

Celebrating Ocean Life and Marine Conservation



Fantastic Friday is celebrated as a fun reminder to appreciate and protect marine life, especially sharks and other fascinating sea creatures that play a vital role in maintaining ocean balance. The day encourages people to learn about marine conservation, reduce plastic use, and support sustainable seafood choices. By spreading awareness about ocean health, it highlights how everyday actions can help preserve underwater ecosystems for future generations. Through education, community activities, and social media campaigns, Fantastic Friday inspires individuals to respect the oceans and take small steps towards protecting the planet's most mysterious and vital habitats.

#FAREWELL

The Journey of "Babul Mora Naihar Chhuto Hi Jaye"

"Babul Mora Naihar Chhuto Hi Jaye" is more than a song; it is a journey through history, music, and emotion

Street Singer (1938)



"O' Father, my parents' house is left behind."

K. L. Saigal & Kanon Devi

In the 2017 film *Poorna*, composed by Salim-Sulaiman with lyrics by A m l a b h Bhattacharya, a haunting line echoes with deep emotional resonance: "Babul Mora Naihar Chhuto Hi Jaye..." Sung in a contemporary voice by Arijit Singh, the line stands apart, carrying with it a legacy that stretches back more than a century.

The origins of this timeless composition trace back to 1856, when Wajid Ali Shah, the last Nawab of Awadh, was exiled from his beloved city of Lucknow following the British annexation of his kingdom. In a moment of profound personal grief, Wajid Ali Shah composed "Babul Mora Naihar Chhuto Hi Jaye," drawing a poignant parallel between his forced departure and the emotional farewell of a bride leaving her father's home. What emerged was not merely a song, but a deeply layered metaphor of loss, displacement, and longing.

Set in Raga Bhairavi, the composition carries a sense of melancholy that is both intimate and universal. Over the decades, it has transcended its historical origins to become a musical expression of farewell in its many forms, personal, cultural, and even spiritual.

The song found widespread recognition in the early 20th century through the legendary performance of K. L. Saigal in the film *Street Singer* (1938). His live rendition, delivered with raw emotion and minimal accompaniment, remains one of the most iconic interpretations of the piece. It set a benchmark for all future renditions, establishing the song as a cornerstone of Indian musical heritage.

In the years that followed, the composition was reinterpreted by some of the greatest



Eagle Owl.



Bar-headed Goose.



Mirza Yawar Baig
Naturalist and Wildlife Conservationist

We spent two nights at the Karnataka Jungle Lodges and Resorts, Blackbuck Resort in Bidar. Lovely cottages, set in natural forest, on the bank of a lake. Very peaceful and quiet with only birdsong to keep you entertained. Lots of swaths of hillsides and plains splashed with pink. But when you get closer, it tells a different story.

birds, both migratory and resident. And all vying to outsize each other. The best part of the resort is the people. Wonderful people, friendly, courteous, helpful, very knowledgeable, and willing to do anything to ensure that you have a memorable holiday.

The big buck stood tall on the peak of the ridge, puffing out his muscular chest, his spiraled horns rising high above in a perfect V, their points, making them lethal weapons. His black head with striking white face markings circling the eyes, like eye-patches, his chest with distinctive white breastplate, and the white belly and legs, all marks of a warrior, surveying his realm. His realm is the grassland that covers the ridge and flows down like a blanket to the lake on one side. On the other, it ends abruptly at the barbed wire fence along the highway that slashes through it. On the banks of the lake are farms of the villagers, growing tomatoes, peas, millet, and sometimes rice. All good to eat as far as the blackbuck are concerned but the villagers are clearly not coopera-

voices in Indian music. Begum Akhtar infused it with the delicate nuances of thumri, while Bhimsen Joshi brought a powerful classical depth to its structure. Jagjit Singh, known for his evocative ghazals, offered yet another interpretation that connected with modern audiences.

Each rendition has preserved the soul of the original while adapting it to different musical sensibilities and eras. Despite these variations, the essence of the song, a poignant farewell, remains unchanged.

The reappearance of this line in *Poorna*, voiced by Arijit Singh, is a testament to its enduring relevance. Even in a contemporary cinematic setting, the emotion embedded in Wajid Ali Shah's words continues to resonate. It bridges the gap between past and present, reminding listeners that themes of separation and belonging are timeless.

