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The Bird Motif beyond Borders: Human-Nature Symbiosis in Gojri Poem ‘Kuku’ and Cross-Cultural Analysis

Quleen Kaur Bijral

Faculty, HSS Department, IIT Jammu
quleen.kaur@iitjammu.ac.in

Pummy Sharma

Research Scholar
HSS Dept, IIT Jammu
2018rhu0048@iitjammu.ac.in

Abstract

Throughout history and across diverse civilizations, birds have consistently served as a prominent motif acting as a means of identification for humanity. The present paper undertakes a critical exploration of the recurrent bird motif in the Gojri folk song ‘Kuku’, as an enduring oral tradition among the Gujjar and Bakerwal tribal communities of Jammu and Kashmir. Anchored in the theoretical frameworks of archetypal criticism and comparative folkloristics, the study sets out to examine how the figure of the cuckoo symbolically encapsulates the themes of migration, resilience, existential displacement, and ecological symbiosis. The study is grounded in the concept of the archetype, understood as a primordial image embedded within the collective unconscious of humanity.

Within this theoretical framework, the bird motif in the Gojri folk song ‘Kuku’ is interpreted not simply as a cultural or regional symbol, but as a timeless representation of human experiences related to migration, resilience, and ecological interconnection. Further, by interpreting ‘Kuku’ alongside global literary and folkloric traditions where birds act as messengers, companions, and emblems of freedom, the study also establishes the Gojri song’s thematic resonance across cultural boundaries. Methodologically, the research adopts a cross-cultural, interdisciplinary approach, juxtaposing the Gojri song with global literary and folkloric representations of birds as emblems of freedom, spiritual transcendence, and communal memory. The analysis reveals that ‘Kuku’ operates not merely as a localized expression of tribal ethos but as a profound articulation of archetypal structures embedded within the collective unconscious.

The present work, while drawing on cross-cultural folklore, demonstrates how the bird motif transcends specific tribal realities, offering a collective memory of human-nonhuman symbiosis, offering insights into the shared human experience of displacement, endurance, and the persistent negotiation between human and nonhuman worlds. The paper also contextualizes ‘Kuku’ within broader traditions of folk and literary narratives. Thus, the present paper aims to evaluate the enduring Gojri folk song ‘Kukku’, a significant oral tradition among the tribal communities of Gujjars and Bakarwals in the Jammu and Kashmir region, and explore literary connections with similar works, emphasising the enduring significance of the bird motif in folk traditions across different cultures and historical periods.

I. Gujjars-Bakarwals: A historical background

The Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir is characterized by the presence of numerous tribes and culturally diverse communities. This paper primarily focuses on the poetic traditions of the Gujjars and Bakarwals, indigenous populations inhabiting the upper regions of Jammu and Kashmir. The Gujjars, a semi-nomadic community, are recognized for their rich cultural heritage and oral traditions. Within the Gujjar community, two distinct subgroups can be identified: the Jamindar Gujjars, who are primarily engaged in agriculture, and the Dodhi Gujjars, who traditionally subsist on the rearing of buffaloes and the production and sale of milk and dairy products. The Bakarwals, on the other hand, are predominantly pastoralists, specializing in the herding of goats and sheep. Historically, their livelihoods have been rooted in transhumance, involving seasonal migration from lower altitudes to alpine pastures during the summer months, and a return to the lowlands during the harsh winter season. In recent decades, however, shifting socio-economic conditions have led sections of these communities to diversify their means of subsistence, with some members engaging in agriculture, wage labor, and other emerging occupational sectors. This evolution reflects broader patterns of economic adaptation and transformation within tribal societies of the region.

In recent decades, socio-economic transformations, climate change, and political restructuring have led to gradual shifts within these communities. Many Gujjars and Bakarwals have diversified into agriculture, wage labour, and other informal sectors, signaling a transition from traditional pastoralism to mixed or alternative livelihood strategies. Nevertheless, their collective identity remains deeply tied to their nomadic heritage, oral lore, and rich repertoire of folk songs, myths, and ritual practices that continue to be vital carriers of historical memory and communal resilience.

Politically, the Gujjars and Bakarwals were granted Scheduled Tribe (ST) status under the Indian Constitution in 1991, a recognition aimed at addressing their historical marginalization and providing avenues for socio-economic upliftment. Despite this constitutional acknowledgment, these communities continue to face systemic challenges, including limited access to education, healthcare, political representation, and land rights. In this context, the preservation of their folk traditions and indigenous knowledge systems gains even greater significance, offering both a testament to their historical endurance and a lens through which broader questions of cultural sustainability, displacement, and identity in Jammu and Kashmir can be understood.

