

## Sutradaar

**Yamunotri :** Possible location of mountain quail



**Saraswati River:** A search over centuries



**Tryambakeshwar - Source of the Godavari River**

**AC Srila Prabhupada**

**Vagrant Birder :** Birds met during journeys

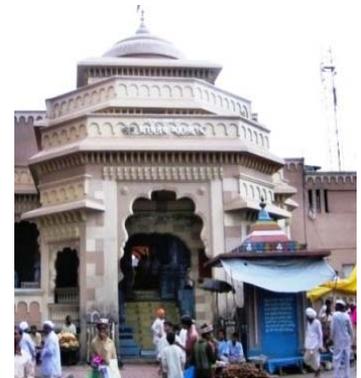
**bharatasutras**

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## Chokha Mela – waiting outside, waiting...

As you approach the ‘*Naamdev Paari*’, the steps of Saint Namdev, the first of the entrance stairs at the most sacred **Panduranga** temple at Pandharpur, you need to go past the ‘*samadhi*’ (memorial place) of Chokha Mela, the well known devotee of the deity. He is one of the best known devotees of Vithala, or Panduranga, the deity of the main temple of Pandharpur, in Solapur district, Maharashtra. Denied the opportunity to enter the Pandharpur and other temples in his lifetime, because of his caste, Chokha Mela triumphed over all by the intensity of his devotion. It is said that the God, Lord Panduranga could not rest within the Sanctum Sanctorum of the temple and would go to converse with Chokha Mela, wherever he would be, even if away from Pandharpur.



*The blue structure is Chokha Mela's Samadhi outside the Panduranga Temple*

The story from the late thirteenth Century marks out the prominent caste divide of those times, and helps us understand that God is much above these divisions made by humans. Chokha Mela was from Mangalvedha, a remote rural village hamlet of those times. A staunch devotee since his childhood, Chokha Mela often wondered and remained deeply hurt by the injustice of social inequality.

I am concerned about the prevalent injustice even to these times in the twenty-first Century. The ‘*samadhi*’ of Chokha Mela, right out there on the street, outside the main entrance of the Pandharpur temple, makes it seem like he is yet to be allowed inside. Panduranga, the deity of the temple, would leave the sanctum to be with Chokha Mela. This worthwhile devotee is as yet outside the premises of the temple. So, it would mean that Vithala or Panduranga is not within the temple to bless other devotees. When can Chokha Mela enter the temple? Or, at least, can the premises of the temple be extended to include the ‘*samadhi*’ of Chokha Mela within it?



*Food items at a roadside restaurant at Barkot, Uttarakhand, December 2009.*

## Yamunotri – possible location of the mountain quail?



*Bird Count team at Jankichatti – December 2009*



*With the Village Sarpanch and other members*

Four bird species in India bring forth the excitement of field ornithology or birdwatching. They are the Jerdon's Courser, the Forest Spotted Owlet, the Pinkheaded Duck and the Mountain Quail. These four species were thought to be extinct. Of these, the Jerdon's Courser and the Forest Spotted Owlet have been rediscovered. The Pinkheaded Duck, by its very existence as a duck, should have been spotted by bird-hunters, duck fanciers or birdwatchers at some time, in its range, if it was not extinct. But that's another story. The Mountain Quail is yet to be seen in its range or nearabouts. It was reported to be near Mussoorie and therefore all expeditions are near this area. At some times, the search goes to the areas above Mussoorie, Kemptee or on the roads leading to Barkot.



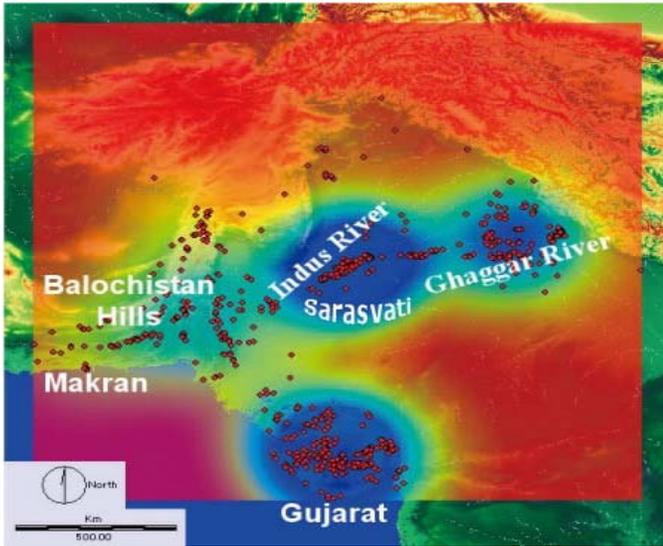
*A village sarpanch with the Quail poster*

Searches have been unsuccessful. I do think however that the Mountain Quail would be present and is waiting to be spotted again in the areas beyond Mussoorie towards Barkot, Yamunotri and Gangotri. My reasoning is very simple. The areas are too vast, habitat is simply enormous, undisturbed, without extensive impact of deforestation, and most importantly, without birdwatchers.