"Babul Mora Naihar Chhuto Hi Jaye" is more than a song; it is a journey through history, music, and emotion. From the courts of Lucknow to modern cinema, it stands as a powerful reminder of how art can capture the deepest human experiences, and carry them across generations.

Being A Blackbuck

Today, there are two other things to fear. Both, which if left unaddressed will send the blackbuck reeling off the screen into oblivion. One, curiously enough, is a tree with a beautiful pink flower, *Gliricidia*. This is a leguminous tree which is fast growing, drought resistant and grown both from cuttings and seeds, for cattle and goat fodder as well as living hedges. It spreads fast and needs no special care. Ideal tree to grow in barren lands. But lethal in grasslands where blackbuck live. Flowering *Gliricidia* looks spectacular. Large swathes of hillsides and plains splashed with pink. But when you get closer, it tells a different story. *Gliricidia* grows so thick and creates so much shade and its roots spread so widely in search of water that nothing grows under it. Plant it in grassland, and before you know it, the grass is gone. Killed by *Gliricidia*. It is truly alarming to see how fast this is happening in Bidar.



Blackbuck with companion.

#WILD



Demoiselle cranes - Karanja Dam backwaters- in bad lighting.

name of reforestation. They have a rich history of expensive mistakes with planting *Eucalyptus* and *Acacia*. But I guess learning is not easy or quick. So, now, we have another disaster in *Gliricidia*. The combination of *Gliricidia* and village dogs is far more deadly than wolves or leopards and it is anyone's guess how long the blackbuck can survive as a reproductively viable population.

Village dogs are a problem peculiar to India. They belong to nobody, they hang around places where they can get food, they form packs and hunt, and prey on anything they can bring down. There are many accounts of packs of dogs attacking and killing and eating people.

The usual governmental response of catching stray dogs and sterilizing them is not a solution because the problem is not only breeding but much more urgently, the daily food requirement for the dogs. Even a sterilized dog needs to eat. Dogs are apex predators and hunt in packs. In places like Ladakh, for example, in the tourist season, there is a lot of food waste thrown out of restaurants and hotels which these dog packs feed on. But in the winter, there are no tourists and hotels shut down. But the dogs are still there. That is when their instinctive pack behaviour kicks in and they hunt anything that moves. Domestic animals, nesting birds, and humans.

In the case of blackbuck, stray dogs are their nemesis. There's no escape. Stray dogs must be eliminated. If anyone loves stray dogs, they are welcome to take them home and raise them as pets. But ownerless

dogs have no place on the streets, free to be a menace to the defenseless. In this case, blackbuck. Blackbuck are highly endangered and need far more protection than they have at present.

The big buck surveys his realm and his harem. This is a group of does led by an older female which he overlooks. He trots around them and chases back any female that wanders off. He holds his head high with his nose in the air, much like a certain orange head of state that we are all familiar with. His long, spiraled horns with their tight curls ending in sharp points are almost parallel to his back as he struts along in a bouncy trot. Every time, a female urinates, he is there to taste and assess her readiness to breed. Then off he goes on this circuit ensuring that all his family are with him. There are two or three family groups that I could identify. Each with its dominant buck, strutting around the group.

Then, there is a group of juvenile bucks with smaller horns. There are no females with them, and they keep to themselves and don't tangle with the dominant bucks and their harems. Horns are status symbols which announce a buck's virility and suitability to breed. Bucks with longer horns are more likely to get a chance to breed than ones with shorter horns. The juveniles have a way to go still. Horns are certainly ornamental and one of the reasons why these beautiful antelopes were hunted almost to extinction. Today, they are highly endangered and protected but there are poachers willing to take the risk. But the main reason for the horns is protection



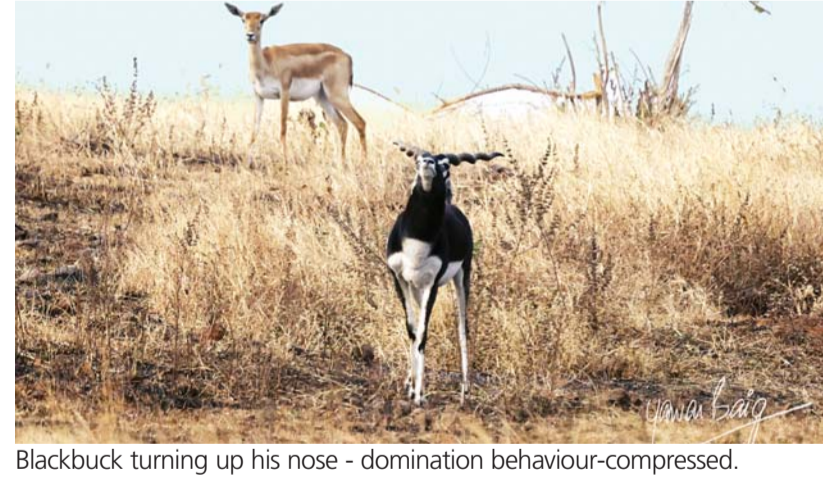
Harrier-facing.