II. Introducing the Folk Song: Bird Motif

Birds have been a recurring source of identification for the human populace since time immemorial. It has been a continual symbol, motif, character, or archetype throughout history and in various far-flung civilizations. The very image, which embodies essential human experiences and emotions, is profoundly ingrained in the collective unconscious of all people. The liberating idea of a bird is its ability to breach human limitations through its capability of flight and reach places beyond human accessibility. The bird call or song also stands as a memento of either something propitious or ominous in which the song's message demonstrates the exigency of the community in question.

The concept of the archetype, as initially theorized by Carl Jung, refers to primordial images embedded within the collective unconscious that reappear persistently across

cultures and historical periods, particularly through creative expressions (Jung 1959). Extending Jung's insights into literary criticism, Northrop Frye conceptualizes archetypes as recurring symbols or images that create a network of connections between literary works, thereby integrating and unifying human literary experience (Frye 1957). Building upon this foundation, Maud Bodkin suggests that such archetypal symbols evoke deep resonances within readers' memories, reflecting emotions and ideas shaped by the cumulative experiences of humanity (Bodkin 1934). Within this theoretical framework, the bird motif in the Gojri folk song 'Kuku' is interpreted not merely as a narrative feature but as an enduring archetypal figure that embodies the intertwined themes of migration, resilience, and ecological interconnection. Further supporting this perspective, Mircea Eliade underscores that myths and archetype articulates existential patterns that remain fundamentally consistent throughout human history, transcending specific cultural or temporal contexts (Eliade 1963). Accordingly, 'Kuku' is situated within a timeless continuum of human displacement, longing, and survival.

This paper examines the Gojri folk song 'Kuku' as an oral treasure of the Gujjar and Bakerwal tribal communities of Jammu and Kashmir, through an archetypal, semiotic, and anthropological lens. The Gujjars and Bakerwals, historically semi-nomadic pastoralists, have practiced transhumance for centuries, migrating seasonally with their herds between highland and lowland pastures. 'Kuku' (Cuckoo) encapsulates the lived realities of these migratory cycles, transforming the bird into a spokesperson for the tribals' endurance amid poverty, ecological disruption, and socio-economic marginalization. As a dynamic oral tradition, the song has evolved through successive retellings, yet consistently preserves the bird as a symbolic mediator between the human and non-human worlds. Following Finnegan's (1970) assertion that oral literature must be understood as a performative and communal act, the folk song 'Kufound in the reference ku' emerges not merely as a text but as a living social archive. Additionally, drawing upon Evans-Pritchard's seminal work on pastoralist societies, it becomes evident that for communities like the Gujjars and Bakarwals, livelihood, identity, and social organization are inextricably tied to patterns of cattle rearing and seasonal movement. The folk song 'Kuku' mirrors similar pastoral realities, encoding the socio-economic rhythms of transhumant life.

The central research problem addressed in this study is how the bird motif in 'Kuku' transcends its immediate cultural context to articulate a broader archetypal narrative of migration, resilience, and ecological symbiosis. Using archetypal criticism, supported by semiotic and ethnographic approaches, the paper explores how the symbolic resonance of the bird operates within both the specific socio-cultural setting of the Gujjar and Bakerwal communities and a universal human tradition of meaning-making through nature. In doing so, it situates 'Kuku' within global traditions of folklore and literary expression, underscoring the folksong's capacity to bridge cultural and temporal divides while preserving the ecological and emotional knowledge systems of a marginalized people. As Saussure (1966) theorized, cultural meaning is produced through the interplay of signifiers and signified, a dynamic clearly visible in the evolving symbolism of the cuckoo within Gujjar-Bakarwal folklore. Further, as Saussure posits that meaning is not inherent but generated through the arbitrary relationship between the signifier (such as the image of the bird) and the signified (ideas such as migration, longing, and freedom). In the context of 'Kuku', the cuckoo becomes

a powerful cultural signifier, representing the tribals' emotional and ecological realities rather than merely describing a natural phenomenon.

The paper is an attempt to interpret the universal themes of a bird motif while exploring how the Gujjar folk song 'Kuku' transcends cultural boundaries and time periods. It also makes a literary encounter with works of similar nature, and in that, the song underscores the archetypal significance of tribal folk throughout the world and eras. Herein, Barthes' (1977) concept that myth transforms history into nature is particularly relevant to the analysis of 'Kuku'. The bird song, initially a natural event, undergoes cultural re-signification and becomes mythologized as a herald of migration, renewal, and emotional resilience among the tribal community.

This study primarily employs a qualitative methodology grounded in textual analysis and artistic interpretation. The analysis focuses on interpreting the Gojri folk song 'Kuku' as a literary and cultural artifact, examining its symbolic structures, archetypal motifs, and thematic resonances within broader folkloric and literary traditions. Rather than fieldwork or direct interviews with indigenous communities, the research is based on close readings of the song's oral and textual versions, supplemented by comparative analysis with parallel folkloric traditions. The artistic interpretation approach allows for an exploration of the imaginative, symbolic, and emotional layers embedded in the folk song, situating it within the collective cultural consciousness of the Gujjar and Bakerwal communities.

