

Superstition, Symbolism, and Suffering: The Hidden Cost of India's Peacock Feather Trade

The Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*, celebrated as India's National Bird, holds immense cultural and religious importance. In Hinduism, the peacock feather is one of the most sacred symbols. Lord Krishna is eternally depicted with it adorning his crown, embodying divine love and humility. Lord Kartikeya (Murugan) rides a peacock symbolising triumph over ignorance. In Buddhism, the peacock represents purity and transformation (ResearchGuru 2022). Among Sufi communities in southern Asia, peacock motifs appear as metaphors for divine beauty and the splendour of paradise (Utrecht University 2020). Christian art in India has also embraced the bird's symbolism of resurrection and immortality because of its cyclical moulting and feather renewal. In several tribal and folk cultures, peacock feathers are integral to rituals for fertility, rainfall, and protection from evil spirits (ResearchGuru 2022).

This rich symbolism, however, has also contributed to unchecked superstitious practices. The belief that possessing or gifting a peacock feather attracts good fortune and wards off evil has created a lucrative market for real feathers (BWC India 2025). However, scientifically and biologically, they are just specialized feathers grown by male peafowl for display and courtship. They do not have any supernatural power or effect on a person's fortune, success, or future.

Although peafowl naturally moult each year, providing an ethical source of feathers, traders frequently prefer fresh, vibrant feathers that fetch higher prices (Wildlife SOS 2025). To obtain them, birds are restrained or plucked alive, often leading to pain, infection, or death. Field investigations by conservation groups report instances of peafowl held in captivity solely for feather harvesting (BWC India 2025).

Also very recently, in Pune, 11 people from Uttar Pradesh were arrested with over 400 kg of peacock feathers, seized for illegal trade, violating the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, which lists the Indian Peafowl

Pune News

Pune: Forest Dept Seizes 500 KG Peacock Feathers, 11 Arrested

Pune Pulse Desk July 4, 2025

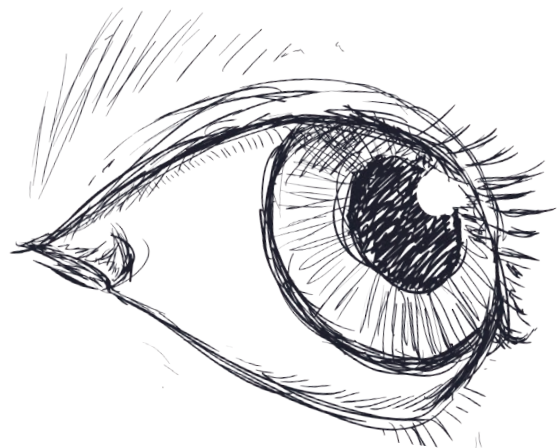


Pune Forest Department Busts Illegal Peacock Feather Trade; 11 Arrested, 500 Kg Feathers Seized

Source: <https://www.mypunepulse.com/pune-forest-dept-seizes-500-kg-peacock-feathers-11-arrested/>

under Schedule I (Hindustan Times 2025). These findings reveal how superstition-driven demand is fuelling a shadow economy that thrives on cruelty and weak enforcement.

Traditional medicinal beliefs also perpetuate exploitation. In parts of Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan, powdered feather "bhasma" is used for asthma or epilepsy despite the absence of scientific validation



(Down To Earth 2021). Such practices merge folk medicine with superstition, reinforcing demand even among communities aware of legal restrictions.

The ecological consequences are equally concerning. Removing feathers before the breeding season impairs courtship displays, while capturing birds or disturbing nests reduces reproductive success. Local population declines have been observed where intensive collection occurs alongside habitat degradation.

Ending this cruelty does not mean rejecting cultural tradition. Instead, awareness campaigns should emphasise that peafowl shed feathers naturally and that purchasing plucked feathers encourages illegal trade. Religious and community leaders can promote symbolic alternatives; printed motifs, artificial feathers, or offerings made from other sustainable materials. Greater vigilance at local markets and online platforms, combined with strict implementation of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, is essential. Educational outreach in schools can reshape beliefs, helping people appreciate the bird's beauty in the wild rather than as decoration. Ultimately, it's our responsibility to ensure that peacocks remain dancing in the monsoon, not suffering for a superstition.

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