



Rameshwaram, The Anchor of Indian Renaissance - 11

By Shri. Narendra Joshi

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

An old person, in his eighties, staying close to me in Mumbai rang bell of my home on a day and said, 'I have brought prasad of Shegaon.' (A holy place in interior Maharashtra) I took it with lot of gratitude and asked 'Kaka (Uncle) when did you visit? and how? By train or bus?' For I knew that both journeys are tough, especially at old age. To my utter astonishment he said, 'I went barefoot, on yatra, with a group.' So that means a new pilgrimage started, a new route, a new yatra started for the saint of Shegaon. People are not bothering whether it is said in old scriptures or not. They have that need, the feeling that they should go on a new route as well. Already many are going to Shirdi, Amarnath, Chardham, Kashi-Rameshwaram, Pandharpur, Shabarimalay, Kamakhya, and several other places in literally nooks and corners of the land of gods, India.



Following piece of information was found to quench my query to some extent:

'The journey itself is as important as the destination, and the hardships of travel serve as an act of devotion in them. Visiting a sacred place is believed by the pilgrim to purify the self and bring one closer to the divine.'



In present times, yatras are highly organised affairs, with specialised [tourism](#) companies catering to the need of yatri. [State](#) governments are sometimes involved in the organisation of annual yatras, stipulating numbers, registering [yatri](#), and regulating yatri traffic. The Hindu sacred month of [Shravan](#) is also the time of the annual [Kanwar Yatra](#), the annual pilgrimage of devotees of [Shiva](#), known as [Kanwaria](#) make to Hindu pilgrimage places of [Haridwar](#), [Gaumukh](#) and [Gangotri](#) in [Uttarakhand](#) to fetch holy waters of [Ganges River](#), way back in 2003, 55 lakh pilgrims visited Haridwar. Other important Tirtha Pilgrimages are [Char Dham Yatra](#), which involve [Badrinath](#), [Kedarnath](#), [Gangotri](#) and [Yamunotri](#), [Amarnathyatra](#) in [Jammu and Kashmir](#).'

From Manas-sarovar in Tibet to Kanyakumari and Rameshwaram in the south, from Somnath in the west to Jagannatha in the east, from Shabarimalaya in south east to parashuramkunda in the north east, the whole nation is woven so devotedly by Tirth-yatras. The fact that Mansarovar is a fresh-water lake situated in [Tibet](#), Mount [Kailash](#), a place outside India now, does not mean



anything. It is a place of pilgrimage attracting religious people from India and neighboring countries. The Mount Kailash is sacred place not only in Hinduism but also in Buddhism, Jainism and faith Bon. Kailasha is the abode of Lord Shiva and circumambulating Mount Kailash on foot is believed to be a holy ritual. Lake Rakshastal lying close to the west of Lake Manasarovar is the source of the Brahmaputra River and the Karnali River, which is a tributary of the Holy river Ganges.

The Amarnath Temple in Jammu and Kashmir is dedicated to Shiva. Every year in the main Amarnath cave an Ice Shiva Lingam forms, and there are also two other ice formations which are believed to be of Shri Ganesh and Maa Parvati. Amarnath yatra is held every year in spite of all odds made by nature and men. About 4 lakh people visit during the season every year and we know it is in the heart of the insurgent area where the pilgrims have possibilities of getting killed either due to wrath of the nature or due to wrath of the insurgents. But they are determined and life means hardly anything in comparison to having a darshan of Bholenath.



The Chardham belongs to four pilgrimage places in India, They are Badrinath, Dwarka, Jagannath Puri, and Rameshwaram. The Char Dhams are the most revered sites for Hindus. So much so that one must visit them at least once in his lifetime. There is a Chota Char Dham as well includes Yamunotri, Gangotri, Badrinath and Kedarnath which is situated in Garhwal Himalayas.

The annual yatra to the famous Vithoba temple at Pandharpur locally called as Vari is held every year during June and July. From separate places with magical synchronicity, different saints' followers start and meet each other to proceed further. The main saints whose followers join are Jñāneśvar from Alandi, Tukaram from Dehu, Eknath from Paithan and Nivruttinath from Trimbakeshwar. All these pilgrims are referred to as Varkaris. There is so much devotion in the whole process; they touch feet of each other irrespective of age, status, education and gender. All are 'mauli' - the Mother, the name by which they fondly call Jnaneshwar, a saint who wrote commentary on Gita and took samadhi at a very tender age in his twenties. It is difficult to believe all this happening in a scientific era.

