

## Sutradaar

**Bhimashankar :** *Conflicts or concerns – wildlife & religion*



### The monkey in the mind

Pix from British India

Princess Panther

Vagrant Birder : Photoviews of birds met during journeys

## Longest distance in the shortest of space

Have you ever sat down for meditation? Or tried to meditate? I have often met people who have told me that they can meditate peacefully for 1-4 hours or more at a time. They have their methods to meditate. I find it very puzzling that one can do so, i.e., meditate peacefully for a long period of time. I cannot do so. My mind wanders, slowly, rapidly, cyclically or sequentially, from one thought to the other. How do people actually succeed in making their mind stay still? I often wonder.

I find that I am not able to concentrate or focus on a single subject for more than an hour, even when I am not meditating. And how does one achieve concentration when one is quiet, not moving, not doing anything and in contemplation within oneself?

The moment I sit quietly, and begin to focus on an object or on my breathing, my mind begins to race around more rapidly than when I was not in meditation.

There are various essays about '*the monkey in the mind*', or controlling the mind, in understanding it or helping it to help you. I have read up on most of the stuff that there is available. But there is nothing to beat than practice, repetition, acceptance, humility and persistence. Just do it again and again and again and again. Knowing that one will fail again and again and again. Start again. Fail or succeed, start again. It is in knowing that if one feels success, it is the mind that is pulling tricks.

It is the mind that tells you that you are great, or that you have won, or actually that you have defeated someone. Understand the inner voice. Do not let it conquer you.

Is it okay to be disturbed by the mind when in meditation? It is like answering the question to if it is okay to be disturbed by a wandering mosquito when in meditation. If you can notice the mosquito or if you can hear someone moving around, you are not in focus. Similarly, if the mind allows thoughts to wander around, it is helping you travel the greatest distances in the shortest space. Such travel usually acquires more weight in the mind and is likely to disturb you for longer period of time. You need to break the thought process, and START AGAIN, and again, and again.

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Fruits from Pune district, Maharashtra. Strawberries, raw mangoes and coconuts.

## Bhimashankar – *conflicts or concerns of religion and wildlife*



*Wild flowers at Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary*



*With the Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary team (2006)*

The Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary occurs at Junnar and Ambegaon Tahsils of Pune district in Maharashtra, India. The splendid sanctuary is one of the most important Protected Areas (PA) in the Western Ghats, a biodiversity hotspot of India. The Bhimashankar Jyotirlinga temple, one of the twelve jyotirlinga temples of India, occurs within the Sanctuary. And thereby, the conflict and concern. Today, the sanctuary, the forests and wilderness areas exist because of the religious sanctity provided in earlier times by the Bhimashankar Jyotirlinga temple. And it is the very reason why the forests and wilderness areas are under threat. The impact on the wildlife sanctuary with modern travel, vehicles, easier access and increased numbers of devotees on important spiritual days are the very concerns that seem to be destructive to the wilderness.



*With the Wildlife Sanctuary team (2006)*

Solutions are difficult. Logic and argument from both sides are vehement, persuasive and most certainly, in conflict. I have been visiting the temple, the forest areas and the nearby villages since 2006 on behalf of my Academy. The priests are good souls and have been very helpful in discussing the issue with me. Similarly, the forest department officers are also concerned about the future of the wildlife sanctuary.

The solution may be in the fact that the Bhima River gives prosperity and productivity to Deccan Maharashtra. The river gets its waters in the wilderness. It is important the wildlife sanctuary is able to maintain the natural support systems for the river. The temple is an important age-old institution. Let the activities continue. But, let all infrastructure, constructed structures, travel support and parking areas and pilgrim residences be restricted to areas outside the limits of the wildlife sanctuary.

The important stakeholders, the local tribal villagers, lose out on both ends of the issue – Wildlife and Religion. I think, their sustainable livelihood is more important than the temple.



## *The monkey in the mind...*

The first step of understanding concentration and training the mind, during the vipassana meditation course, is when the individual is instructed to be careful about the monkey in the mind. One feels strange, when told so...

