

# bharatayatra

## Sutradaar

Panduranga Temple at  
Dehu - *spiritual roots*



Car parking areas can be  
eco-friendly and green



Vagrant Birder: Jungle or  
Maratha Myna (Juvenile)

## bharatasutras

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## Cycle-touring

### *With the wind on your face...*

Cycling is survival for those who use the vehicle for their everyday travel. Cycling for long distances, over many days, known popularly as cycle-touring, is a passion in most nations. It has yet to be recognised as a regular adventure action event in India. There are several splendid opportunities available in India, and today, there are professionally managed tour operators for cycle-touring.



Way back, in 1978-79, until 1982, I used to be a confirmed cycle-touring addict. With two friends, Satish Menonnanand and Sailesh, we did cycle-tours in western Maharashtra, especially the Mumbai-Nashik and Mumbai-Shirdi sectors. Later, we set up a cycling club, got it affiliated with the Maharashtra Cycling Association and also helped organise the first Mumbai-Nashik cycle race. Those were the days.

With the wind on your face, in pouring rain, cycling downhill on the Malshej Ghats, below the Bhimashankar hills, and in the Igatpuri-Kasara Ghats, diving speedily inside dark curving tunnels, is a thrill that cannot be experienced in hiking, driving or web-surfing. The extreme high came about in Kasara, when we came out cycling downhill, fast, through a tunnel, and faced a 200 strong troop of Hanuman Langur monkeys, sitting peacefully on the road. We could not stop. What happened was a total miracle. We kept rolling, through the troop, did not hit a single monkey, did not go over the cliff, and kept going down without an accident.

Thirty-three years later, I wonder. Can I start again? Today, the cycles are better. The bags, tents and other accessories make it more tempting. In those days, we did our adjusting, with canvas haversacks covered with plastic sheets. It seems to beckon again – and the spirit is willing. Watch this space, or join me...



*The photos that I could not get... mules and the trail at Yamunotri – by A. K. Jha*

## Devotion Absolute – *from Dehu to Alandi to Pandharpur*



More than 1.3 million pilgrims walk for nearly 17 days to Pandharpur (Left) from Dehu (Right) and Alandi

The annual *palkhi*, the pilgrimage that escorts the deities from Dehu and Alandi in Pune district to Pandharpur in Solapur district of Maharashtra, in July, during the Hindu calendar month of *Ashaadh*, culminates on the sacred day of *Ashaadh Ekadasi*. The Dehu-Alandi to Pandharpur pilgrimage comprises more than 1.3 million pilgrims, and they walk for seventeen days, braving harsh conditions, pouring rain, unsanitary facilities and lack thereof, congested tents and continuous jostling and pushing. It is only the devotion, sublime and pure devotion, in the pilgrims that give them constant strength and persistence to keep them on the journey, steadfast in their goal, to reach Pandharpur, on *Ashaadh Ekadasi*.



*Panduranga at Pandharpur*

The Dehu and Alandi temples are on the Indrayani river near Pune. The processions converge in Alandi and Pune city and later separate to proceed on two separate routes that meet again at Pandharpur. Similarly, there are other *Palkhis*, supposed to be nearly 200, as known now, that originate from several places in Maharashtra, some as far as north of Nagpur city, and they meet up at Pandharpur. These *Palkhis* may be walking for more than forty days, perhaps.

What is it that keeps them walking? Its pure, pure, pure devotion. It is indeed extremely amazing to watch the bliss on their faces. They do not ask for anything while on the route, are content with whatever is offered. Their only goal is to be intent on their devotion to Panduranga, the serene manifestation of Krishna. Sant Tukaram at Dehu and Sant Jnaneshwar at Alandi have helped billions of pilgrims over the past 400 years or more, in understanding and reaching Panduranga, within their hearts.

It is through the constant repetition of the hymns composed by Sant Tukaram and Sant Jnaneshwar that the pilgrims are able to gain spiritual strength and keep walking. It is said that these holy saints distilled the various prayers, mantras and stotras into the singularly most simplest of all, “*Om Ram Krishna Hari*”, that is repeated by all the pilgrims on the *Palkhi*, and later, in their lives, to be at one with Panduranga.