III. Bird archetypes and motifs in literature: A brief background

An exploration of literature, especially poetry, can open vistas of an investigation into the representation of the human condition through the symbolic narration of birds. There are prominent examples, such as Dickinson's life-affirming poem in which she renders the idea of hope through the metaphor of a vulnerable yet strong bird. Oblique to this representation is Poe's haunting association of human grief and descent into madness through the illusory presence of a raven. It is magical that poets have been able to translate human experience through the imagery of birds, and this high point can also be witnessed in P.B. Shelly's exaltation of Skylark (Shelly 1820). It is infused with the idea of elevating the human mind and its capacity for imagination. There is an envious adoration of the bird, for the poet wishes to escape his fetters of tragedy and levitate in the land of unbridled creativity, choice, and peace of freedom. This notion of the transcendence of the human condition is often connected with the imagery of birds.

Tracing the mythological fascination with animals, particularly birds, yields very penetrating developments. It is observed that the anthropomorphism and also divination of birds had been a collective phenomenon. The avian species Cuckoo exerts a formidable influence on the collective consciousness of the Indian populace owing to its distinctive vocalisations. This bird finds its place in an abundance of myths, folklore, and traditional songs. A plethora of folk festivals reverently honour the Cuckoo as an emblem of optimism, fertility and bountiful harvests (Rajendran 2011). Moreover, in the majority of Bhojpuri folksongs, it is revered as a symbol of affection and amorous sentiments (Upadhyaya 967). An example of this can be seen below:

Cuckoo you look frightful but (your) speech is sweet. O cuckoo, your speech is so sweet that even the Trinity of Gods get pleasure (from it). Gajadhar enjoys

(it) at Gaya and Benimadhaws at Prayag (. . .). (Upadhyaya 1967: 64).

This folk ballad encompasses the presence and profound impact of the Cuckoo, transcending from the material realm to the spiritual domain, all through the musical resonance of its voice. The Cuckoo's song is likened to the mystical melodies of Lord Krishna's divine flute. As expounded by (Chopra 2017: 81), Cuckoos hold a significant place in numerous Indian legends and have deeply influenced the tapestry of Indian folklore, ancient literature, poetry, folk songs, and music. It is believed that this bird served as an inspiration for Kalidasa, an eminent ancient Indian author, while composing his masterpieces *Shakuntala* and *Meghadootam* (Ibid.). In a lesser-known Hindu tale, Goddess Sati subjected herself to a self-inflicted penance and took the form of the bird cuckoo for a thousand celestial years. The cuckoo bird is observed as a witness who records the hardships of humans and Gods in equal measure. Indian folk tales, folk songs, and mythology abound with references to this avian creature. The profound association of a bird with divination presents an intellectually stimulating aspect that has been thoroughly examined in scholarly discourse. For instance, Garry, Jane, and El-Shamy, in their significant work, address this notion with examples from various cultures far-flung from each other. It is noted that:

Many cultures deemed birds important in their mythology, legend, and folktale tradition, believing that they possess powers of prophecy and associating them with gods. The roc, phoenix, and griffin are examples of such birds... Now, they are seen to possess the ability to talk, offering guidance to humans, guarding treasures, and sending messages to gods ...Stories of these fabulous birds have parallels with stories of the garuda of India, the simorgh of Persia, the anka of Arabia and Turkey, the feng-huang of China, and the bennu of Egypt (Garry et al. 2005: 80).

In continuation with this stream of thought, it is also to be highlighted that the connotation of the animal may change from one culture to another. It may be imparted with attributes that differ, which again is a testament to the diversity of human thought. The archetype might recur, but it is the presence of variations that underscores the contradictory impressions of the animals from one region to another. A common object might have radically diverse meanings in other cultures if one studies the distribution of motifs in folklore or literature in general:

In studying the distributions of motifs, one finds that the same object in different cultures may hold vastly different meanings. For example, snakes are found in the mythology and folktales of many cultures. While in Judeo-Christian tradition the snake usually symbolizes evil, in India it is a sacred creature that plays a major role in folklore and in many Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu legends. In European folklore the dragon is a guardian of remote, dark regions and often a beast to whom humans must be sacrificed, but in many Asian cultures dragons are helpers of human beings and bring good luck (Garry 2005: XVII).

Interesting as it is to note this flavour of change across far-flung cultures, literary works harp on this societal feature to present subjective interpretations of an animal. As

Jung expressed this dynamism of motifs while saying, ‘What seems like a bird to you is a serpent to the other, and what seems like a serpent to you is a bird to the other’ (Jung 2009). An example of this can be aptly seen in the usage of the word cuckoo, which signals the oft-intended meaning of cuckoldry in most cultures. As discussed above, the same object might have diverse connotations, and it is also seen in one of the tales of a Chinese myth. The tale surrounds the figure of Tu Yu, who was sent into exile and came to hear the call of a cuckoo. The story can be read as an observation to understand the stark change in the same object over a difference in culture.

