



Folk songs related to birds and animals in Shekhawati region, Rajasthan

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Abstract

The present study documented folk songs related to bird and animal in the Shekhawati region of Rajasthan, covering Sikar, Jhunjhunu, and Churu districts. Folk songs are an important part of oral cultural heritage because they transmit traditional knowledge, beliefs, emotions, and information about nature from one generation to another. During the study, approximately 105 people from 23 villages were surveyed, and 43 folk song records were documented through field visits and interactions with local people. The songs showed a strong relationship between local biodiversity and cultural traditions. Birds were mentioned more frequently than mammals and other animals. The peacock (*Pavo cristatus*) was the most frequently recorded species, followed by the parrot (*Psittacula krameri*), crow (*Corvus splendens*), and cuckoo (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*). The peacock was mainly associated with beauty, love, festivals, rainfall, and the monsoon season, whereas the parrot represented communication, affection, devotion, and emotional attachment. Crows were related to daily life, omens, and ancestral beliefs, while cuckoos were connected with rain, separation, and longing. Other birds and animals were associated with agriculture, rituals, social relationships, spirituality, and local livelihoods. The major themes identified in the songs included love, separation, reunion, marriage, family relationships, seasons, rainfall, and religious beliefs. The findings indicate that folk songs preserve traditional ecological knowledge and reflect the close relationship between the people of Shekhawati and their natural environment. However, modernization and changing lifestyles may threaten this oral heritage. Therefore, systematic documentation of these songs is important for preserving the cultural traditions, biodiversity knowledge, and ecological understanding of the Shekhawati region.

Keywords: Folk songs, birds and animals, Shekhawati region, Rajasthan

Introduction

In the world, folk music is considered as the oldest form of music. These are not written anywhere or not recorded generally. Folk music is sung to each other in a group. These are transmitted from one generation to another. All countries have their unique folk songs. Like this, in every region of a country has its own folk song. By folk music stories of native people is told. These songs are related to love, nature, affection, happiness, loss or everyday life. For folk music there is no copy write of an individual. These are related to all. Folk music is —the music of the people, by the people, and for the people (Lomax, A., 1960) ^[10]. Folk songs are important to maintain any culture. In each culture, there is unique language, dress style, food and music. With folk songs, their culture reflects. So, folk songs help to alive culture as it is forgotten by people with time. Because of this, many government and culture groups are working to collect and prevent the knowledge of folk tunes. UNESCO has listed various folk songs as Intangible Cultural Heritage. These songs are important as old buildings (UNESCO, 2003) ^[14].

Folk songs continue to influence modern musicians around the world. Many wellknown artists have used melodies, stories, or themes from traditional folk songs. They have given these old ideas a new form and introduced them to modern audiences. Bob Dylan is a good example. He received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2016. He began his career as a folk performer and used many traditional American folk and blues influences in his music. The Nobel Prize Committee noted that his work was deeply connected

with a long tradition of folk music (Nobel Prize Committee, 2016, *Nobel Prize in Literature Award Ceremony Speech*).

Birds have always had an important place in folk songs. They often represent things that people deeply desire. These include freedom, love, hope, and the wish to travel far away. The koyal (cuckoo) is one of the most popular birds in Indian folk music. Its sweet call is often seen as a sign of spring. In many Hindi and Rajasthani folk songs, the sound of the koyal is connected with love and longing. It often expresses the feelings of a woman waiting for her loved one to return. The koyal and the peacock also appear in traditional Malhar ragas. They are used to express the joy of rain after a long dry season (Tidemann, 2010) ^[13]. The peacock is especially associated with the arrival of rain and the happiness it brings. The nightingale has a similar place in Persian, Turkish, and European folk traditions. It is often connected with love and sadness. Its beautiful song is used to express emotions that are sometimes difficult to put into words.

Animals often play the role of teachers in folk songs. They are used to show people how to behave. They can also show what people should avoid doing. This is especially common in African folk music. Animals such as the hare, tortoise, elephant, and spider often appear in songs and stories that carry moral lessons.

