

TAKE AWAY FREE THE BEAUTIFUL THINGS OF NATURE

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Many beautiful things of nature are absolutely free. The sight of the crimson sky in the morning or the plays of colours on the horizon at sunset are a festive treat to the eyes. Nobody buys or sells such unparalleled beauty of the nature. Those wonderful sights of nature are free for all people. Whether a person pays attention to the beautiful sights of the nature or not or appreciate it or not, the sight is freely available to all persons without any distinction.

But it is also true that many beautiful things of nature are not easily available for all people. Take for instance the chirping of birds. My house is very close to the botanical gardens of St. Xavier's College at Ahmedabad. Around the college there are four-five different botanical gardens. I find it difficult to make up my mind about what is more – the different species of birds or the variety of trees and plants?

A bird watcher Bishop Francis Brangaza of Baroda who serves the college after his retirement, says that he has counted 82 different kinds of birds in the botanical gardens including those birds which fly over the college. Bishop Brangaza sits at the porch of his bungalow every day in the morning and evening and habitually watches the birds in the closeby botanical gardens. So I am not surprised that he was able to count 82 species of birds in the sprawling college campus.

My own residence is situated in the other end of the college campus away from Bishop Brangaza's bungalow. My house too is very close to a botanical garden of the college. In the botanical garden, I believe, not just 82 varieties of birds but more than a hundred species of the birds!

Perhaps there are not a hundred species of birds but there are certainly thousands of birds of many species. For, I get up with hearing the beautiful chirping-hymns of a lot of birds in the morning.

During summer seasons when I go to sleep on the terrace at 11 P.M. there is absolute silence. The whole nature is in deep slumber. But to get up at 5 AM according to my habit I do not need an alarm clock. The birds in the botanical garden serve me the purpose of an alarm clock!

The chirping of hundreds of birds is very pleasant to hear in the morning. The chirping-music of the birds in the morning is very pleasing to the ears. The beauty of the chirping-music is that it is free. Everyone, rich or poor, high or low, is welcome to enjoy it. You need not go to any concert hall or to the recital of a choir group to hear the music. You neither need to go to any musical recital or buy any expensive ticket to a musical event. No. The birds in the botanical garden sing freely for you and me!

But I am sad that, in spite of this chirping-music being free, this music does not reach all people. The people staying in the concrete jungles of the city do not get the privilege of listening to the beautiful chirping-music of the birds!

To begin a day with the chirping-music of the birds is great. In the chirping of hundreds of birds it is almost impossible to make out which bird makes the one or the other sounds of chirping. Still the chirping of certain birds stands out. So it is not too difficult to distinguish the sounds of crows, peacocks, cuckoos, and sparrow. But it is great fun to listen to the combined sound of the chirping of all the birds instead of breaking your head to distinguish the chirping of one bird from that of another bird.

When I listen to the chirpings of different birds, I am amazed at the variety of their sounds. I hear the sweet and loud song of a small black bird as big as my thumb. I wonder from where does the long and shrill sound comes from such a small being!

But I am more amazed by the variety of birds in size, colour, shape and appearance than the variety of their sounds. In the book of Genesis in the Bible there is the story of creation. In it God says, "Let the air be filled with birds. So God created...all kinds of birds...and he told the birds to increase in number" (Genesis 2, 20-22).

The variety in the species of birds is a miracle of creation. In the variety of the species of birds, in their chirping in the colour of their wings, in the way of building their nests, in their different capacities to fly, in their mating calls and in their food habits, we can wonder the beauty of the creation!

On the one hand there are birds smaller than your thumb and on the other hand there are very big birds like the African ostrich. Ostriches are unique that they are not able to fly like other birds. But they can run very fast on account of their long necks and very long legs. There are no ostriches in Gujarat. But in Gujarati language we have a popular expression "shahmrugh-vruti". It is said that when faced with threats the ostriches bury their heads in the sand and see no danger. So believing that there is no danger even when the danger persists is called "shahmrugh-vruti" or habit of ostrich.

The biggest birds in India are considered the Swans and Himalayan vultures. In Gujarat the biggest birds are the some types of hens and peacocks. Peacocks can fly to the top of trees or to the terrace of 5-6 storied buildings. Peacocks spend their nights high on the branches of tall trees. Peahens lay their eggs on high places. But they seek their food on the ground.

The dance of peacock before peahens is a sight worth seeing. It is a wonderful sight when a peacock flaps the wings and spreads out its tail-feathers in a very colourful round shape and dances proudly within the sight of peahens. It is superb exhibition of nature. Peacock is considered the symbol of pride and haughtiness.

Similarly different kinds of birds are symbols for different things. The hens are the symbol of motherly love. Lark is the symbol of jolly temperament. Swan is the symbol of goodness and charm. Nightingale which sings at night is the symbol of loneliness. The owl is symbol of wisdom. Dove is the symbol of peace and innocence. The king of the birds, the eagle is the symbol of power and strength. An eagle is also used as symbol of political power and army might.

Sometimes I roam around the botanical gardens of St. Xavier's College. It is a sort of other worldly experience to walk through the botanical gardens during the early morning and late evening hours listening to birds singing in a big choir of nature! As I walk I observe different species of birds but I do not know the names of most of the birds in the botanical gardens. So once I bought a book on birds. After reading the book with pictures of many kinds of birds and their specific appearances and characteristics, I thought that there is great pleasure in bird watching even without knowing the names of all the birds.

Some birds in the botanical gardens of St. Xavier's College are familiar like crows, Robins (a small bird with red breast) bulbul, dove, woodpecker, parrot, kite, eagle, cuckoo, partridge, peacock, etc. Listening to the birds singing one late evening a friend who came to meet me said, it looks that you have a big bird sanctuary around! I told the person that the college botanical garden is also a bird sanctuary!

Birds are indeed the winged friends of us. The worms and flies, which destroy our flower-plants and cultivation, are the food of the birds. Thanks to the birds, the fruits, vegetables of our fields and the plants of our gardens are protected from insects that might have otherwise destroyed them.

Then, birds like vultures help us to clear away the bodies of dead animals. Thus these winged friends help us to protect our environment.

Jesus Christ has given us the example of birds for a life free from the worries and anxieties. He said once, "Look at the birds: they do not sow seeds, gather a harvest and put it in barns; yet your Father in heaven takes care of them! Are'nt you worth much more than birds. Can any of you live a bit longer by worrying about it?" (Mt. 6, 26-27). **(Contact: ciss@satyam.net.in)**