

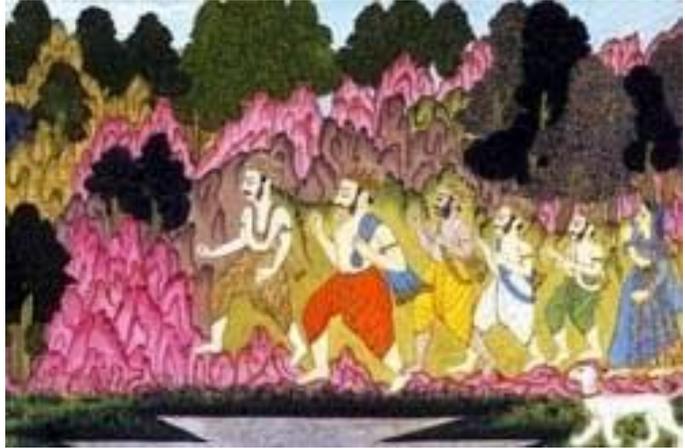


Tirtha Yatra, Pilgrimage to Holy Places

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Interestingly, in the Vana parva and Anusasana parva of Mahabharatha, more emphasis is placed on Pilgrimages vis-à-vis Sacrifices. There is an explicit comparison made in Vana parva. A Sacrifice requires wealth, tools, materials, performance by the priests and importantly, the presence of performer's wife. Such restrictions limit the commoners from the performance and leave it to the rich, princes & kings.



Whereas, going to pilgrim places is feasible for all, who were healthy. The text says further, that the benefits accrued out of pilgrimages is superior vis-à-vis by performing sacrifices. More importantly, it conjoins on the cultivation of the moral, ethical values and spiritual qualities.

Interestingly, the following qualities are prescribed for reaping the benefits through pilgrimage:

1. Whose hands, feet and mind are well-controlled
2. Who possess knowledge, practicing austerities and carries a good reputation
3. Who turns away his face from receiving gifts and contentment with minimum receipt of things
4. Who is free from vanity, that he is doing the holiest of things
5. Who is free from hypocrisy
6. Who is not engaged in money-earning undertakings
7. Who is not a heavy eater
8. Who is practicing brahmacharya by subduing the senses
9. Who has a control over anger
10. Who is very close to Satya and practices in all three ways – Kaayaa, Vaachaa & Manas

The Skandapurana asserts that

1. 'Snana cannot be predicated of a person whose body alone is flooded in water; that person who is plunged in restraint of senses, who is pure, relieved of all taint and is stainless, is alone to be called Snata (One who had taken bath)'
2. All holy places, sacrifices and various gifts are meant for cleansing the mind

The Vayu-purana states that “the steadfast person visiting Tirthas with faith and controlling his senses would be purified if the person has been guilty of sins”.

The Padma-purana remarks “sacrifices, vratas, tapas and dana cannot be carried out in kali-yuga by all; But bathing in the Ganges and chanting Hari’s name are free from all defects”.

Again, both Skanda-purana and Padma-purana asserts that in addition to the holy places on the land, there are certain virtues/qualities that may be called Tirthas and some of them are:

1. Satya
2. Titiksha/Forbearance
3. Brahmacharya
4. Daya / Compassion
5. Straight-forwardness
6. Charity
7. Self-control
8. Contentment
9. Sweet speech
10. Knowledge
11. Patience
12. Austerity



And, they aver that **Mental purity** is the highest of all the Tirthas

The Padma-purana extends the meaning and scope of Tirthas and made them more inclusive:

1. Where Agnihotra and Shraddha are performed
2. A temple
3. Where Veda is being studied
4. A cowshed
5. The places, where Soma (Spiritual elixir) drinker resides
6. A place, where Puranas are recited
7. Where one’s teacher stands
8. Where a chaste housewife dwell
9. Where a father and worthy son are together

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

