

## Ideas and Fancies connected with Birds in Classical India (Abstract)

Klaus Karttunen (Helsinki)

In a previous article I have discussed the display and pairing of Birds in Sanskrit Literature,<sup>1</sup> including such themes as the dance of peacock, the conjugal fidelity of ducks, and the sexual virility of certain birds. But there are also other fascinating ideas — both true and fancy — connected with birds in classical Indian literature. Thus the hawk-cuckoo (*cātaka*) is supposed to accept no earthly water, instead it drinks rain water directly from air — and therefore waits eagerly for the coming of the rainy season. The red-eyed chukor partridge (*cakora*) is equally fastidious, feeding only on moon-beams. The cuckoo was the symbol of spring and love and it did not escape the notice that it did not take care of the offspring of love (*parabhṛta*). The geese (*hamsa*) have the ability to separate milk from water. The much exaggerated ability of parrots and mainas to repeat even long discussions or to recite literary texts, including Vedic hymns and Buddhist sūtras, was a popular poetic device, at the same time these two species were often made a married couple. More natural are the accounts of the dangers caused to birds by forest fire, snakes and cats. Crows are detested as carrion-eaters and birds of ill omen, but they also receive offerings. Their war with the owls is an important theme in narrative literature. These and other literary ideas will be presented and analysed in my paper on the basis of numerous examples from epics, classical poetry, Hindu and Buddhist narrative literature etc. In this connection, also the identification of the birds in question will be discussed.

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<sup>1</sup> “‘Sparrows in Love’ The Display and Pairing of Birds in Sanskrit Literature”, Piotr Balcerowicz & Marek Mejer (edd.), *On the Understanding Other Cultures. Proceedings of the International Conference on Sanskrit and Related Studies, to Commemorate the Centenary of the Birth of Stanislaw Schayer (1899–1941) at Warsaw University, Poland, October 7–10, 1999*. Studia Indologiczne 7. Warsaw 2000, 197–205.