they will nest in the same place. About twenty kilometers from the Blackbuck sanctuary is the Karanja Dam on the Karanja River. The backwaters of this dam are host to flocks of Demoiselle cranes (*Anser virgo*) and Bar-headed geese (*Anser indicus*). Demoiselle cranes migrate annually to India from their breeding grounds in Central Asia, Mongolia and Siberia, flying at heights of 16,000-26,000 feet over the Himalayas. There, they are exposed to the hazards of high-altitude flying and attacks from Golden Eagles which wait for them as they come over the mountains. The Eagles hunt in pairs and can bring down even a large bird like the Demoiselle crane. A small number fly to the backwaters of the Karanja Dam in Bidar where I saw them. Unfortunately, the sun was in my eyes which is the worst possible light for photography and there was no way to get to the other side to get them in better light. Nevertheless, I was thrilled to see them.

As for Bar-headed geese, they are among the highest-flying birds in the world. They migrate from Central Asia, Mongolia and Siberia to the Indian subcontinent (India, Nepal, Pakistan) each autumn. They travel 3000 miles by flying at an altitude of 20-30,000 feet and more, in the Jetstream current at a speed of 1000 miles in a day. They cross the Himalayas, often at altitudes above 7,000-8,000 meters, to winter in warmer, cultivated wetland areas, returning north in spring. I have photographed them in Assam in Kaziranga and Manas National Parks. And now, I saw a very nice sized flock in the backwaters of Karanja Dam in Bidar.

On the way back home to the Blackbuck Resort, our driver/guide/naturalist, Mr. Raghu, asked if we would like to see Pallid Harriers (*Circus macrorurus*). I was obviously delighted at the possibility. And sure enough, we saw about eight or nine of them, sitting on fence posts scanning for prey. They make very low-level swoops across the fields looking for rodents, such as mice, voles, lemmings, ground squirrels, small terrestrial birds like Larks and Paddyfield pipits (*Anthus rufulus*). They also hunt lizards, other small reptiles, frogs, and insects, such as locusts and dragonflies. Harriers are also endangered, thanks to grassland destruction, overgrazing and human interference. Same sad story everywhere that we humans live. It is always wildlife that suffers the consequences of our way of life.

The sun has not shown itself yet, but the glow in the east is its herald. In a nearby quarry which has a large pool of water, there is a telltale 'whitewash' of guano coloring the rock side of the quarry. This means that there is possibly an Eagle Owl (*Bubo bengalensis*) perch there. And sure enough, we saw a magnificent specimen, a large female (my guess based on size because the genders are almost indistinguishable by colour) glaring at us. Her golden-yellow eyes seem to bore into you. Her massive legs and talons make me very thankful that I am not small enough to be her prey. Not nice to be killed by a bird. There was no nest and I never saw the male, but I guess



Blackbuck turning up his nose - domination behaviour-compressed.