These songs also carry a way of understanding the world. They connect nature with human emotions, beliefs, and everyday life. Their messages are simple but meaningful. We should therefore listen to these songs. We should learn their stories and meanings. Most importantly, we should

share them with younger generations. This can help keep both our folk traditions and our connection with nature alive.

Materials and method

During the study, frequent surveys were conducted in different villages of Shekhawati region. Interaction with native people were done and they were explained about the purpose. Songs sung by people were noted down. They were also asked about the bird about the song was and its importance. Approximate 105 people were surveyed among 23 different villages during the study.

Results

The ethnozoological survey of the Shekhawati region documented 43 folk song records related to birds and animals. The results showed a strong connection between local biodiversity and folk traditions. Birds were mentioned more often than mammals and other animals.

The peacock (*Pavo cristatus*) was the most frequently mentioned species. It appeared in many folk songs. The peacock was linked with beauty, pride, love, festivals, and the monsoon season. Its association with rain and agriculture was particularly common. These references showed its strong cultural importance in Rajasthan. The parrot (*Psittacula krameri*) was the second most frequently mentioned bird. It was mainly associated with communication, love, devotion, and emotional attachment. In several songs, the parrot acted as a messenger. It represented communication between people who were separated from each other.

The crow (*Corvus splendens*) and cuckoo (*Eudynamis scolopaceus*) were also commonly represented. The crow was associated with daily life, omens, alertness, and ancestral beliefs. The cuckoo was mainly connected with the monsoon, separation, and longing. The owl (*Bubo bengalensis*) appeared in fewer songs. However, its cultural importance was clear. It was associated with mystery, fear, and traditional beliefs.

Some songs mentioned more than one species. Examples included parrot–crow, cuckoo–parrot, and sparrow–peacock. These combinations showed how different birds were used together to express social ideas, moral lessons, fate, and contrasts in human life. The crane (*Antigone antigone*) and heron (*Ardeola grayii*) were also recorded. Their presence was linked with social events, good news, and reflections on life and destiny.

Mammals were less frequently mentioned. The mouse (*Mus musculus*) and buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*) were among the recorded species. Although they appeared less often, they had strong social and religious importance. They were connected with rituals, deities, agriculture, and local livelihoods. The songs covered several major themes. Love, separation, reunion, rainfall, seasons, marriage, family relationships, and spirituality were common themes. Birds were often used as messengers or symbols of human emotions.

The overall frequency followed the pattern peacock > parrot > crow > cuckoo. This pattern may reflect both the visibility of these birds and their cultural importance in the region.

Table 1: Name of species of birds and animals related to folk songs in Shekhawati region, Rajasthan.

S.No.	Species	No. of Occurrences in Folk Songs	Percentage (%)
1	<i>Antigone antigone</i>	1	2.325581
2	<i>Ardeola grayii</i> , <i>Eudynamis</i> , <i>scolopaceus</i>	1	2.325581
3	<i>Bos taurus</i>	2	4.651163
4	<i>Bubalus bubalis</i>	1	2.325581
5	<i>Columba livia</i>	1	2.325581
6	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	5	11.62791
7	<i>Cygnus olor</i> (symbolic)	1	2.325581
8	<i>Equus asinus</i> / <i>Tyto alba</i>	1	2.325581
9	<i>Eudynamis scolopaceus</i>	3	6.976744
10	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>	1	2.325581
11	<i>Gallus gallus domesticus</i>	2	4.651163
12	<i>Hierococcyx varius</i>	1	2.325581
13	<i>Mus musculus</i>	1	2.325581
14	<i>Oriolus kundoo</i>	1	2.325581
15	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	3	6.976744
16	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>	7	16.27907
17	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	6	13.95349
18	General	5	11.62791
	Total	43	100

Discussion

The present study provided useful information about the relationship between birds, folk songs, and local culture in the Shekhawati region. A total of 43 folk song records were documented. Birds were represented more often than other animal groups. This showed the close relationship between local communities and birds. Such a relationship is an important part of ethno-ornithology (Hunn, 2008) [8].