...it was said that when he (TuYii) left his kingdom in shame and went from Shu into exile, the call of the tzu-kuei bird was heard, and so the deposed king became identified with the bird. Some translators render the name of the bird as the cuckoo. But although the cuckoo has the connotation of cuckoldry in Western lore and the theme of cuckoldry is present in the narrative, it has not been used to render tzu-kuei here for the reason that the punning intention of cuckoo-cuckoldry is not present in the Chinese text. The name nightjar has been used instead. This semantically neutral name also has the virtue of coinciding with the sympathetic attitude of traditional writers toward the figure of Tu Yii (Birrell 1999: 197).

Similarly, the literary imagery of a ‘bird’ changes from one poem to another. For instance, the poem “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” by Maya Angelou is unlike the examples of poems seen above. In the work, there is a contrast between a ‘free bird’ and a ‘caged bird’ suggesting the inevitable and irrevocable spasms of human misfortune, fate, and treachery of oppression. To discuss further, in the composition of Keats’ “Ode to a Nightingale”, birds and their songs have an undeniable influence on the human mind. The poet offers art as a source of solace in the midst of the perennial human condition of loss, grief, and pain. It enables a society to traverse the whimsicality of the human condition while keeping the bird song as a North Star to guide them out of the worldly tempest. It is a universal archetype that, despite the growth of distance between human communities, is resonated with the multiple interpretations of hope, dread, courage, freedom, and artistic creativity. At this juncture, it is pertinent to mention that this multifarious and variously interpretative conception of birds, according to Jung, is a beautiful shared reservoir of universal experiences and memories inherited by all human beings.

The impetus to study archetypes from literature to folklore has propelled a scholarly contribution and criticism. In terms of folklorist analysis of motifs, Vladimir Propp developed the theory of the ‘morphology of the folktale’, which has become a foundational approach in the study of folktales and their archetypal elements. American folklorist Stith Thompson is renowned for his vast work in the categorisation and cataloguing of folktales. He developed the ‘Motif-Index of Folk-Literature’, a thorough database of folklore motifs that includes archetypal components frequently appearing in many cultural narratives. Linda Dégh, a Hungarian-American folklorist known for her work on the folklore genre, worked with renowned Hungarian folklorist Gyula Ortutay to work on a research methodology that was based on text comparison. She created her own contextual methodology on folklore genres, including motifs in legends and folk narratives. British author and academic Marina Warner is well-known for her

research on myths, fairy tales, and folktales. In order to investigate the symbolic and cultural relevance of folklore in literature and culture, her research frequently uses archetypal and motif analysis. Devoted to the intricate and marvelously deep storytelling of folklore, critics and academicians have made sound developments to revive the corpus of folklore with renewed interest.

IV. Bird motif in Gojri folk song ‘Kuku’

Gujjar and Bakerwal tribal communities predominantly speak the Gojri language and have a rich oral tradition, and their cultural practices include folk music, dance, and traditional attire. It is important to note that Gujjars and Bakerwals face various socio-economic and cultural challenges, including access to education, healthcare, land rights, and representation, and the tribals face it with resilience as captured in the rich folklore. Additionally, these folklores play a significant role in preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge, beliefs, and values within these tribal communities. Many of their folktales revolve around animals and portray their qualities, behaviours, and interactions with humans. These stories often carry moral lessons and provide insights into the human-animal bond. In the current folk song, the overarching theme is the remembrance of a tribal’s existence. The bird sings about the trials of the tribals hence allowing the memory of his existence to be imbued with essence. It is a poignant prayer of the tribal throughout the song that the bird must keep singing while providing him with the comfort of genuine companionship and sincere telling of his story. The poem begins with the lines:

*Kuku tera gal vich pat gi dor hai Jeetan ga chagra, de moyan ki hor hai
Pardesiya kukua bol, terra bolna layi dhaadi kaani Oh firaqiya kukua bol*

There is a silk ribbon on your neck, Cuckoo
When a person is alive, he is busy
with arguments. But when he is dead, he is buried under the grave. Cuckoo of
foreign lands, sing!

Oh! Cuckoo of heartfelt angst, sing!’ (Rahi 2023: 79).

