

bharatavatra

Sutradaar

Har-ki-paudi : *Haridwar, on the banks of the Ganges*



In search of the source of the Bhima River : *near the Bhimashankar Temple, Junnar Tabsil, Pune District.*



Sanjeevan Vidyalaya :
Panchgani, Satara District

Hibiscus (Shoeflower) :
At Pune and Lonavala

Vagrant Birder : Photoviews
of birds met during journeys

YATRA - Journeys of the mind and body

There are journeys and then, there are journeys. We travel physically, across great distances, with access to better and better facilities and we reach places, only to once again return to the beginning. And then, there are journeys where we travel to, again across greater and farther distances, without using any facilities to reach places that we could not have gone to in the normal sense of the term, and yet, we have but only done the journey within our mind.

The mind is a fascinating system, I feel. It helps us travel great distances, break down the barriers of time, distance, space, speech, language and understanding. It also helps us go beyond the barrier or limits of knowledge that was to be gained.

In this age of the Internet and e-knowledge, the mind has received that strong push and help that makes it challenge the very limits of understanding, analysis & debate.

I have been an excited traveler in this age. I am thankful that I was born in an age when the radio began its entry, the transistor and newspapers made their stay very useful and relevant, the B&W Television, the record-player, the spool-led tape recorder, the cassette-led tape recorder, the video player, the monopoly-based colour television, the cable TV, the direct-to-home cable TV, the early DOS-based computer and now, the Internet has come, improved themselves, evolved, changed, been eliminated, and newer pathways are emerging more and more rapidly.

Perhaps the most exciting frontier to observers like me is the cellular phone and the awesome convergence with the Internet, e-transactions and promises for the future.

This rapid period of technology-led evolution has only challenged the mind to keep up with the shortening of distances of knowledge and making it easier to travel greater and farther distances to new frontiers. An understanding of aspects that would have been difficult because of lack of access is now recognized as extremely ridiculous to have even existed earlier. Join me in this journey.

bharatasutras

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Srivilliputhur Andal Temple, Tamil Nadu – Native town of my great grand-father

Har-ki-paudi – *Haridwar, on the banks of the Ganges*



The Ganges at Har-ki-paudi, Haridwar



The Ganga-mata and Bhagirath temple at Har-ki-paudi

Visited Har-ki-paudi, at Haridwar, with Dr. Arvind Jha and Prateek Panwar enroute to Devprayag and Adi Badri in Uttarakhand. This was sometime in late 2009. The bonus was in visiting the temple of Mother Ganga (the Goddess Ganga) and Bhagiratha at Har-ki-Paudi on our own, without the presence of any other pilgrim, staying on for the prayers and taking photographs with the permission of the priests. This would have absolutely been impossible on any other day, especially the Kumbh Mela or other local festivities. The priests were very helpful and absolutely unlike the priests met with in temples elsewhere. I could sit down with them, chat and talk about the temple, the deities and the river. Have to most certainly return with more time to soak in the spiritual atmosphere there.



Bhagiratha (L.) and Goddess Ganga (R.)

Har-ki-paudi or, *Hari-ki-pauri*, as the place is referred to by some, signifies the steps (*paudi*) of (*ki*) Shiva (*Hari*). The Ganges comes out of the Himalayas at Haridwar and journeys on to the plains. The roar of the Ganges, the Bhagirathi, the Alaknanda and other tributaries in the Himalayas is down to the pleasant ripple and calm flow at Har-ki-paudi. This cannot be appreciated by anyone who has not visited the place or journeyed further northwards.

The Kumbh and Ardha Kumbh Mela is conducted on the banks of the Ganges at Haridwar, and we could only reflect on the enormous numbers of pilgrims who would spread out in this region. On that day, we were comfortable, watching, observing and taking photographs and collecting the waters of the Ganges.