Galliformes was the most frequently represented group. The peacock (*Pavo cristatus*) was especially common. Parrots (*Psittacula krameri*) were also frequently

mentioned. Their frequent appearance may be related to their visibility and familiarity in rural areas. Earlier studies have also reported the cultural importance of Galliformes in traditional beliefs and practices (Alves *et al.*, 2013) [1]. The frequent mention of the peacock was also similar to earlier reports from Rajasthan. The bird has been strongly linked with beauty, rain, the monsoon, and human emotions in local traditions (Sharma & Kumar, 2020) [11]. Its association with rainfall also showed how people observed nature and connected bird behaviour with seasonal changes. Similar observations have been reported in studies of traditional

ecological knowledge (Singh *et al.*, 2021) ^[12]. Parrots, crows, and cuckoos also had important places in the songs. The parrot was mainly connected with communication, love, and emotional bonding. Its ability to imitate sounds may have influenced this symbolic role. Bird communication and vocal behaviour have long been important in the way people understand and represent birds (Catchpole & Slater, 2008) ^[5]. Crows and owls had different meanings. Crows were linked with omens, daily life, and ancestral beliefs. Owls were more often connected with mystery and traditional beliefs. Birds are commonly given symbolic meanings related to life, death, and spirituality in different cultures (Tidemann & Gosler, 2010) ^[13]. Crows may have a particularly strong cultural role because they commonly live close to human settlements (Garibaldi & Turner, 2004; Kumar *et al.*, 2022) ^[7, 9].

The folk songs included birds from several different orders. These included Passeriformes, Galliformes, Psittaciformes, and Cuculiformes. This showed that local communities had knowledge of many different bird species. Similar patterns have been reported in other ethnobiological studies (Alves & Souto, 2015) ^[2]. Some songs also mentioned more than one bird species. These mixed references may have helped people express comparisons and contrasts. They could also represent social relationships, moral ideas, and different human emotions (Berlin, 2014) ^[4].

The study also showed the ecological value of these songs. The peacock and cuckoo were often connected with the monsoon and seasonal changes. Such references suggest that local people closely observed bird behaviour and changes in the environment. Similar traditional observations have been reported in rural communities where bird behaviour is used to understand seasonal and environmental changes (Díaz *et al.*, 2015; Singh *et al.*, 2021) ^[6, 12]. Folk songs can also help transfer knowledge from one generation to another. Information about birds, seasons, nature, and local traditions can be remembered through songs. In this way, folk music helps maintain the relationship between people and their natural environment. Traditional ecological knowledge can also support awareness about biodiversity and conservation (Berkes, 2012) ^[3].

However, this traditional knowledge may be at risk. Urbanization and modernization are changing traditional lifestyles. Folk songs and local ecological knowledge may gradually be forgotten. At the same time, changes in habitats can affect local biodiversity. Therefore, documenting these songs is important. It can help preserve both cultural heritage and traditional knowledge about birds and nature.

Conclusion

The documentation of 43 folk songs related to birds and animals from the Shekhawati region is an important cultural and ecological finding. Shekhawati is well known for its havelis, art, and storytelling traditions. Its folk songs also preserve a rich cultural heritage. Birds and animals are an important part of these songs. The koyal is often connected with love and longing. The peacock is linked with the monsoon and the arrival of rain. Animals such as the camel also appear in songs related to desert life. These examples show how closely nature is connected with the everyday life of the people of Shekhawati.

The present collection can provide a base for further research. More songs can be documented from different villages and communities. Their meanings, species

references, and ecological information can also be studied in greater detail. Most importantly, these songs deserve to be heard and remembered. They are a valuable part of the oral heritage of Shekhawati. They remind us that humans have always shared their world with birds, animals, and nature.

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