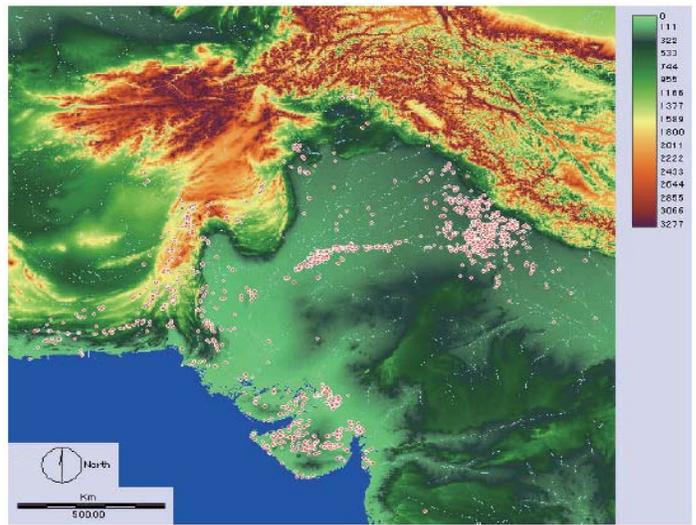
How many birdwatchers can actually go out into Himalayan slope forests at any time, with an assurance in their minds that they will definitely see so many quail or partridges or spurfowl? These are extremely difficult to spot. Much less, to plan to spot.

Today's birders are in 4-wheel drives, with costly cameras and in a hurry. The Mountain Quail requires a patient wait in these areas and an understanding of the local habitats with the local people. We made a beginning during the Great Himalayan Bird Count and distributed posters to the village sarpanchas near Yamunotri. I will return there, again, and with more birdwatchers.

## Saraswati River : A search over centuries...



*The Saraswati River geography in Western India*



*Map of Indus civilization sites (Map by Hirofumi Teramura, Indus Project, RIHN)*

Have you ever been excited by a mystery or sets of mysteries or by hundreds of thousands of mysteries that refuse to go away? That is the extent of mysteries waiting to be solved in the Saraswati-Indus inter-basin areas. The river's geography, mythology, hydrogeology and water regimes are awesome to comprehend. Include the continuing history of its peoples, especially the Saraswats, the Indus and Harappa Valley civilizations and the cities, towns and villages on its banks and in the region, and you have thousands of mysteries.

A river that disappeared. Did it actually exist? The stories of the Saraswats. The story of Saraswat Muni. The story of Goddess Saraswati. The stories in the ancient mythological books about the region, and it can excite any person. It is akin to being a geo-spiritual detective, and I would like to name myself as one. You are welcome to join me.

More than 1200 ancient settlements are known from this region. The river can be seen today at Mana, a village north of Badrinath, in Uttarakhand, "*lands of the Gods*". It is tremendously loud at Mana, flowing vigorously, and then goes underground. The river is supposed to emerge later at Adi Badri, north of Yamuna Nagar (Haryana) and Bilaspur (Himachal Pradesh), for a short distance and then disappears underground again.

Both Mana and Adi Badri (Himachal Pradesh) have a significant connection. It is said that the great Sage, Veda Vyasa, wrote the Mahabharata at Mana and later the 18,000 cantos of the Srimad Bhagavatam at Adi Badri. My desire is to go to Mana and stay there for a considerable period of time to absorb the spiritual context of the place. It must be extremely tremendous. I have been to Adi Badri and that's a visit I intend to repeat again and again.

It is said that the Vedas were written and composed on the banks of the Saraswati River. A theory suggests that the river simply dried out due to the drying up of the glaciers that fed it. Another theory suggests that the river turned in its flow underground and followed the drainage pattern of the Ganges and Yamuna to join up with them at Prayag, near Allahabad in eastern Uttar Pradesh. The river Saraswati however was part of the seven rivers of Punjab, namely the Saraswati, Sutlej (known in ancient times as *Satadru*), Beas (*Vipasa*), Chenab (*Asikni*), Ravi (*Parosni*), Jhelum (*Vitasta*) and Indus (*Sindhu*). The river is supposed to have flowed as a mighty one during 6000 BC to 4000 BC. There are pages and pages of references to the mysteries of the Saraswati River and they do make for exciting reading. There are experts, institutions, science paradigms, spiritual theories and stories and great places to make up for the loss.

# bharatayatra

## Tryambakeshwar – source of the Godavari River.



The story of the birth of the River Godavari is as fascinating as the story of the birth of the River Ganga, with Bhagiratha and Siva. Born at Tryambakeshwar, the river flows through Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. One of the twelve jyotirlinga temples, this Shiva temple is also unique like the others in Maharashtra for the sanctity and conservation values that they provide to the high hill forests of the Western Ghats. How did this linkage evolve? Nature – Forests – Hill Ranges – Shiva – Rivers? In fact, it seems like the agricultural productivity of Maharashtra is directly linked to the conservation of the forests around Shiva temples.

## AC Bhaktivedanta Srila Prabhupada



Abhay Charanaravinda Bhaktivedanta Srila Prabhupada walking with some devotees along the coast somewhere in the US, I guess. Definitely a rare, rare, rare photograph. Wonder if there are any other photographs in this series and at that location and if there are any notes about the occasion. It would be good to know about the identity of the devotees with him.



*Prayer room of my parents, and a quilted mattress at home at Wadala, Mumbai.*



## Vagrant birdier



*Painted Stork at Pune wetlands, at the College of Military Engineering Campus (CME) in Pune city limits, January 2010*



*Grey Tit at the bird table feeding station at Pune, January 2010*

## bharataayana

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Saraswati River article, Indus seal, AC Srila Prabhupada pix and the Mountain Quail sketch are sourced from the NET.

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