



Rameshwaram, The Anchor of Indian Renaissance - 12

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Where life is a pilgrimage, yatra, to know the infinite

RathaYatra, the festival of Chariots of Jagannatha, is held every year at Puri which is in the state of Orissa. This ten days yatra is said to be done to commemorate Lord Jagannath's, annual visit to Gundichamata's temple which is close by. It is miracle no less that thousands of pilgrims come to Puriduring this time to pull the Jagannathrath, the God's chariot with ropes. All are allowed in the temple premises, even non-Hindus and foreigners get glimpse of the deities.



DeogharYatra also called as Baidyanath Dham or Baba Dham is situated on the eastern side of Jharkhand. Baidyanath Temple as we know is one of the twelve Lord Shiva's Jyothirlingams in India. The pilgrims take the holy water of Ganga from Sultanganj's and offer to the Jyotirlingam of Lord Shiva at Deoghar. These pilgrims are called Kanwariya, reciting Bam bam Bol Bam on the way of their tedious walk more than hundred kilometers. It is in the holy month of Shravan, this Shravani Mela is celebrated as a month long festival in the Deoghar Baidyanath Temple of Jharkhand.

The 84-Kosi Yatra is a tradition and is done for thousands of years with the belief that it gives deliverance from the cycle of 84-Lakh Yonis i.e the cycle of birth and death. A king of Ayodhya performed this in the "treta period" at a place in Makhurha which is now in Basti district of Uttar Pradesh. The yatra is pradakshina or circumnavigating six districts in the region. The dates for 84-Kosi Yatra are fixed and it takes place in the month of Chaitra.



India is indeed the land of spirituality. Crowned by the mighty Himalayas, three oceans washing her feet, Mother India indeed is the blessed Punyabhumi. All the sages who moulded minds of this immortal nation, have said so at one point or other in their life on this earth, in their 'jeevanyatra.'

There is something in the very dust of this holy land which makes one realize that life is not lived till one gets a higher purpose in it, that the world is not non-existent but is definitely unreal in the sense of the ultimate reality. Swami Vivekananda said in his visit to Rameshwaram - "The very dust of this land has become holy to me; the very air is now to me holy; it is now the holy land, the place of pilgrimage, the teertha".

Tirtha Yatra, a 'journey', 'procession', means pilgrimage to holy places. Generally such places are confluences of sacred rivers, or places where some incident in ancient epics occurred. Tirtha yatra is a pilgrimage to a holy site and it is done individually or in groups. Yatra is in many times done barefoot. It is done just like the way our forefathers did, without vehicles, sheds, umbrellas, palkhis, etc.

Yatra is generally done for self-purification and increasing one's proximity with the Lord. Some more terms came like 'jatra' and 'zatra' which probably are derived from 'yatra'. There are many annual yatras in India and we see an amazing display of self control, discipline, group symphony, hospitality in arranging food and lodging. The miraculous way in which some pilgrimages are happening every year and continuing for last several centuries is making one speechless. There is no announcement, no force, no marketing, no invitations, no decisive government regulations and even then the pilgrimage is happening on the specific dates, peacefully, with so much coordination, organization, devotion and silence. There are many who come from other nations to see this happening, many have done research on them, many have filmed them, many wrote about them, the yatra is in the very blood of this Nation.

Tirth yatra is mentioned in several ancient scriptures. Even in Rig Veda wanderers are praised. *Mahabharata, Puranas like Skhanda Purana, Sthala Purana, Maha-Bhagavatha, Sri Venkatachala-Mahatmiya, Maha-Bharatha, Brahma Purana, Matsya Purana, and Brahmanda Purana mentions about Tirtha yatra.*

There are several sankalpas – resolutions are made and also boons are sought. Sound health, wealth, prosperity, progeny, and moksha (salvation) can be sought as per one's need and progress. Religious scriptures also speak about yatras done right from conceiving of a baby to the last rites of the deceased kin in a pilgrimage site.

Many great sages performed tapas (meditation) and several other spiritual activities in these sacred tirth places. These sites are said to have some special 'spiritual force that can wipe out one's evil tendencies and take him towards the path of gyan (knowledge), bhakti (devotion) and self-realization.' A sensitive mind finds some peculiar vibrations in such places.

Following information is found about Kashi and Kashi Rameshwar yatra from a online source:

“Kashi Yatra”:

Thousands of people visit the holy town of Kashi (present Varanasi or Banares) to conduct Vedic rites for their ancestors. Located in the state of Uttar Pradesh, Kashi is considered the epitome of Hindu religion as innumerable parikramas take place here throughout the year. Various religious rituals are also performed here to help one attain nirvana (salvation). It is also believed that those who take their last breath in the land of Kashi attain freedom from the gruelling cycle of life and death.



“Kashi – Rameshwaram Yatra”

There is a link between Kashi and Rameshwaram yatra. Rameshwaram is a holy place located in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. As mentioned in ancient scriptures like *Skanda Purana*, rituals performed in Kashi bear best results when performed as per the ancient religious standards. It is extremely auspicious if a devotee performs Saikatha puja at Rameshwaram, collects some sand from the same place and travels all the way through Kashi to immerse it in the holy Triveni Sangam where the River Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati converge. At the same time, it is also fortunate if one, after propitiating Lord Shiva at Kashi Vishvanath Temple in Banares, brings the holy water from the Ganges to the Rameshwaram Temple to offer Abhisheka to the Jyothirlinga of Lord Shiva present here, in the form of Lord Ramanathaswamy. (from www.indianscriptures.com)