A monkey in my mind? How can that be? I am so good, I am great, I am excellent in my studies, I have achieved so much and much more... I am better than others... And what is all this about? How can anyone tell me that I cannot do even this simplest of tasks... that is to sit still, meditate within oneself by focusing on one's breath, and ensure that there are no thoughts within one's head...

One begins to attempt to search for that very faint sensation of breath, ... it is supposed to be found below one's nostrils, we are told... of course, where else can it be... but after about five minutes of scanning the entire region, one feels, there are so much more important things to do in one's life, and then there was that problem at office, and that situation about a friend, and that long pending fight with the neighbour...

Now, the mind has begun to question... why not keep track of the sensation of breath, now and then, ... in the meantime, what was that about the long pending fight with the neighbour... Oh, Yes. He had kept asking for the copy of the morning newspaper, silly man, why can't he purchase his own paper? The other neighbour had actually confided that the first neighbour purchased magazines, but did not spend money on newspapers... Yes, Yes, Yes, the sensation of breath, and the meditation is quite ok, and in progress, ... For as long as one keeps one's eyes closed, sits straight, and looks calm without agitation, the Assistant Teacher is not going to know that one is actually solving two problems at one time...

The sensation of breath... oh, yes... there it is... it has not gone anywhere... This is actually silly... why not be content with sitting straight, keeping one's eyes closed, and staying calm... that's all that one has to do when meditating... Why should one concentrate on the breath... How can a human being not breathe... It is always there... why should one search for it... Ok, where were we... Yes, the first neighbour... what was it about... some fight... with the second neighbour? Anyways, forget it... there is that problem with the senior at the office...

People were so silly, wandering around with monkeys in their minds... Yes. People do not concentrate... There, that man in the red shirt, and the funny towel around his neck, four rows ahead, two columns to the left, he was not meditating at all... he was looking all around... and the Assistant Teacher, was not scolding him or asking him to meditate... People are very funny... one can safely bet that the red shirt man had a monkey, a very big monkey probably, in his mind...

One's own mind is intact, no monkeys there... the sensation of breath is easily tracked, Yes, there it was, what was it? 30... 31... 32... no, no, no counting... no chanting... no imagining any photograph or painting etc... why not actually use chanting to help? With each sensation of the breath... one could actually chant something... But the Assistant Teacher had said that one should not use God's name or any other symbol for chanting... Let that be... That senior officer in one's department had a week before given a memo to a colleague... Very bad... actually, it was the senior officers' fault... He had not given correct instructions.... And why blame juniors...

There is so much time, one can always start and start again... Why go into all this task based approaches, time tables, instructions and discipline? Am I not efficient enough to do what I plan to do? My mind has no monkey in it... I am the best... I can concentrate easily... I will do it later... There are more important things at hand now... I can always, *Start again...*

*[from an earlier essay published elsewhere...]*

## Classic India – colonial India, classic photographs.



The Grand Trunk Highway and the Rashtrapati Bhavan – from the days of colonial India. Classic photographs. The Grand Trunk Highway was made famous by Rudyard Kipling and ‘Kim’ and Rashtrapati Bhavan was of course, a classic moment of the growth of Delhi as the National Capital. There are many more classic photographs out there on the internet. I hope to travel up and down the Grand Trunk Highway and pick up on a number of photographs. Wonder how it looks like? Probably has several ‘dhaabas’ and McDonalds and Maruti Service Centres on it. Good that the Rashtrapati Bhavan does not have a McDonalds.

## Panther Princess – did she do it?



A great photograph from the Internet. Young girl with gun and leopard after a shikar. Did such an incident actually occur that this young girl shoot the leopard? Wonder where it occurred? Looks like Central or North India. Her outfit looks great and the habitat looks like an forest edge and open arid scrub forest area.



Pickles from Andhra Pradesh – Nothing can be stronger and more pungent.

## Vagrant birder



Whitebreasted Kingfisher at the Police Campus (SP-Rural), Pune



Pariah Kite on entrance gopuram at Srirangapatna. 25 Dec 2009.



Plumbeous Water Redstart, Yamunotri. December 2009

## bharataayana

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“Classic India” and “Panther Princess” photographs are sourced from the Internet.

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