The *Har-ki-paudi* is supposed to have been constructed by King Vikramaditya in 1st Century BC in honour of his brother, Bratihari, who had meditated here. Have to return here to attend and witness the famous *Ganga Aarati* that takes place in the evening on the river banks. Even Haridwar and *Har-ki-paudi* has more places to be seen and visited. The *devi* temple at the hill-top has a cable car to travel in, or elephant forests to walk through.

In search of the source of the Bhima River



The Bhima River catchment near the temple



The catchment streams near the source of the River

Legend has it that the Bhima river began to flow from the forests of Junnar, in the Western Ghats, near Pune after the condensation of sweat of Lord Shiva, and was also known as *Bhaimi*. The wildlife sanctuary is a splendid forest and is known for herbivores and plant diversity, especially medicinal plants. One of the twelve *dyotirlinga* temples, the Bhimashankar, is located within the forests.

The Bhima River is important to the economics, water supply, rural and urban growth and agricultural productivity of Maharashtra. It meets the Krishna River later down south. The *Padmapurana*, in its ancient stories written sometimes after the four Vedas were written, links the birth of the river with Pandharpur and *Panduranga*.



The ashram near the source of the River

Above the Bhimashankar temple, along the ridge line near the dense forest patches, is an ashram with more than 200 monkeys (macaques) moving around. The ashram's claim is that the *pandavas* visited the place during the *Mahabharata*. The resident sadhu at the ashram suggested that the next time around, I should stay overnight with them, and start trekking up the river course in order to reach the upper catchments.

Possibly, 4-5 major streams come together in the upper forests before the ashram, and later 2-3 streams join up before the flow goes past the Bhimashankar temple, and is joined by other streams subsequently.

I am hoping to make this task into one of the important projects of my life. Biodiversity, hydrogeology, river ecology, local sociology, environmental economics and of course, the mythology and spiritual genesis of the great Bhimashankar temple are some of the thematic areas to be explored. These are fascinating aspects of knowledge to be sought and there are many friends willing to participate. The link-up with Pandharpur, *Panduranga* and *Pundalika* is the most mysterious and awesome. Of course, I am not forgetting the birds of the place.

Sanjeevan Vidyalaya – at Panchgani, Satara Dist.



An amazing school at Panchgani, Satara District, near Mahabaleshwar. Visited the school in 2009 and met the trustees, teachers and students. The school has two exclusive divisions for tribal students from the region. The enthusiasm, spirit and happiness of the students in the school made us happy. The kids require some more catching up to do in English language use and proficiency but they will get there.



The kids had also performed in some movies made at the school and seemed like born actors. I met some of the actors later, and they were happy that I had seen them in the movie and recognized them. It made a very refreshing change from the 'Slumdog' genre that only showed up the ugly picture of India. Wish these kids could be part of Ananth Mahadevan's movies.

Hibiscus (Shoeflower) – at Pune and Lonavala



I have always been demanding about flowering plants that do not require high maintenance in terms of time, effort and money. The best of such flowering plants is the Hibiscus or Shoeflower. The diversity of plant-types is amazing. Known locally as *Jaswanti*, I have been able to plant some varieties at the house in Nangargaon, Lonavala and in the YASHADA campus at Pune. The flowers shown in these photographs are from saplings (or *cuttings*) from Ratnagiri in the Konkan coast of Maharashtra. The flowers bloomed at Lonavala and Pune and are about 8 inches in diameter. In time for Ganesh Chaturthi, I could offer them for the prayers to Ganapati – *Gajanana, O Gajanana*.



Venkateswara Tirumala Temple, Andhra Pradesh – Native town of my mother.



Vagrant birders



House sparrows at Shivri village, Purandhar, Pune, Maharashtra 27 June 2004 with P. Deshmukh.



Openbill Stork at Ranganthithoo Sanctuary, near Srirangapatna, Karnataka. 25 December 2009.



Pariah Kite at arid plains near Baramati, Pune. January 2010

bharataayana

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