

# bharatayatra

## *Sutradaar*

Rock Garden, Chandigarh -  
covered with plastic bottles



Rickshaakaaran  
Rangachari @Kanchipuram

Vagrant Birder: Bird pix -  
Rock Garden, Chandigarh



## bharatasutras

PDF e-edition from Bharat  
Bhushan for limited private  
circulation only.

*bharatayatra* - my journey  
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## Sant Baba Singh Seechewal *Fighting on God's behalf*

I met this unique holy spirit at Chandigarh at the Mahatma Gandhi State Institute for Public Administration, Punjab (MGSIPAP). He was the Chief Guest and Theme Mentor for the Conference on Religion and Environment.

For those who know of the magic, persistence and power of Sant Baba Singh Seechewal of Punjab, you will understand. For me, it was like a pilgrimage had suddenly turned fruitful and I was granted darshan of the holy inner spirit of nature conservation and environmental management. He is the best, there is, in India and in the world.

For those who do not know, Sant Baba Singh Seechewal is the best of environmental and spiritual activists that contemporary India has known. He is the power behind the cleaning up of the Beas River. He went into the river stream, and refused to come out of it until the local authorities agreed to clean it up. He began to clean the river stream by himself, with the help of volunteers. He does this regularly, and it has become some sort of a spiritual pilgrimage for his devotees from around the world, leave alone India and Punjab. They come from all over the world to help him.

During the conference, he came prepared with a complete presentation, two bottles of Beas water, one that was darker and blacker than sewage, and the other one that was clear and purified, after the treatment and clean-up. Today, he is considered as one of the leading experts in understanding the aspect of bringing together the convergence of environment, religion, community participation and spirituality. He has received several awards and accolades, including invitations to the Buckingham Palace and being able to discuss his work with world leaders. He is well represented on the Net and you can see him talking about his work on videos on YouTube also. His team is well trained and they provided me with videos in multiple languages about his work.



*The seminar on religion and environment held at MGSIPAP, Chandigarh*

## Rock Garden, Chandigarh – *covered with plastic bottles*



*The rock-garden at Chandigarh is a world-famous destination. Today, it is filled with plastic bottles from visitors.*

The Rock Garden at Chandigarh is a major destination for locals and tourists alike. There are long queues of people outside the complex purchasing tickets. In actual fact, the long queue outside is not a correct picture of the chaos inside. The entire complex has to be seen in a never-ending queue of people gathered around narrow pathways, ledges, stairs and bridges. Some of these are one-way passages and usually, the worst bottleneck is a two-way traffic jam. Needless to deviate, the Rock Garden is fantastic. It's a marvelous aspect of single-minded dedication and passion by Nek Chand. Today its not the rock complexes, the waste-origin statues and composites that are to be appreciated. It is the tens of thousands of plastic water bottles that are to be wondered upon. Perhaps the Municipal Corporation will invite ideas and provide land for some similar genius to develop a plastic garden. There would be no end to the amount of plastic that the Rock Garden can provide to such an initiative.



*This is typical of the entire complex. The queues of tourists are never-ending.*

Large families have the worst of it. Senior citizens, especially slow walking women, suffer the most. Then, there are gangs of local boors who come for eve-teasing. They are quite a specialized lot. They focus on the female foreign tourists and try to stand behind them, while one of their friends springs a cell-phone suddenly and takes photographs. Digital cameras are also used, usually to zoom in on female foreign tourists, and each click is akin to a shikar.

The construction work, the diversity of habitats, the multi-layered stone landscape and the statues made of waste material did not disappoint at all. What I had heard of Nek Chand's efforts were not less in praise. Words fail you when you see the manner in which his eyes saw the place and converted it. Every person in these slow moving queue did appreciate the entire Rock Garden.

There were typical touristy thingees inside the core zone. There were camel rides, ice cream shops, juice corners and crazy mirrors. And, yes, one row of very dirty, opaque, very badly maintained series of fish tanks with wrong labels. Made me sad. There is one entrance to allow vendors to bring in four-wheelers and these vehicles dart in suddenly into the crowd. We could have managed this place better, methinks, with some care.



## Rickshaakaaran Rangachari...

**Abstract from my very own unique blog – “Shtories and Shtuff by the Shtory Shteller”** – available at <http://shtories-shtuff.blogspot.com> The blog presents diverse fiction accounts of visits to places known to one and all, but talks of unique people, their lives, their perspectives and their exclusive art of living. Enjoy.

