

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Sarus Crane in Indian Mythology and Culture

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Manuscript details:	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: 20.05.2017 Accepted: 10.09.2017 Published : 30.09.2017</p> <p>Editor: Dr. Arvind Chavhan</p> <p>Cite this article as: Kumar Adesh and Kanaujia Amita (2017) Sarus Crane in Indian Mythology and Culture; <i>International J. of Life Sciences</i>, 5 (3): 465-470.</p> <p>Acknowledgements Thank are due to, Head Department of Zoology, University of Lucknow, Lucknow for providing facilities for study. Authors thanks to all the volunteers, local peoples and traditionally knowledgeable persons for their continuous help and support.</p> <p>Copyright: © 2017 Author (s), This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial - No Derivs License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.</p>	<p>The Sarus crane is known for its immense cultural contribution is the tallest flying bird and globally 'Vulnerable' species as per IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. It is the 'state bird' of Uttar Pradesh of India. The cultures of various communities not only in India but from all over the world have mentioned about Sarus such as Nepal, Vietnamese, Chinese and Cambodia. Many myths are associated with Sarus. This bird is also known as the eternal symbol of unconditional love and devotion and good fortune. Sarus has a special position in social folklores and this is reflected in its mention in some Indian folk stories and songs. From the ancient to modern time many painters, artists and workers are concerning the Sarus crane in their paintings, architectures, embroideries, handicrafts. India Post also launched a postal stamp on Sarus crane. Presence of Sarus crane is good sign of rainfall and healthy wetlands ecosystem. Various Government departments, Universities, Scientists and Conservationists are coming together to work for Sarus conservation which includes both ex-situ and in-situ measures. Since we are depleting our wetlands which direct affect the Sarus day by day, World Wetlands Day (2nd February) is being celebrated all over the world to make the future generation sensitive about the dilemma of Sarus.</p> <p>Key words: Sarus crane, Mythology, Culture, Symbol.</p>
	<p>INTRODUCTION</p> <p>Our ancient civilizations depict the worship of some of animals and birds including nature Gods. Even the forests, environment and the elements of nature were revered and held in Indian Mythology with high esteem. Sarus crane known as the eternal symbol of unconditional love and devotion and good fortune in Indian culture. Due to developmental activities and population pressure the population of this bird is depletion day by day. The Sarus crane which is known for its immense cultural contribution is the tallest flying bird and globally 'Vulnerable' species as per IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. It is the 'state bird' of Uttar Pradesh of India. The Sarus Crane (<i>Grus antigone</i>) is a large non-migratory crane. The name Sarus came</p>

from Sanskrit term “sarasa” which means “bird of the lake”. All the way through the ages, Sarus have been honored as symbols of love and devotion. All through olden times and across many cultures, people have regarded Sarus with charm and respect.

Sarus have important place in mythology and culture along with their economic significance and ecological role as iconic bird of Indian wetlands.

From the ancient time it is widely believed that the Sarus pairs for life and that death of one partner leads to the other infatuated to death. Assumption about Sarus crane began in primitive folklores, ages ago but passed over to the future generations through narratives and tales. Sarus crane notorious as the eternal symbol of unconditional love, devotion, togetherness and good fortune in Indian culture and different myths. The cultures of various communities not only in India but from all over the world have mentioned about Sarus such as Nepal, Vietnamese, Chinese and Cambodia. The purpose of this paper is to imitate the magnitude of the most efficient iconic bird of wetlands throughout the ancient times in India. There have been detailed studies regarding the role of Sarus crane in ecosystem, this paper reflects their role in various cultures.

METHODOLOGY

To be acquainted with the significance of the Sarus in numerous cultures around the World, all existing scientific and grey literature was cited and reviewed on the mythological, cultural, occurrence and rituals

associated with Sarus within India and the World. Data was also collected during visits to various places like Lumbini Garden in Nepal, Bodh Gaya in Uttar Pradesh, Bodh Stoop in Banaras.

Sarus in Indian Mythology and Culture

The Sarus crane species has historically been distributed broadly in the northern and north-western lowlands of India along the plains of the Ganges River. In India, the Sarus crane are considered sacred birds; they never get harmed by human. The Sarus crane has always had a privileged social status in India. Many myths are associated with this bird. This bird is also known as the eternal symbol of unconditional love and devotion and good fortune.

There is a tradition of having a newly-wed couple view a Sarus pair in some parts of India. It is believed that if one bird of the pair were to die, then the other shadows the path towards starvation by refusing any food or water (Sunder & Chaudhary, 2003). Sarus has a special position in social folklores and this is reflected in its mention in some Indian folk stories and songs (Mishra, 2009).