In the first line, the bird wears a silken ribbon around its neck. It could imply a necessary and humanised personalisation of an alien bird into a warm companion of the tribal. With the ribbon, the bird becomes a part of his world and enables the tribal to know it is available as an intent listener. Further, while exposing the pretense of human bonds, there is a judgment on the vainglorious existence of human civilisation, which considers wars, fights, and arguments as an epitome of power, ambition, and purpose. Eventually, everything which is gained is lost in this pointless display of violence, and the participants perish in the grave. The idea is meaningful considering the human propensity for domestic disturbance, public chaos, and global warfare. The tribal community may be seen as an isolated and even a marginal dot on the map of human progress, but the folk song shows the power of sensibility in the tribal ethos. In the modern age, it is the stream of sensibility that is being corrupted in the club of human achievements and strides of technological prowess. The song deconstructs the high rise with a simple exposition of human foibles and a lack of sincerity in emotions and relationships.

It is not fallacious to develop tools, ideas, and systems attuned to human intelligence.

But it is downright a malady to do so without putting insurance of forethought for the survival of the planet as a whole. It is this attack on human hubris which is impressed upon while delivering a closer read of the song. Connected to this thought is the displacement of the human monopoly over nature with a co-evolutionary realisation of symbiosis between humans and nonhumans. In the last two lines, there is an earnest pleading that the bird must continue singing. The bird's song narrates the struggles of the tribal, which gives it an empathetic meaning of solace and reassurance. Throughout the song, the tribal fervently beg the bird to continue singing while finding hope in its innocent companionship and heartfelt narration of his story. It is the gravity and sombre sense of humanity in the song that the tribal finds in it emotional support against his hardships.

Poetic literature is beautifully overflowing with the idea of full circle or cradle to grave while commenting upon the meaning of existence and its loss in the distractions of negative human emotions. For instance, in the poem "Time, Real and Imaginary" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the poet narrates the quandary of human existence, which is consequently leading to death. However, though the surface meaning might appear cynical, the poet is presenting a panacea for the human condition. Human existence might be anathema, but the creative output of imagination and the reflection on nature, much like the bird song, is a cure for the ills of human mortality. In "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard," Gray is adamant that the life of the obscure and forgotten villagers must be remembered despite the overrun of morality, poverty, and social standing. It is this remembrance that the bird in the folk song 'Kuku' faithfully complies with. The bird, through the song, ensures the unsung tribal in his travails is not forgotten by the mainstream or by his own self.

In the poem, it can be wondered if the poets were able to understand the language of the animals or if it was purely an imaginative exercise. There is a mysterious or one can mystic sense of interplay between a poet and nature wherein it seems the conversation is not one-sided. The language may not be human, but there is certainly a resonance of understanding between human and nonhuman. The folk song exemplifies this discerning depth of nature that can be observed in the Gujjar communities. Through their daily cycles of borrowing and giving back to nature, along with the repository of oral lore, the connection between humans and non-humans is not a mute hegemony of one over the other. As Ruth Finnegan emphasizes, oral literature is not a static relic but a dynamic form of social expression continually reshaped by the lived experiences of a community. "Kuku," in its multiple variations and adaptations, exemplifies how oral traditions in the Gujjar-Bakarwal community evolve to reflect contemporary challenges while retaining ancestral memories. Consequently, in order to harness the pastures of nature, the tribals realise how much to take and how much to grow. It is not entirely a simple sense of economic lifestyle but a habit that is developed after years of living in absolute symbiosis with nature. There is an interesting work on this that deals in detail with this non-spoken language between humans and non-humans which cannot be reduced to a literary topos. The work addresses that the poets are able to imitate and understand birds, and it is not an isolated occurrence:

In his anthropological survey about the development of humankind, Lucretius considers imitation of the sounds of nature, in primis birdsong, as the origin of

the human language. The first men were able to sing like the birds even before they began to speak a human language and perform poems. The actual activities of the poet — devising and constructing — are thus conceived as mimesis — the imitation of nature and human life. Conscious formulations of this idea appear as early as the fifth century, presenting imitation either as a recreation, through voice, music, dance, and gesture, of the actions and utterances of men and animals— or, with more specific reference to the figurative arts, as the production of an inanimate, visible object that is a realistic replica of something living (Palmisciano 2022: 107).

Orality is a tradition, and Gujjar folklore is testimony to the equilibrium which has been put in place between the tribals and their surroundings. It brings to attention the need to revitalise this system in order to herald an eco-friendly advancement of the human race. The concept of a bird in folklore is also associated with the notion of escape. This is an oft-used conception, which has seen its interpretation in various literary works to oral lore. The idea of escape using bird imagery can be seen in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. The motif has been profusely used in the work, and if any exegesis is carried out on it, it will require a new research paper. For the sake of reference, it is curious to note how the idea of escape is a prevalent theme which is the first thing one embarks upon while seeing a bird:

Stephen's general discomfort in his new surroundings. flying, ponderous football, introduces bird imagery that will pervade the novel; here, it is used to identify the mythical escape theme which unifies the novel. Young Dedalus (like his Greek namesake, Dacdalus) sees himself in a hostile environment from which, at least for the moment, he is unlikely to escape, although he would like to. Similarly, Stephen (the name of the first Christian martyr) suffers ridicule because of the uniqueness of his name; he is mercilessly questioned about his name by a bullying classmate, Nasty Roche (O'Shea 1986: 52).