So, there we went. Four of us on the passenger's seat with myself, seated next to Rickshaakaaran Rangachari. We set off from the guest house and bumped our way through unmetalled roads, potholes and metalled roads that were worse off than the un-metalled ones. The rickshaw roof was just that bit lower to prevent me from sitting up straight. My head had to be tilted inwards so that it would not protrude out of the vehicle.

I had to tilt my head towards Rangachari while he had to tilt his head towards the right hand side rear-view mirror. He actually had to twist himself to see the road ahead in the front windshield I however had the wonderful privilege of getting the complete smell-blast from his unique brand of coconut hair oil. I felt the smell actually separating itself from his hair and could almost see the scent-waves jetting inside my nose that was right up his thick black oiled hair.

I asked Rangachari as to which oil did he use. Naturally he had to give a very longish speech that was interspersed with comments about where we were headed, the restaurants, shopping, temples and the government in Chennai, the State Capital, and the Kanchipuram municipality. The reason the subsequent speech by Rangachari is extremely long, while driving his rickshaw through the streets of Kanchipuram, is that it was extremely long. He kept talking non-stop and driving and talking. All he had waited for seemingly was my question. As you will see from his answer, the issue of his heavily scented hair oil was entirely a non-issue for him.

*"Yes, saar, this is puyar (= pure) coconut oyal (= oil) saar, but spechal (= special) coconut oyal, saar. We get direct from oyal mill saar and they mix jasmine flower in oyal, and we get good scent. Old flower, more straang (= strong) smell saar and will stay full day very good smell. Say namaskaar, amma (= the missus, seated on the passenger seat), paapa (= the daughter seated with the missus), there is puliyar (= Ganesha) temple going bye. Say namaskaar very fast, paapa. See it is gone. Saar do not worry about oyal, I will get you full bottle for you, spechal, at afternoon, at less price."*

*"See amma, this is new saree sale shops. Do not trust them. They are very bad here. They give commission to all rickshaakaarans. But all sale saree boards are wrong here. Paapa, do you want to buy any spechal shalwar kurta, silk shalwar pieces for stitch up in Chennai Mumbai, enna paapa? (= what say, young girl?) Amma are you wanting to purchase sarees for festival or for marriage?"*

*"Saar silk shirt also available but you buy spechal silk dhoti for puja. This is new Coimbatore hotel, saar, we will come back after temple for breakfast. Big big idli saar. You cannot eat more than two idli at Coimbatore hotel. This is not udupi hotel saar. All udupi hotel not real south Indian hotel. People all over India are fooled. Udupi is not even in Tamil Nadu. Did you know that Paapa?"*

*"No problem also if you want to eat punjabi chinese for breakfast. My friend, Selvaraj has spechal full-day punjabi chinese north Indian hotel near Sabarimalai Swamy temple, next to flower shops lane, and you can always get hot hot breakfast and tiffin even at lunch, evening and dinner. There you see saar is ICICI bank ATM if you want to take out money. It came up four years ago. We used to wait outside the ATM for six months when it came first to Kanchipuram. It was great fun. 2 or 3 people only would go to ATM each day in first month. In six months it was about 5 to 10 people every day."*

## My grandfather's school — at Nungambakkam, Chennai



I had written about my maternal grandfather, Muniswamy Naidu, and the school that he started in Nungambakkam, in Chennai, at 4, Ramanaickam Street. The 'Raja Rajeswari High School' was well attended in the 60s. I have some old B&W photographs of the school, the various functions and activities at the premises. The photograph here shows the flag hoisting ceremony on Independence Day, perhaps in 1968 or 1969. From left, my sister, aged 3, my grandfather, a Tamil film actress who was the chief guest, a teacher at the school who also managed the cattle-shed, and my maternal uncle, Kuchela Naidu. Children and adults alike took the flag hoisting ceremonies very seriously during those years, especially after the 1962 war with China and the 1965 war with Pakistan. Villages, small towns and mofussil cities enjoyed these occasions and enjoyed being patriots.

## How many can sit on a bike?



If at all, someday in the future, when I will file a public interest litigation in the Supreme Court, it will be about the number of people who ride pillion, both front and rear, on a bike. It is amazing that people take chances with their lives, with the lives of their loved ones and do not realize that if there would be an accident, death would be the easy way out. Do they even realize the impact if an accident victim is paralysed, and would have be imprisoned at home?



Medu Vada and Idli+Vada (L) at a restaurant in Pandharpur, Maharashtra

## Vagrant birder



Blue-rock Pigeons at the Rock Garden, Chandigarh. The birds have adapted easily to the large crowds.



Common Myna at the Rock Garden, Chandigarh watching humans.

## bharataayana

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Past issues of the Newsletter are available at the blog - <http://planet-bharat.blogspot.com>

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