Sarus pairs are a symbol of marital virtue and in parts of Gujarat and believed that death of one partner leads to the other infatuation to death. The mating season of sarus coincides with two of the most important cultural occasions in the Indian subcontinent: The Dashain and the Tihar. These back to back celebration events are festive and cheerful and very significant to the people, analogous to our traditional Lunar New Year.

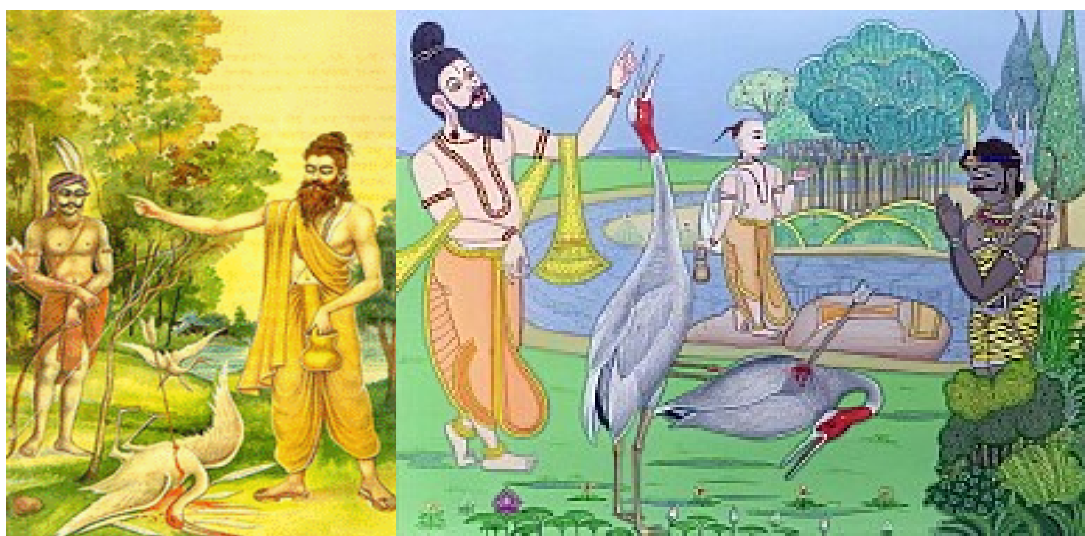


Fig.1 Valmiki cursed a hunter for killing a Sarus crane

The sarus is recognized in India and legend has it that the poet Valmiki cursed a hunter for killing a Sarus crane and was then motivated to write the epic Ramayana (Rana and Prakash, 2004, Sunder and Chaudhary, 2005) (Fig.1).

The tribes of Gondi people consider sarus crane as sacred “five –god worshippers” (Birdlife International, 2001). In ancient Hindu scriptures the meat of sarus was considered taboo (banned or unmentionable, Board *et al.*, 2001).

Around 1607, observation on sarus biology made by the Mughal emperor Jahangir and concluded that sarus constantly laid two eggs with an interval of 48 hours

between them and that the incubation period was 34 days in floods plains of Ganges (Johnsgard, 1983).

In 19th-century British zoologist Thomas C. Jerdon, consulted that young birds were good to eat, whereas older ones were “worthless for the table” (Tanee *et al.*, 2009). In some parts of India, the eggs of the sarus crane are still used in traditional remedies (Leslie, 1998 and Sundar & Chaudhary, 2003).

A plate of Sarus crane by Johann Michael Seligmann published between 1749 and 1776 based on a work by George Edwards (Fig.2). Maharana Amar Singh Hunting Sarus crane have shown in fig-3.



Fig.2 A plate of Sarus crane used by J M Seligmann



Fig.3 Maharana Amar Singh Hunting Sarus crane



Fig.4 Sarus crane in Handicrafts



Fig.5 Sarus crane in Paintings



Fig.6 Sarus crane in Embroidery



Fig.7 Sarus crane in Postal Stamps

Sarus crane also portrays in Indian Handicrafts (Fig.4), Paintings (Fig.5), Embroidery (Fig.6) and Postal Stamps (Fig.7).

Sarus crane in other Culture of World

The term Sarus came from Sanskrit term “sarasa” which means “bird of the lake”. The very earliest pioneers of the Indian subcontinent region speak the Austro-Asiatic language, sarasa is derived from there which is also the root language of most Asian nations including the old Vietnam. Vietnamese people called these cranes “seu” but in Vietnamese folks the Chinese-derived name “hac” that was only poetically applied in written literature.

