi*. The mention of the word *Suka* or the parrot in Hinduism can be traced back to some ancient scriptures such as *Mahabharata* and *Bhagavad Purana* where it is referred to as the son of sage *Vyasa*. The *Suka* or *Sukdev* son of *Vyasa* is depicted as a great sage, spiritual preceptor and teacher of divine knowledge to the seekers of truth. In India, parrots were popular as storytellers in fiction work and similarly the compilation of *Tutinama* a Persian translation of Sanskrit work *Sukasaptati* means 'Seventy Tales of the Parrot' was a collection of Indian stories dating back to the 14th century or earlier. (Krishna 2018; Parrot-Historified 2024) ^[2, 49].

Rooster

The rooster with the Sanskrit name *Kukkuta* indicates rising sun. The bird is a symbol of awakening, courage, protection and masculine energy. It is a flag symbol of lord *Muruga* or *Kartikeya* and the rooster on the flag symbolises the dawn of wisdom and conquest over the forces of ignorance. The rooster is also associated with the goddess *Kamakhy*. It is also the vehicle of the goddess *Bahuchara* which

symbolises innocence. The bird adorned the flag of *Shikhandi*, a character in Mahabharata. In a ritual form of worship from Kerala (North Malabar), *Theyyam* gods are propitiated through a rooster sacrifice with religious cockfight as an offering of blood to them. In Balinese Hinduism, there is a religious belief of cockfighting usually outside the temples in which the altar and deity *Ida Ratu* may be seen with a fighting cock in his hand and with spilling of blood serving as a purification rite to appease the evil spirits. (Krishna 2018; Chickens-Wikipedia 2024) ^[2, 50].

Cuckoo

The Cuckoo or Pied Cuckoo with the Sanskrit name *Chataka* in folklore is a symbol of spiritual longing and devotion. It is referred to as the harbinger of monsoons and its ability to endure thirst until rain comes is a symbol of patience and resilience. In Indian mythology, it is considered as the vehicle of *Jayakara*, a companion of *Kamadeva*, deity of love and attraction. According to the legend, the goddess *Sati* is also associated with the cuckoo. In ancient Indian poetry, the poet *Kalidasa* used it in his *Meghadoota* as a metaphor for deep yearning and this tradition continued in further literary works also. (Krishna 2018; Jacobin cuckoo-Wikipedia 2024) ^[2, 51].

Indian Roller

The Indian Roller with the Hindi name *Neelkanth* is considered a sacred bird and associated with lord *Vishnu*. The *Neelkanth* name of this bird is also connected with lord *Shiva* because of his blue throat. The bird is caught and released on some Hindu festivals such as *Dushehra* and on the last day of *Durga Puja*. There was a belief in Indian tradition that adding chopped feathers of this bird to fodder can increase the milk yield of cows. The *Kol* tribes of central India traditionally consider an encounter or sighting of an Indian roller as a good omen. A nomadic tribe of fortune-tellers from Visakhapatnam used to wear feathers of Indian roller on their heads believing that the bird could foretell events. (Indian Roller-Wikipedia 2024) ^[52].

Conclusion

- The present investigation throws light upon the significance of birds and their symbolism across various cultures of the world.
- It highlights the symbolism of some common birds associated with human beings and their beauty reflected in many aspects of human life.
- It also shows the diverse meanings of bird symbolism in mythology, traditions, folklores, religions and beliefs among different cultures.

Note: A part of this paper was presented in the International Conference on the theme 'Exploring the Literary Space as A Bridge Across Disciplines' organised by the Department of English at Government College Una (Una), Himachal Pradesh, India on 15th-16th November 2024.

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