

Celebrating the koel

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We live in a world where we have no time to marvel at the mysteries of nature.



PROTECTION: Ensure safety.

Do you sometimes wonder who God is and what he/she looks like? Maybe if I asked you if you know someone who is Godlike you might speak of someone you respect and love. And if I were to ask you, who is Nature? Most of us know what is natural — so the trees, the seas, the birds and animals are all part of Nature, right? But just like it is difficult to define God it is also difficult to define Nature — or at least it seems to be difficult these days.

Yet not so long ago, humanity felt closer to both Nature and God, as it lived in more direct contact with the earth and the seasons and marvelled at the mystery of it all. Because the experience was real, it didn't seem to matter much that the concepts were abstract. Nature was revered, feared and loved. The sun, the moon, the elements, birds, animals became 'Gods' because people experienced their connection to and dependence on them. Today, we lead a lifestyle that doesn't spare us the time to watch the sun rise every day, and so these days we are not very sure what is "sacred" anymore.

Recently I heard a story that epitomises the state of our disconnection from the sacred. A certain Hindu ritual called the *Kokilavrat* involves the worship of a particular bird — the koel. With the depredation of urban biodiversity, this bird has all but vanished in modern cities. An enterprising girl in Nagpur discovered that the zoo near her home actually housed a koel.

Worship the bird

On the auspicious day, she went out to the zoo in the morning and made offerings of rice and kumkum along with her prayers. Happy with her discovery, she came back home and unfortunately told her neighbour of her success with the ritual. Pretty soon word was out and the zoo had a stream of enthusiastic believers visiting the bird. That evening, exhausted by the trauma of being worshipped all day, the bird died.

Surely the koel is a sacred bird — as sacred as all the birds that exist — and sacred, also, simply because they do exist. Can you imagine a world without any birds at all? Maybe it is time to renew our rituals so that they respect life and ensure a healthy environment for all forms of life on earth!

In collaboration with Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group