Similarly, the notion of escape is visible in the folk song in a very unique sense. The tribal knows he cannot surrender, but through the bird song, he is able to live under a simulation that his condition is not as bleak or abysmal as it appears. The song enables the temporary suspension of his real life and, through the genuine touch of empathy, provides him with a flight from his tragic life. The bird song also narrates the excruciating pain of departure faced by a tribal due to migration. He has to walk away from his family and belongingness to a place and a life that could have been different if he were not tribal. This departure can have varied meanings depending on the diverse experience of tribals who are even now languishing in the prisons of forced land annexations, the injustice of law and policing, and the irremediable stereotypes and prejudices of the mainstream against them. In the modern world, it is not only the non-human world that is devastated by the human ego but the 'others' as well. The marginalisation of a human community because of its traditional ways of livelihood and ethnicity is a moot point in the scholarly encyclopedias of human intelligence.

Kirby Brown's argument that oral traditions serve as active practices of survival and self-determination aligns closely with the role of 'Kuku' among Gujjars and Bakarwals. Through its emotive portrayal of migration, struggle, and perseverance, the song

emerges not merely as cultural memory but as a vibrant assertion of tribal identity in changing socio-political landscapes. While reading folklore and other cultural practices, as well as indigenous knowledge, ingenious methods can be discovered to enable a green living of the mainstream. On this note, it is generally seen how the natural landscape and its symmetry are often used as examples of perfection when human society falls into disarray. Animals and birds, for instance, are usually observed as representing that natural perfection envisioned and longed for by humans (Otono & Akoma 2021). In addition to this facet, in the poem, the bird is beseeched to keep singing the notes of empathy, for with it, the alienated nomads are able to find comfort, which might be a 'little thing with feathers' but it is an impregnable fortress when it comes to the emotional support and oral history of the tribals. This idea which departs from the concept of godly power or sacred connotation of the bird is grounded on the companionship of a bird or any animal whatsoever. Here, it is interesting to highlight how in most of the folklore, animals are mostly associated with helping the main characters in their journey. In Albanian fairy tales, for instance,

The hero will often use a ruse to get the Earthly Beauty or some animal to assist him. Snakes are particularly common and are uniformly good in Albanian tales and mythology. Among other animal figures common in folktales are owls, nightingales and the gjysmagjel (Half Rooster), a one-legged bird who has many an adventure in the course of its travels, carrying its weary companions on its back or in its belly (Elsie 23).

The livelihood and sustenance of a tribal is dependent on the animals. Gujjars rely on the cows and buffalos, and Bakerwals rear sheep and goats. Surrounded by the ever-giving soul of nature, the tribals, which depend upon folklore for support, create a voice in the animals to achieve resilience. It is not only a song that provides entertainment, but it is a prayer, an earnest solicitation of help, and clamour for support in the trying life of a tribal. Instead of approaching the human population of the mainstream who have fixedly overlooked the indigenous, the tribals depend on the animals for emotional and spiritual support as well. However, it is also to be noted that this is one aspect of the story, and in folklore, birds are associated with demonic creatures, which could explain the subconscious fear of flight, the envy of what is unattainable, or the nostalgic fascination with the idea of a bird which can touch the sky. It can be a fruitful exercise to cover some known bird motifs in various folklore around the world. Some notable ones are:

...a large part of bird imagery in folklore and folk tales is negative or fearsome. Birdlike monsters are omnipresent in myths and legends of most cultures. Harpies, Sphinxes, Griffins, and Dragons...Japanese folklore (has the ominous) tengu or bird demon...Ra or Horus is depicted as a bird (Beauvais 2016: 129).

In India, it has been observed that, unlike the Western characterization of animals based on spiritual qualities, here, it is based on natural attributes. It can be highlighted:

Whereas in Western tradition the spiritual antagonism of bird and serpent is commonly understood and stressed, the opposition, as symbolized in India, is

strictly that of the natural elements: sun force against the liquid energy of the earthly waters...The bird is addressed as 'He who kills nagas or serpents' (nagantaka, bhujagantaka), 'He who devours serpents' (pannagasana, nagasana). His proper name is Garuda, from the root gri, 'to swallow'. As the relentless annihilator of serpents, he is possessed of a mystic power against the effects of poison; hence is popular in folklore and daily worship (Zimmer 1990: 74).

