



PEACOCK



India's National Bird

The Peacock is perhaps Nature's most resplendent bird, with rich mythological associations & evocative symbolism. Perhaps this is the reason why it is India's National Bird, representing to the Western eye all that is beautiful, graceful & aesthetically pleasing in Eastern Cultures. In fact, it is believed that Lord Krishna's purity is exemplified by the Peacock Feather decorating his forehead – leading to the belief that the Bird intercourse takes place between a male & female Peafowl but that the Peahen conceives by consuming a tear drop from the male – thus preserving the purity of the Peacock.

The Indian Peacock is one of the most recognizable birds in the world. It is a colourful, Swan – sized creature with a Fan-shaped crest of feathers, a white patch under the eye & a long, slender neck. The male of the species is more colourful than the female, with a glistening blue breast & neck and a spectacular Bronze-green train of around 200 elongated Feathers. The female is Brownish, slightly smaller than the Male, and lacks the train. There is of course the White Peafowl which is often mistaken for an Albino, but it has a dark & not red iris, which is a sign of a recessive mutant.



Morachi Chincholi on Pune – Ahmednagar Road, the name itself declares that the village belongs to the Peafowl. Over generations, people of this village have provided sanctuary to a large number of Peafowl. Early each morning, the Peafowl descend from the lofty tamarind trees in the village & roam the lanes of the village to be fed by the people, before retreating to the shade for the hottest portion of the day. Their food includes Grains, Insects, small Reptiles, small Mammals, Berries, Drupes, Wild Figs & some cultivated Crops.



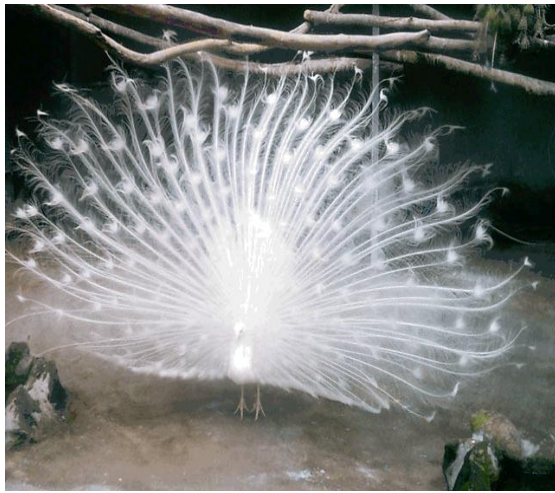
Peacocks have enjoyed the centre-stage of our cultural heritage. This was most evident during the Mughal Era – when Peacocks adorned almost all the intricate Paintings, adding grace & romance to the most beautiful women sitting in their courtyards. In fact, in Hindu Mythology the Peacock was the vehicle of Kama, God of Love, where it represented desire. According to Greek Mythology, the ‘Eyes’ on the tail of a Peacock were placed there by Hera to commemorate her faithful watchman Argus who had a hundred eyes with which he kept watch on her Husband Zeus, who eventually killed him.

The Peacock’s exotically ornamental appearance motivated early seafarers to carry the bird to their homelands in other parts of the western world. Phoenician traders in the time of King Solomon [1000 BC] introduced the birds to present day Syria & to the lands of the Egyptian Pharaohs. The main figure of the Kurdish religion Yazidism, Melek Taus is most commonly depicted as a Peacock, although the birds are not native to the original range of worship of Melek Taus.



It is obvious that one significant reason why Peacocks have been glorified is because they are physically so beautiful. Another reason of course is that they have played a very important role in the control of rodents & farm pests. So both their beauty & their utility had led to their deification. Lord Murugan also known as Lord Kartikeyan, the Brother of Ganesha & Saraswati, the Goddess of Wisdom & learning, both use them as their vehicles. Sometimes, even Lakshmi & Brahma, the creators are borne on the bird's back.

The poaching of Peacock, unthinkable in the past is a common practice today. They are hunted for their feathers & flesh & for their fat which some believe to be a cure for Arthritis. The merciless hunting grounds are spread all over Rajasthan, Haryana & Punjab – once areas rich with Peacock. While the young ones are mainly trapped to be eaten, Peacocks are killed for feathers. Actually, the law permits collection of moulted feathers, but once the feathers have been used in artifacts it is difficult to say whether they were shed or pulled out.



Mayur – White Peacock