## Car parking redefined... *Eco-friendly or Green?*



*The car park at the establishment at Pune – Totally green, without crows or pigeons to fear.*

It is the fear of the droppings from birds perched on trees that prevent most institutions and establishments from offering 'green' parking areas. The MCGM institute at Borivili, Mumbai, is totally green, but with white coloured roads, from all the droppings from a million or more crows. Visitors are usually dropped in the campus, and drivers are instructed to hastily drive out and park on the streets elsewhere.

There is one institution in Pune that 'drives' all these fears away. The Cummins establishment near Karve Road in Pune is a splendid example of planning and implementing a 'green' parking area. There are hundreds of vehicles parked in this establishment, and the spacious vista is a true delight. There are stone seating areas for drivers and visitors, near the vehicles. The stone seating areas are called 'kattas', after the traditional 'kattas' – or meeting places in Pune. One can also see drivers fearlessly sleeping on the 'kattas' without the danger of droppings.

The trees have a small, low circular abutment to protect them from being hit by the cars while reversing or circling around. There are trees in rows, that have better protection and there are trees that seem to be randomly planted within the parking enclosures. There are birds, and these are not the crows or pigeons. The garden staff has been very particular in preventing open garbage bins, or feeding of pigeons in the parking area or anywhere else in the campus. As a result, other birds have taken over the parking canopy, and one could hear babblers, mynas, and bulbuls, tailor birds, magpie robin and Indian robin.

There were doves. The little brown dove and spotted dove could be seen near the drains and near the cycle parking areas. They are nesting in the parking areas in the canopy. Bulbuls were also seen nesting in the cycle parking sheds. Most drivers and employees, including the security guards are aware that the parking area is a paradise for birds and they have been helpful to local birders or schools wanting to visit. They do not encourage frequent visits, but do not object to them either.

The establishment has decided to open up other locations in the campus for afforestation and have begun to choose the tree species with care, to attract birds. Their decision-making factors were availability of food and nesting spaces for birds. Bamboo has not been a clear favorite, but hopefully, they may include it near their compound walls or at the corners of the campus. Another plan in the offing, was to re-route recycled water to the parking area and to the new areas chosen for afforestation.

What makes the crow or blue-rock pigeon become such a fearsome pest in urban areas? It's our behaviour. The open garbage areas, the littering near food-grain markets and the unsanitary conditions of our urban and peri-urban lifestyles make for large populations of crows and pigeons. The pune parking lot is certainly a lesson to learn from.

## Sri Ram Raksha Stotra — *Annotated dictionary project*



I was introduced to the *Sri Ram Raksha Stotra* as a pathway to devotion to Shiva and Ram and was told that I should memorise each hymn only after having understood it. That was indeed puzzling. I tried it, and indeed, reciting the *Stotra*, everyday, was amazing. Most devotees seem to recite the *Stotra*, and keep it to themselves, and I have nothing against it. But, for me, the *Sri Ram Raksha Stotra* has made everyday living into such an enjoyable existence, that I feel I should share the joy with one and all. I have therefore begun the annotated dictionary project and have made it available on the web as blog pages at <http://ram-raksha-stotra.blogspot.com>. The blog pages also include essays on some of the mysteries of the stotra and I hope to keep adding to them. There are photographs of Shri Ram from various temples, as also several important temples of Shri Ram in India.

## Vagrant birder



*Maratha (or Jungle) Myna – Juvenile  
– at my bird table – at Pune  
YASHADA Campus*

## Is there a Pod-5 at the Smithsonian?



The latest Dan Brown book located itself within the Smithsonian and delved into its possible connections with the Freemasons. It made me go totally nostalgic. I have been associated with the National Museum of Natural History of the Smithsonian during 1992-93 and have wondered about who could have been a Mason, or a senior Master. Most of them could definitely have been, and I knew some that were. Nothing is sinister about it all, I know.



*Guru Nanak in his 3<sup>rd</sup> Udaasi (journey) at the Mount Kailash areas.*

## bharataayana

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Touring cycle, Pandharpur, Pod-5, Guru Nanak's 3<sup>rd</sup> Udaasi & Sri Ram pix are from the Internet

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