Connected to this thought, the tribals view the bird cuckoo as singing a song that is part of its nature and not a dramatised effect for a moral lesson or aesthetic value. The bird chirrup and the tribals view it in the realm of its nature while collating its musical tune with the idea of reassurance, peace, stability, and support. Related to this thought, birds throughout the ages have also been portrayed as guides that enable travellers to find their desired direction. There is an entire field of pseudoscience which is a form of divination in which foretelling is provided using bird behaviour, flight patterns, and calls to interpret omens or forecast the future. In the bygone era, people believed that birds were messengers or symbols of the divine in many different cultures and historical eras and that their motions and vocalisations contained significant messages or foresight into the future. This can be observed in the example of Cuckoos, who was said to have the 'power of prophecy, specifically regarding the length of one's life (Murphy-Hiscock 2011). In the corpus of the medieval Jewish literature, this form has been widely discussed:

The details of the ornithomantic techniques and attempts to explain their workings are especially prominent in the medieval Jewish mystical literature, including the kabbalah. Such techniques include deciphering bird chirps and bird calls for divinatory purposes, interpreting flight patterns or other avian behavior to predict the future, sometimes using living birds in magical rites, and so on (Bar-Asher 2021: 895).

Apart from being seen as an object of divination, birds are also associated with totemic belief systems. They are revered and thought to have spiritual importance. They may also symbolise a certain group, family, clan, or tribe. The totem acts as an emblem and is frequently connected to specific traits or characteristics that the group identifies with. Totemic figures have been found all over the world, which prove the consecrated nature of birds as recorded through cave art, masks, and totem poles. The existence of these artefacts provides an answer or creates more questions regarding the fascination of humanity with birds as divine creatures or spiritual guides. Commenting on this subconscious attachment to birds, it can be noted:

The motives, conscious and subliminal, which underlie these symbols would repay investigation. Certain characteristics of birds have always impressed men—their swift motion, sudden apparition and disappearance, and the suggestion of communion with higher powers implicit in their powers of flight. Impressions thus gained have led to ideas concerning the visits of winged gods or their aerial ambassadors and, on the other hand, to concepts of the soul as a bird (Armstrong 2012: 16).

This is a strain of thought which explains the different motifs of a bird in folklore and literature in general. Reading the story of Icarus, for example, who wanted to fly like a bird, highlights the idea of overreaching potential and the shimmering gem of ambition. It is the flavour of purpose which allows the human to breach his limits and reach a state of fastened evolution. This was a Renaissance spirit that was either condemned or empathised with, such as in the tales of Dr Faustus. All in all, the bird motif can unify the idea of progress and human will in an effective way to capture the need for a sensible approach to development. In the next lines, the folk song highlights the arrival of Baisakh or the month of April.

Aayo ae baisakh, tokein tur peyo maal ae Neela neela tala, kuku bole naalon
naal ae Kukua tera ban bich ke sona khet hai Tapiye tup rabba naal sadke ret
hai

The month of Vaisakha is here now. The cattle have started migrating now.
Amid the green pastures, the cuckoo is following us. In the forest, there are
beautiful fields. There is sunshine and sand (Rahi 2023: 79).

During this month, various regions of India celebrate the time of harvest with music, cultural performances, and feasts. For the tribals, it is the signal for the settled to non-settled tribal communities to leave their temporary/permanent abodes and start the gruelling experience of migration. The communities migrate to the upper reaches in order to find and secure green pastures for their herd. It is interesting to highlight that the Cuckoo and its bird song have been, throughout poetic literature, seen as a harbinger of spring. For instance, in *To the Cuckoo* by Wordsworth, the poem is dedicated to the bird for the joy it brings while infusing a new life after the cold winter months. The work by Christina Rossetti, *Spring Quiet*, describes the various gentle sounds of nature that contribute to the tranquility of the season, such as the soft breeze, rustling leaves, buzzing bees, and the murmuring stream. The cuckoo's call is also mentioned, enhancing the overall sense of calm and renewal that comes with spring. As an archetype, the bird song of the Cuckoo is associated with the time of rejuvenation and rebirth. In the tribal folk song, the festival of Baisakh is spearheaded with the call of the cuckoo, which in the Gujjar folklore is perceived as a signal of warmer weather and the onset of migration. In the song, the tribal is joyous that no matter which direction he takes during the seasonal migration, the bird will follow him with the perpetual singing of understanding. It is an imaginary thought or a temporary suspension of disbelief that allows him to escape, and in that, the tribal is able to endure with forbearance.

Another significant aspect of the bird song is how it is historicised as it narrates every aspect of tribal life, allowing him to remember his past. It also delivers knowledge of his ancestral heritage, which allows him to prepare for his role in the tribal community. It is narrated in the song that there is an effervescent presence of pain which matches the deplorable existence of a tribal. This, in turn, suggests a note of empathy between human and non-human participants on planet Earth. Further, upon closer interaction with the song, it can be seen the bird could be a lover, a personified idea of grief, or a companion of a tribal. It can also be observed that the bird might be an alter-ego of the tribal, who finds his migratory tradition in the flight of the bird.

In the next lines, there is a satirical note on the meaning of human bonds, which fails to carry any weight in the face of life and death.