#BAPPA RAWAL

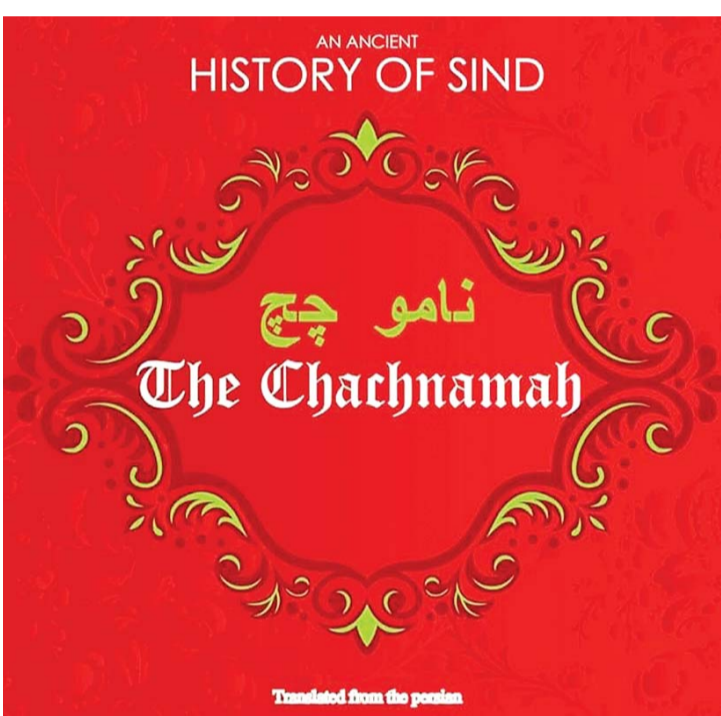
Resistance to Arab Expansion in Early Medieval India

Some traditions go on to attributing the origin of the name Rawalpindi to Bappa Rawal

The 7th and 8th centuries marked one of the most dramatic phases of expansion in world history. Under the Umayyad Caliphate, Arab armies advanced with remarkable speed, conquering vast territories across West Asia, North Africa, and even parts of Europe. Within roughly a hundred years, regions such as Persia, Syria, and Spain had come under their control. Yet, when this wave of expansion reached the Indian subcontinent, it encountered a very different outcome.

The first significant Arab entry into India occurred in 711 CE, when the young general Muhammad bin Qasim led a campaign into Sindh. There, he confronted Raja Dahin the local king who resisted the invasion but was ultimately defeated and killed in battle. The Persian chronicle known as the *Chachnama* describes the aftermath of this conquest in stark terms, including accounts of destruction, enslavement, and the capture of members of Dahir's family among them, his daughters Surya Devi and Parmal Devi, who were reportedly sent to the Caliph's court in Damascus. Despite this initial success, Arab control remained largely confined to Sindh. Efforts to expand deeper into the Indian subcontinent soon met with determined resistance. Dahir's son and other regional leaders sought support from neighboring kingdoms, and a broader coalition of Indian rulers began to take shape across western and northwestern India.

Among the prominent figures in this resistance was Nagabhata I of the Gurjara-Pratihara dynasty, who is widely credited by historians with successfully repelling Arab



forces advancing eastward. Alongside him were other regional powers in Rajasthan and Gujarat, forming a defensive front that challenged further incursions. This resistance culminated in confrontations such as the Battle of Rajasthan (738 CE), where Arab armies suffered significant setbacks, effectively halting their expansion beyond the northwestern frontier.

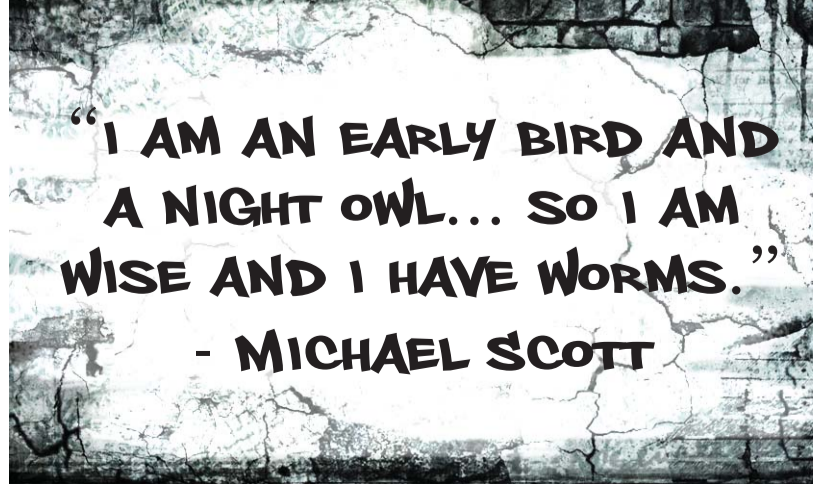
Within this broader narrative, the figure of Bappa Rawal occupies a special place, particularly in regional traditions of Rajasthan. Regarded as an early ruler of Mewar and founder of its ruling line, Bappa Rawal is often depicted as a key leader who united various forces against the Arab advance. According to later chronicles and bardic accounts, he not only helped repel invading armies but also pursued them

westward towards the Indus frontier. These stories also speak of alliances forged through diplomacy and marriage, strengthening frontier defenses against further incursions.

