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Topic

M39 - The Concept of Tirtha

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Introduction

- *Snana, Japa, Homa, Sraddha* and *Dana* at the Tirthas are said to be liberate seven generations of a man.
- Generally, *snana* etc. are to be performed during the course of the day and not at night; but a *snana* or *Dana* which is *Naimittika* i.e. which has to be performed on account of some special occasions like the eclipses, marriage, solar *Sankranti*, pilgrimage, some difficulty or at the time of delivery can be performed even at night.
- When one takes a bath at a *Tirtha*, he can have it not only for himself but also for his mother, father, wife, brother, friend or preceptor.



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- Whomsoever he remembers at the time is said to acquire one eighth of the merit of a *Snana*.
- Sage Paithinasi states that one should prepare a small image of the *Darbha* grass of the person whom one intends to benefit and dip that *Darbha* image into the *Tirtha* waters, and it is said that this would give the desired merit to the absent relation or friend.
- After taking this bath one is asked to perform the *Tarpana* of his ancestors.



Introduction

- In Brahma Purana, the following are mentioned as great rivers situated in the south of Vindhya, viz., Godavari, Bhimarathi, Tungabhadra, Venika, Tapi and Payoshni.
- The following six others are mentioned as great rivers in the north of Vindhya, viz., Bhagirathi, Narmada, Yamuna, Saraswati, Visoka and Vihasta.



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- The above-mentioned twelve rivers are known as *Mahanadis*. As their designation is *Nadis*, they are supposed to be feminine.
- The following seven are stated to be *Nadas*, and regarded as masculine. They are: Sona, Sindhu, Hiranya, Koka, Lauhitya, Gharghara and Satadru.
- In Padma and Matsya Puranas, *Sraddha* in the following *Tirthas* is considered as highly efficacious.



Introduction

- These places are: Gaya, Prayaga, Amarakantaka, Varaha Parvata, River Ganga, Varanasi, Gangadwara, Prabhasa, Bilvaka, Nila Parvata, Kurukshetra, Kubjamra, Bhrigutunga, Mt. Himalaya, Kedara, River Falgu, Naimisharanya, River Sarasvati, ushkara, River Narmada, Kusavarta, Mt. Sri Saila, Bhadra Karnaka, River Vetravati, River Godavarai etc.



- Vishnu Dharma sutra also gives a long list of places where *sraddhas* should be performed.
- Usually one is asked to perform the *sraddha* only at his own residence and is prohibited from offering *sraddha* to his ancestors at the house of another person.



- In times of difficulty, when there is no fire, when one is visiting a *Tirtha*, when one is having a journey, on the birth of a son, when the wife is in her monthly course and when the sun changes a *rasi*, one may perform a *sraddha* even with uncooked food.
- But this is secondary and to be performed only when cooked food or proper recipients of cooked food are not available. Acceptance of gift is very vehemently prohibited in the texts.



- “One should not accept any gift at a *Tirtha* even when one is about to die.
- Tirthas are classified as either *Swaayambhuta* like *Prabhasa*; or *Nirmita* i.e. constructed by others, like temples etc.
- According to another classification, *Tirthas* are either *Daiva* or *Asura* or *Arshaka* or *Manusha*. They may be in heaven or on earth or in Patala.



- In Mahabharata it is stated that *Naimisharanya* is a *Bhauma Tirtha*, *Puskhara* is an *Antariksha Tirtha*, and *Kurukshetra* is a *Tirtha* for all the three worlds, or *Triloka Tirtha*.



- It has been noted above that association of godly and saintly people lends holiness to a spot. But one's own subjective approach is equally important.
- “Wherever a self-controlled man stays, for him there are famous Tirthas like Kurukshetra, Naimisharanya and Pushkara at his very residence.”
- Merely taking a dip in water is no real snana or bath at all.



- “He is properly bathed, who dips himself into the water of self-control, and who washes away his mental impurity with faith.”

स स्नातो यो दमस्नातः श्रद.....



- One, who is impure, treacherous, cruel, hypocritical, and addicted to sense pleasures remains sinful and mentally impure, even if he has taken baths in all the *Tirthas*.
- Making gifts, performance of sacrifice and penance, remaining clean, visits to *Tirthas* and even acquisition of learning are of no avail, if the mind and intention are not pure.



- One, who bathes in the *Manasa* or mental *Tirtha*, where water is purified with contemplation, and where dirt in the form of passion and attachment is washed away, attains the highest path.
- Tirtha yatra is prescribed for people of all the four *asramas* - those of the Student, the House-holder, the *vanaprastha* and the *yati*.
- Similarly, people of all the four *varnas* are asked to undertake the Tirtha yatra.



- In the case of a house-holder, he should go to *Tirthas* along with his wife, and if he maintains the sacred fire as an Agnihotri, he should also carry that fire with him.
- It has been stated that various *Manus*, *Vasus*, *Rudras*, *Adityas*, *Maruls* and other deities, as also the *Sadhyas*, *Nagas*, *Yakshas*, *Rakshasas* and Sages, -all these have attained *Siddhis* through the *Tirthas*.



- One desirous of undertaking a pilgrimage to a Tirtha is recommended by Kasi Khanda the following procedure: Before starting he must fast at his residence, offer prayers with devotion to Ganesa and to his own ancestors, and offer salutations to learned Brahmins and saintly people.
- After concluding his fast and eating something in token of such conclusion (Parana), he must start with a pleasant mind and decide to observe certain vows which he must strictly observe.



- When he returns from the Tirtha Yatra, he should again perform sraddhas etc.
- The fast must be on the previous day and workshop of Ganesa on the succeeding day. For the piligrimage, he is asked to put on a modest dress fit for a pilgrim.
- Before starting from his village it has been recommended, that he should take a pradakshina of his own village or town. He is asked to strictly avoid acceptance of gifts.



The Pauranika Tirthas

- The Agni Purana writes :- Puskara is the best and the holiest of all Tirthas.
- There dwell ten Koti thousand Tirthas. Brahma with the Celestials and the Rishis who desire to go to heaven always dwell there. The Celestials obtained their final success at this great Tirtha.



The Pauranika Tirthas

- If one, after bathing in this holy Tirtha, performs the Pujas of his dead ancestors and of the Gods, he obtains the final success (Siddhi) and also the fruits that are obtained by the performance of the Horse-Sacrifice. He goes finally to the abode of Brahma.
- It is very difficult to go to Puskara, - it is very difficult to perform austerities at Puskara, - it is very difficult to live at Puskara.



The Pauranika Tirthas

- If one dwells there, meditates there, performs Sradh ceremonies of his dead parents there, if he worships the Gods there, - then hundred generations of his will go to heaven.



- In this *Puskara* there are two other *Tirthas*, named *Jambumarga* and *Tandulakasrama*.
- The other excellent *Tirthas* that should be visited are the following:-
- Karnasrama - Koti Tirtha - Narmada - Arbuda - Charmavati - Sindhu - Somnatha - Pravasha - Sarasvati - Sagarasangama - Sagar Tirtha - Pindaraka - Dwaraka - Gomati - Tumi Tirtha - Girindra - Papanashini - Devika - Brahmatuuga - Panchanada - Kumarotose.



- If a man always says “I shall go to *Kurukshetra*, shall live at *Kurukshetra*,” be becomes cleansed of all his sins.
- He becomes pure and goes to heaven. In this *Kurukshetra*, Vishnu and other Gods always dwell.
- Therefore if one dwells here, he obtain Narayana at the end. The holiest of holy river *Sarasvati* flows here.
- If one bathes in this river, he goes to the abode of Brahma. Even the dusts of *Kurukshetra* bestows Eternal Heaven to all.



- After visiting Kurukshetra, one must go Dharma, Tirtha, Subarna Tirtha, Ganga Dwara Tirtha, and Kanakaloti Tirtha.
- After this if one bathes with proper ceremonies at the Ganges and the confluence of the Saraswati, at Brahmavarta, Trigutunga, Kubjamara, Gingod Veda, Baramshi, Prayaga, Gomati, & etc., he obtains heaven.



- After this, one should visit Rajgriha, Salagram, Batasha, Bamana, Kalikasangam, Lohitya, Korotoya, Sona, Sriparvati, Kodyagiri, Sajha, Malaier, Godavari, Tanguvadra, Kaveri, Pati, Pajasni, Keva, Dandakaranya, Kalanjare, Munjabati, Sarparaka, Mandakin, Chitrakut, Sringavaur, Avanti, Ajedhya and Namisha.
- If one visits all these Tirthas, one obtains both enjoyment and Emancipation.
- Located in five south Indian temples, the Bhuta Lingams are said to be places where Shiva manifested himself as the natural elements.



- I shall now tell you the glory of the Ganges. He who worships the auspicious Bhagirathi (Ganges) obtains both enjoyments and Emancipation.
- The country through which the Ganges flows becomes holy and auspicious.
- Those that always desire to find out the means of Mukti obtain it by taking the protection of the holy Ganges.



- If one worships the Ganges, his both generations, - his paternal and maternal, - obtain heaven.
- To drink the water of the Ganges is thousand times better than to perform one thousand Chandrayana Vratas.
- If one sees and bathes in the Ganges for one month only, he obtains the fruits of all the Yagnas. So long one's bones remain the Ganges, so long he dwells in heaven.



- If the most fallen and degraded men worship the Ganges, they are placed in the abodes of the Celestials.
- He who puts the earth from the Ganges on his body, has all his sins destroyed.
- To see the Ganges, to touch the Ganges, to sing the name of the Ganges and to remember the Ganges send his thousand generations upwards to heaven.



