



Tirtha Yatra, Pilgrimage to Holy Places

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Sri Rabindranath Tagore, in his work “Sadhana” writes – ‘India chose her places of pilgrimage, wherever there was in nature some special grandeur at beauty, as that her mind could come out of its world of narrow necessities and realize its place in the Infinite’.

Sanatana Dharma has put a great emphasis on the sanctity of certain places and has recommended her followers to pursue pilgrimage to such holy places. Pilgrimage:



1. Fosters the principle of essential unity of our culture and the oneness of this great nation
2. Help to crisscross the caste division/exclusion and tend to level up all people by bringing them together. Pilgrimage is a leveler, like Father Time
3. The traditions associated with the holy place, disciplines adopted by the pilgrims, association with holy-philosophical personalities, environment at the Tirtha makes it easy for the traveler to elevate themselves to the required spiritual level
4. Brings in a mood of reverence to all the beings/non-beings in the creation
5. Motivates the individual to take a breather from the worldly/selfish pursuits and put the pilgrim in the path of higher & more enduring moral and spiritual values

There are multiple references about “Tirtha” in our scriptures; Here are a few

1. Rigveda – The word Tirtha appears in many hymns with different meanings – road/path/a way/ access to river/a holy place
 - i. May the divine waters protect me
 - ii. Purifying waters
 - iii. Lord Indra is said to have secured 99 rivers for God and Men
 - iv. Three great rivers – Sarasvati, Sarayu and Sindhu
 - v. Sapta Sindhu
 - vi. Three verses dedicated to River Sarasvati that depicts her as deity
 - vii. Valleys of mountains and confluence of rivers are sacred
 - viii. A large forest is invoked as a deity
2. Taittiriya Samhita – The sacrificier is to bathe at a Tirtha (Ref: Holy river), The rudras are said to prowl about Tirthas

3. Atharva Veda – Waters are described as holy and purifying and are invoked to confer happiness
4. Skanda purana – Spot of the earth resorted to by ancient good people for the collection of merit is called Tirtha
5. Vishnu-dharmottara says the following are common to all: Forbearance, Truthfulness, Restraint of the mind, cleanliness, Charity, Control of the Senses, Ahimsa, Obedience to elders, Visiting holy places....
6. Padma purana – Where no name of a tirtha on rivers is known, it should be called Vishnutirtha
7. Srimad Bhagavata purana – 27 holy mountains are mentioned
8. Brahmanda purana – 30 mountains are mentioned
9. Kumarasambhava – Himalayas as devatatma
10. Vamana purana – Seven forests in Kurukshetra that are holy
11. It should be mentioned that Tirthas do not occupy a prominent position in Smritis like Manu, Yagnavalkya
12. Akin to more holiness assigned to certain part of the body (Right hand, ear, Shika etc), certain places on Prithvi gains their holiness on account of
13. Beautiful natural characteristics of that place
14. Striking richness of water front
15. Presence/association of holy sages
16. Emergence of Godly aspect



Reference - “The History of DharmaShastra” – by Sri P.V.Kane

To Be continued....