Aayo hai basiakh kuku ban meri jaan Jeeta na siyaan moan ga farmaan Khiyalia
kukua bol

Tera bolaane layi daadi kaali Firaqiya kukua bol.

The month of Baisakh is upon us. When a person is alive, he is preached at
When he dies, orders do not stop coming. Oh imaginary bird, you must
sing. Oh! Cuckoo of heartfelt angst, sing (Rahi 80).

The lines emphasise that the living have to endure self-righteous dictums of the community around them, and after death, there is an endless dictation of entitled sermons. The lines are very pungent, which realises how in the commotion of ego, the essential garment of human bonds is often forgotten. Gujjars and Bakerwals are a close-knit community that fosters respect for each other and nature. In the light of the world's constant harassment, the tribal, through these lines, is innocently pleading with a bird to tell him about his sorrows and harsh journey. The tribal is also honest in exposing the problems of the society, which make the temporary life of a mortal on earth miserable and full of grief.

In these lines, the tribal understands that the bird is imaginary by calling it 'khiyalia', which implies make-believe. It is a comfort of art which enables him to sour above his trials like many poets have time and again captured in their poetic compositions. In another interpretation, it could also be that the epithet of 'khiyalia' implies that the bird is highly introspective and capable of rational thought. In either case, the tribals beg the bird to keep singing so the journey of his life is accompanied by the genuine tone of music rather than the notoriously bleak words of debates and arguments.

V. Tribal self-reflexivity and the way forward

The recognition of pain is a conscious activity that involves self-observation, introspection, and the highest form of mental capacity or self-reflexivity. The tribal in the song creates the bird in the image of his needs as he requires someone to hear him, empower him, and support him in his tortuous journey of survival. It is a deep thought which dwells on the idea of tragedy, making the victim highly perceptive of his surroundings and essence. The idea can be observed in Dante wherein the aviary figures in the heaven of Jupiter exhibit self-reflexiveness:

This cluster of bird images intimates the power of self-reflection to gesture towards—and even intimate and incarnate through artistic creation—a dimension that otherwise simply eludes rational comprehension (Franke 2021: 45).

Understanding the environment through self-interrogation, heightened by the harsh conditions of society, is a perennial attribute of a tribal community. In the folklore of Gujjars and Bakerwals, this facet is a pristine quality and a touchstone of tribal knowledge. Moulded by the impartial severity of nature and the preferential treatment of the mainstream, the tribals have gained self-consciousness, which is evident in their lore. To further buttress this point, the bird can also symbolise the human condition and

its existential crisis, which is not to be taken as a complete comprehension of the song. The tribal migrates with the burden of despair, and the bird cajoles him to travel, supports him to persevere, and tells him about his life through an attentive ear. It is migratory, and so is the tribal. The relationship is a reminder for the modern age to allow the breath of nature in the skyscrapers and tunnels of a post-human age. It is only through the bird song of man and nature that the mind of human consumption and financial gallops of ambition can be at peace. The conception is to humanise the leap of progress and not to paralyse it with the paranoid inflexion of an anti-technology refrain. The balance of thought and action can be achieved by the recognition of a tribal world that is embedded in the symbiotic interaction with nature and its non-human entities. To put it poetically, the mainstream understanding of the tribal world can be a mariner's epiphany, like in the poem 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,' in which the character realises that it was his hunting of the albatross which was the reason for his losses. Only through a redemptive transformation of his 'self' he learned to respect the sanity of the natural world and its 'othered' participants. The bird song could be a wake-up call that could chaperone the infant tinkering with technology with a wholesome prospect of an egalitarian future.

This study explored the archetypal significance of the bird motif in the Gojri folk song 'Kuku' positioning it within the broader contexts of folklore, oral tradition, and cultural memory. Through a qualitative methodology combining textual analysis and artistic interpretation, the research illuminated how the song transforms the natural image of the cuckoo into a profound cultural symbol, articulating the lived realities of migration, ecological negotiation, and emotional endurance among the Gujjar and Bakerwal communities. The analysis demonstrated that 'Kuku' is not a static artifact but a dynamic, evolving expression of communal identity and resilience.

By interpreting 'Kuku' alongside global traditions where birds signify transcendence, freedom, and survival, the study affirms that the Gojri folk song resonates with universal archetypal patterns embedded in the collective human unconscious. Moreover, the findings underscore the crucial role of oral traditions in preserving indigenous ecological wisdom and historical memory in the face of socio-economic and environmental transformations. Although the research was based primarily on textual engagement rather than direct fieldwork, the artistic and symbolic analysis offered rich insights into the ways cultural meaning is continuously constructed and reimagined within marginalized communities.

Ultimately, the folk song 'Kuku' emerges as both a witness and a participant in the tribals' existential journey — a testament to the enduring power of oral literature to carry hope, grief, resistance, and survival across generations and geographies.

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