- I shall now describe the glory of *Prayaga*. In Prayaga dwell Brahma, Vishnu, and Indra and other Celestials, also rivers and oceans, the successful ones, the Gandharvas, the Apsaras and Kennaras.
- There are three fiery springs - in them dwell the holy Ganges. All the Vedas and all the *Yagnas* dwell here in their living forms.
- If adorations to Prayaga are re-cited , if its name is sung, - even if its earth is rubbed over the body, all sins are destroyed and all virtues are obtained.



- Whatever gifts are made, whatever *Sradhha* is performed, whatever worship are done at the confluence of the Ganges and the Jamuna at Prayaga, become eternal and ever-lasting. No one should ever abandon the idea of dying at this great holy place.
- Sixty *Kotis* and ten thousand *Tirthas* dwell at Prayaga. Therefore Prayaga is the highest *Tirtha*.



- The learned men say that the fruits that are obtained by bathing only three days in the Prayaga cannot be obtained by giving away many millions of COWS.
- The Ganges is always accessible every where, - but she is hard to be obtained at the *Gangadara (Gangotri)*, at Prayaga and at Gangasagara (where she falls into the sea).



- If one makes gifts at Prayaga, he goes to heaven and is born as a God in his next birth.
- If one dies at the foot of the Banian tree here, he goes to the abode of Vishnu.



- Now Mahadeva (Siva) himself told Gouri that Baranashi is the best of all Tirthas. If one lives here and meditates on and sings the name of God, he obtains both enjoyment and Emancipation.
- Siva said, “I never leave this only place. - Therefore it is called Never-... out. If one performs Tapa, Sapa, Homa and Dana here, - they become eternal.”
- If your body is cut into pieces, still live at Baranashi, - do not leave it.



- The following eight great Tirthas always dwell in Baranashi, - namely highly sacred Harishchandra, highly scared Amratakashwara, highly blessed Japashwara, highly sacred Sripurvata, highly sacred Mahalaya, highly sacred Chandashwara, and Vrigu and highly blessed Kadara.
- Kashi is the most blessed of all the blessed places. Because it is situated between the two rivers, Varuna and Asha, therefore it is called Baranashi.



- If one bathes here, makes gifts here, if one worships the Gods here and if one dies here, he obtains both enjoyment and Emancipation.”



- We shall now quote a chapter from the Linga Perana.
- The great God Siva said, “O Goddess, this my Baranashi city is highly holy.
- Here men with the senses under control and their souls united with Brahman practice austerities, - with the object of coming to my abode.



- In this place, my devotees by fully engrossing their minds and actions in me obtain such *Moksha* as nowhere to be got.
- O Goddess, if any being die here, they certainly obtain salvation. My this excellent city is very sacred.
- Brahma and the Emancipated beings know this secret place, therefore this city is very sacred and holy and it is my best seat.



- Because I never left this place and will never leave it, therefore it is called *Abimukta* never without.
- Man does not obtain Moksha by bathing and worshipping at *Pushkara*, *Gangadvara*, *Kurukshetra* and *Naimisharanna*, - but he gets Moksha here, therefore it is far more holy than the above mentioned Tirthas.
- *Moksha* is obtained at Prayaga and Moksha is obtained also here. But this Baranashi is far superior even to Prayaga.



- *Tirtha* is the *Upanishad* of *Dharma*, *Sama* self-control is the *Upanishad* of *Moksha*, – this Baranashi is the *Upanishad* of all *Tirthas*.



- The obtaining of the sovereignty of thousand Indras is nothing in comparism to dying in this holy city. It is better to be a goblin in Kashi than to be Indra in heaven.
- If one always meditates upon me, then the fire of his Yoga is hundredfold kindled and Kaibalya (Salvation) which is not obtained even by the Gods is obtained by him.



- The celestial Rishis with Brahma, Vishnu, the Sun, the king of the Gods Indra, all are adoring and worshipping me here.
- The Yogees with concentrated minds are adoring and worshipping me here.
- Even the most wordly men, - men that never think of religion, if they die here, will not again take birth in the world.
- That which cannot be obtained by the Yogees in their thousands of births is obtained by men here by my favour.



- In this strain all the Puranas have described the different Tirthas, and as we have already said, they have narrated innumerable legends and stories to glorify them.
- They have been told in many cases to point out the origin of these Tirthas, - but generally they are not authenticated, but were told out of the imagination of their authors.



- We shall make an humble attempt to find out the original history of the Hindi Tirthas in the next chapter.



- Usually one is asked to perform the sraddha only at his own residence and is prohibited from offering sraddha to his ancestors at the house of another person.
- But so far as Tirthas are concerned, they are said to belong to nobody and therefore this prohibition of not performing sraddha at a place not one's own does not apply to Tirthas.



- “Forests, mountains, rivers, sacred Tirthas, temples, sacred lakes etc. belong to nobody.”
- When one perform a sraddha at Tirthas he is not to offer any arghya or make an avadhana.
- There is also no prohibition with respect to nishiddhakala or improper time.