Some traditions go even further, attributing the origin of the name Rawalpindi to Bappa Rawal. Indeed, much of what is known about him comes from later sources that blend history with legend, making it difficult to separate precise historical events from heroic storytelling. What remains clear, however, is that the Indian subcontinent presented a formidable challenge to Arab expansion. Unlike regions that fell quickly, India was characterized by multiple established kingdoms capable of mounting resistance. Its geography, including deserts and river systems, posed logistical difficulties for invading forces, while the distance from the Caliphate's core made sustained campaigns harder to maintain. Most importantly, the willingness of regional rulers to form alliances, even if temporary, played a crucial role in halting further advances.

In this context, the story of early Arab incursions into India is not simply one of conquest, but of resistance and resilience. While Sindh became part of the Umayyad domain, the rest of the subcontinent remained beyond their reach. Historical figures like Nagabhata I stand on solid evidentiary ground as defenders against this expansion, while Bappa Rawal endures as a powerful symbol of that resistance, embodying the blend of history and legend that shapes much of early medieval India's memory.

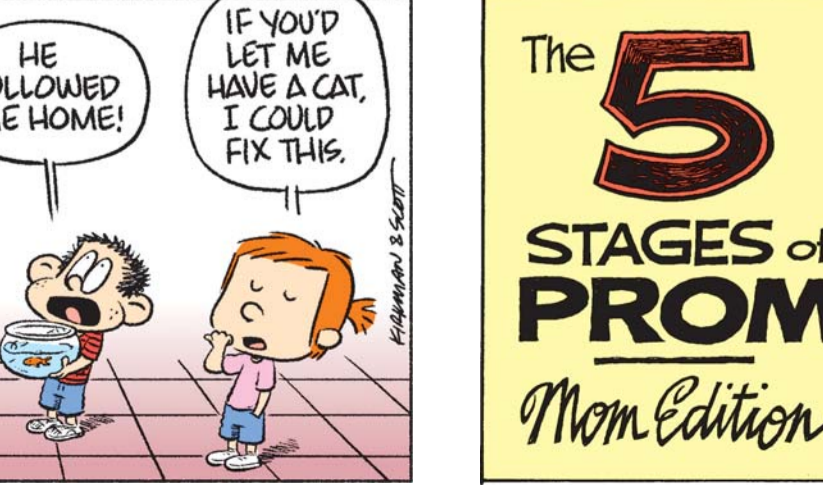
THE WALL



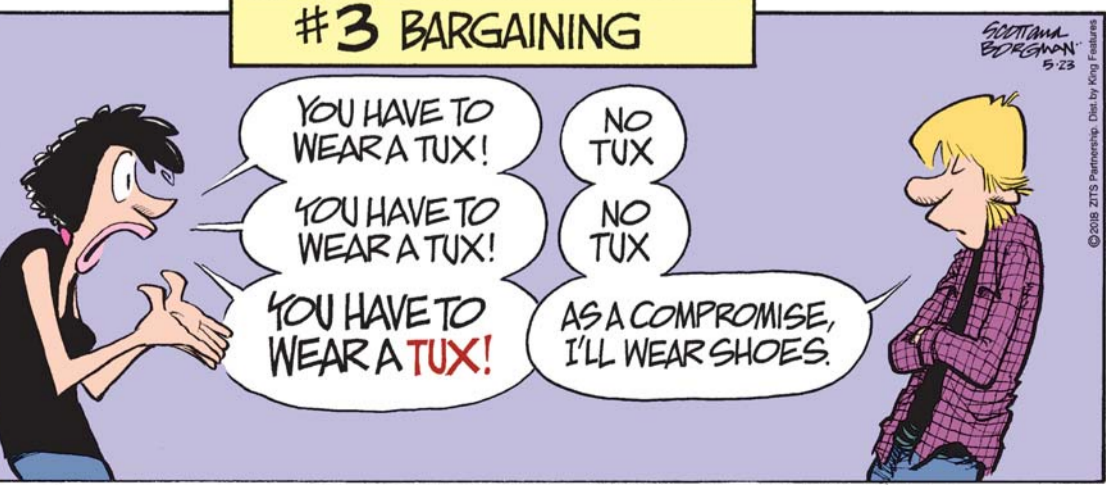
BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



#3 BARGAINING



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman