

## Mumbai Mantra - Sundance Institute Screenwriters' Lab



Lake Pavana

Can a writer's workshop become an almost spiritual experience? I don't think I've ever felt more alive than these past 5 days at the Mumbai Mantra Sundance Screenwriters Lab. To repeatedly plunge, dive deep down into your story and be nudged into discovering yet another unexplored moment that can spin your story into a whole new direction, was exhausting, but so exhilarating!



The Advisors would meet every morning to ensure what has been discussed previously wouldn't be repeated in the one-on-one, three hour long sessions each of us had with the Advisors. Every day I was amazed by the exhaustive comments, fresh insights, sometimes sketches (stick figures to visualise a scene), the Advisors had noted down on our scripts. "Stay away from clichés". "Dwell on genuine life experiences". "What would you have done if - ...". "That is too pat. Dig deeper!" That the discussions were not within the closed confines of a room, but anywhere your heart fancied certainly helped! We were hosted at the lovely Mahindra resort overlooking Lake Pavana, near Lonavala. So, one day it was a shady nook

under the trees, another day was on the wooden deck overlooking the gleaming lake Pavana, or a corner from where the entire valley spread out before you.

After a hard day's work 😊 we weary writers (and the exhausted advisors!) were treated to an unbelievably lavish spread. Most of us gorged on the first couple of days, after which every day became a test of will power! But when the Thai gives way to Mediterranean, and the speciality "Kongu Nadu" to Burmese, it seems so damn unfair to not have it all!

The day began at 9 am and ended after 10 pm. Post dinner was reserved for a screening of some of the Advisors' most seminal works. After the screening when you walked down the star lit pathway to your room and entered your dark room, an elephant or a swan would be waiting to greet you! Every day the Mahindra housekeeping staff would fold towels into cute animals and prop them up on the bed, so when you switched on the lights – presto – there he was, long trunk, flapping ears and all!

Looking back as I try to pin my thoughts down I realise the poet said it best -  
"Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken"

**Deepanjali B. Sarkar**