



Tirtha Yatra, Pilgrimage to Holy Places

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Numerous Tirthas and holy shrines have been in existence, since time immemorial:

1. In the Matsyapurana, it was declared by Vayudeva that there are 35 million of Tirthas in the sky, in the atmosphere and on the earth. They are all centered around Mother Ganga
2. As per Vamanapurana, there are 35 million of Lingas
3. As per Brahmapurana, more than 100 years are required to enumerate the number of Tirthas, since they are in the realm of countless
4. According to Vanaparva of Mahabharata, "Naimisa" is the best Tirtha on earth and "Puskara" in the atmosphere. Whereas, "Kurukshetra" is the most distinguished in all the three worlds



In order to highlight the importance of Tirthas, comparative references have been made:

1. In Vanaparva, it is mentioned as follows – Kurukshetra is holy, Saraswathi is holier than Kurukshetra and Prthudaka is the holiest of all
2. Matsyapurana gives a gradation, in terms of days required for purifying (one bathes for):
 - a. Yamuna does it in 7 days
 - b. Saraswathi takes 3 days
 - c. Ganga takes 1 day
 - d. Narmada purifies someone at the very sight of the river

(It is to be mentioned of all the major rivers of India, Narmada parikrama or circambulating the river, 2400+ kms is a unique feature. Very few rivers have that kind of glory)

Vamapurana gives 4 ways to attain Mukti – by knowledge of Brahman, by Shradha at Gaya, By Gorakshana and by having one's end at Kurukshetra

Four-fold classification of Tirthas is provided in Brahmapurana. Each preceding one is superior to each succeeding one

1. Daiva - created by Gods in Krutha yuga
2. Asura - associated with Asuras such as Gaya from Tretha yuga
3. Arsa – created by Sages like Prabhasa, Naranarayana in Dwapara yuga
4. Manusha – created by Kings like Ambarisa, Manu, Kuru in Kali yug

In terms of Adhikara or eligibility to undertake Tirthayatra, the ancient texts are very generous and all accommodative like all 4 varnas can undertake (Vanaparva), Both men & women can take bath in Puskara to expiate their sin. Several scriptures stress the importance of spouses doing Tirthayatra together to maximize the benefits.

Nevertheless, the scriptures stress the importance of svadharma/svakarma vis-à-vis Tirtha-yatra

1. It is interesting to note a conversation in Santiparva of Mahabharata between two saintly persons. Sri Tuladhara asserts that all rivers are holy like Saraswathi, all hillocks are holy like Himalayas and one's soul is the real Tirtha and advises the other person, Sri Jajali, not to be wanderer visiting multiple places
2. (Brahmapurana) A brahmana should go for Tirthayatras after completing his duty to perform sacrifices. It is also mentioned that it is better for a person to stay at home and perform the duties of a householder when he has the capacity and authority to perform Istis and Yagnas, and that visiting all Tirthas may not match to the performance of Agnihotra
3. (Kurmapurana) That person, who is abandoning his proper duties resorts to Tirthas does not reap the fruits of pilgrimage in this world as well as in the next



Reference – “The History Of Dharma Sastra” – by Sri P.V.Kane