A few historical interpreters of Buddhist transcript from Chinese to Vietnamese have revealed a story of the young Prince Siddhartha (before he became the Buddha) and the swan (Fig.8 & 9). When the prince was very young, one day he found an injured swan (some of assumed that was sarus) on the palace ground that was shot by his cousin Devadatta. Siddhartha detached the poisoned arrow, and nursed the wounded bird with extreme sympathy. When Devadatta found out that it was the bird he shot down, he wanted to own the prize bird and demanded it back. Heated argument succeeded. Siddhartha won the argument by proving that “the life of an animal belongs to the person who rescued it, and not to the one who dispossessed it.”



Fig.8 Sarus in Vietnamese Culture

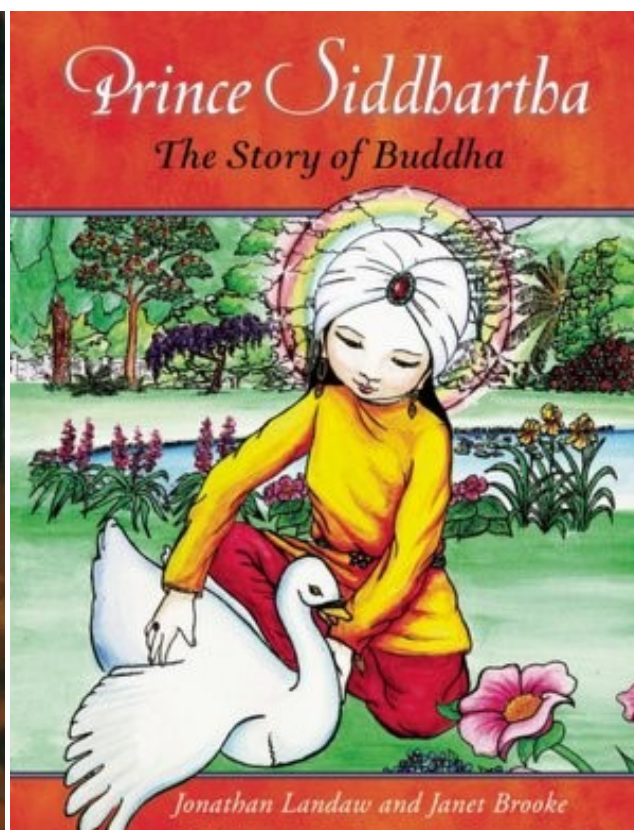


Fig.9 Prince Siddhartha with Sarus



Fig.10 painting by Melchior d'Hondecoeters (1680) showing a sarus crane in the background



Fig.11 wheel of sarus crane conservation depicts the life cycle, threats and conservational measures for sarus conservation and protection

But according to the intellectual scholar Hemraj Shakya - who was the most proficient in ancient languages like Brahmi, Sanskrit and Pali, and who signified the most admired of all researchers of ancient Indian and Nepalese history - there are no acknowledged species of swans or flying geese in said territory at the time of Buddha. The bird in Siddhartha's story must be the native Sarus crane, whose marshland habitat distribution throughout India is more relevant of Sakyamuni Buddha's country (Nguyen Phu, 2011).

The floating feather: a painting by Melchior d'Hondecoeter (1680) of the birds in the menagerie of William III of England at the Het Loo Palace showing a sarus crane in the background worked named "Het drijvendvveertje" (Blaauw, 1897) (fig.10). In Pakistan, sarus cranes are apparently cited in poetry (D. Ferguson, in litt., 2003).

A Nepalese Traditional Thangka painting based on Buddhist wheel of Life Philosophy which show the wheel of sarus crane conservation and depicts the life cycle, threats and conservational measures for sarus conservation and protection (Fig. 11).

CONCLUSION

Sarus crane notorious as the eternal symbol of unconditional love, devotion, togetherness and good fortune in Indian culture and different myths. From the ancient to modern time many painters, artists and workers are concerning the Sarus crane in their paintings, architectures, embroideries, handicrafts. Presence of Sarus crane is good sign of rainfall and healthy wetlands ecosystem. Various Government departments, Universities, Scientists and Conservationists are coming together to work for Sarus conservation which includes both ex-situ and in-situ measures. Since we are depleting our wetlands which directly affect the Sarus day by day, World Wetlands Day (2nd February) is being celebrated all over the world to make the future generation sensitive about the dilemma of Sarus.

Conflicts of interest: The authors stated that no conflicts of interest.

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