

Subject	Paper No and Name	Unit No and Name	Chapter No and Name
History	PaperII: Cultures in the Indian Subcontinent	Unit 2	Lesson 5.5: Pilgrimage

Author and Reviewer Details

	Author	Reviewer
Photograph		
Name	Shubhankita Ojha	
College/Department		
Contact No.	+919810957969	
e-mail id	shubhankita.ojha@gmail.com	
Date of Submission		
Date of Second submission (pl add if any more)		

Table of Contents

- Chapter 5 : Popular Culture
 - 5.5: Pilgrimage
 - 5.5.1: Origins: The 'folk' Hindu tradition
 - 5.5.2: Aspects of pilgrimage
 - 5.5.3: Pithas and the myth of tradition
 - 5.5.4: Local shrines and the politics of popular culture
 - Summary
 - Exercises
 - Glossary
 - Further readings

5.5: Pilgrimage

Interesting detail

The universe is seen as divided into three, with the heavens above, the atmosphere in the middle and the earth below. India's rivers are seen as originating in heaven and flowing vertically from the lake of divine waters in heaven, down through the atmosphere, and out upon the face of the Earth. In the Rigvedic myth, Indra slaps the serpent Vrtra, who had coiled around the heavens and locked the waters inside, and frees the heavenly waters to fall to Earth. This flow of water which links heaven and earth becomes a means for crossing.

Source: Original

Water happens to be an important aspect in the Hindu tradition as being between the Earth and heaven. A part of the Hindu tradition adheres to a locative form of religiousness, where the place itself is the primary locus of devotion. Such places, particularly those associated with waters, are often called tirthas, and pilgrimage to these tirthas is one of the oldest and still one of the most prominent features of Indian religious life. A tirtha is a "crossing place," a "ford", where one may cross over to the far shore of the worlds of heaven. Places mythologically ascribed to certain deities or divine forms are known as dhamas (abodes).

Pilgrimage studies acquired a central place in anthropological enquiry after 1969. Victor Turner defined pilgrimage as a liminal phenomenon that exhibited in its social relations the 'quality of communitas'. Turner's arguments had a tremendous impact on those who wanted to give 'symbolic action an important place in society'. According to her a religious centre or shrine is a state when social distinctions

disappear and a direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities arises. It tends to make those experiencing it think of mankind as a homogeneous, unstructured and free community. Even in the case of India, where caste differentiation based on ritual purity are never erased, the scope for cultural exposure and interaction was greater at places of pilgrimage. 'Communitas' came to be the most debated term in the discussions and it was found to be inadequate for the understanding of pilgrimage. Investigations into pilgrim journeys and behavior have revealed that the divisiveness implicit in everyday social relations is preserved in pilgrimage, that the performance of certain rituals at the sites reinforce social structure and finally, that pilgrimage is often an individual and not a group ritual. And yet at some stage during the pilgrimage, pilgrims are seen as experiencing a sense of unity despite the maintenance of social boundaries.

As Diana L. Eck puts it, in India the word tirtha is associated primarily with those crossing places which are places of pilgrimage and which bring the traditions of the gods and goddesses, heroes, heroines and sages to living embodiment in India's geography. Even the most famous tirthas which attract pilgrims across linguistic, sectarian and regional boundaries number in the hundreds. Apart from these there are the countless local and regional tirthas visited regularly by pilgrims from their immediate areas.

The rites performed at the tirtha do not differ from those performed at home; it is the journey and the place itself which make the ordinary extraordinary. Of course tirthas famous for *pitr tarpana* and *shraddha* rites are known to be distinctive in nature. Since tirtha is a place of powerful and direct communication between this world and the other, the acts one does and the prayers one utters at a tirtha are many times more beneficial and swift of fruition than they would be elsewhere. It is the power of the place itself which is supposed to be transforming. For the Warkaris going to Vithoba in Pandharpur, the journey has greater meaning than the destination. It is the journey, the coming and going that marks out a Warkari from any other tirthayatri: the Warkari is one who makes the *Wari*, the coming and going to Pandharpur.

Rustom Bharucha refers to the different kinds of shrines in India. Open air shrines located in fields or under trees are called 'than'. During those periods of time when the 'than' is associated with some kind of miracle or supernatural event, the shrine is called 'dham'. On days when the shrine becomes active— in other words, on the days when a trance ceremony takes place— the 'than' or 'dham' is identified as 'chauki'. Shrines located in the interiors of the rooms and huts are called 'deora'. Apart from the fixed platforms representing the shrines, there are other kinds of itinerant shrines, such as the 'par' in Rajasthan of which 'Pabuji ki par' is the most important. Another form of itinerant shrine is the 'Kavad' seen in the August month kavads to Haridwar. "It becomes obvious that the shrine is a dynamic phenomenon— it can take on many different forms and shapes, defying the architectural protocol and formality of the temple. In the very informality and ordinariness of its improvised structures, the shrine offers itself as an intimate space of worship".

Interesting detail

The merit of travelling per se, not of the more specified travelling for pilgrimage, appears to be first mentioned in Vedic times. The God Indra said to King Harishchandra, "There is no happiness for the person who does not travel; living amongst men, even the best man frequently becomes a sinner; for Indra is traveller's friend. Hence, travel!"

In the Vedic Samhitas, Brahmanas and Upanishads however, tirtha definitely did not mean a place of pilgrimage. It was associated with good waters for drinking and bathing. In the later Upanishads, the Epics and the Puranas, the word tirtha comes to common use as the spiritual ford which is the destination of pilgrims.

Source: Bharati, Agehananda. "Pilgrimage in the Indian Tradition", *History of Religions*, Vol.3, No.1, 1963

5.5.1: Origins: The 'folk' Hindu Tradition

Even according to Agenandan Bharti there is no evidence of pilgrimage being recommended in texts earlier than the Mahabharata or the Puranas. "The Puranas and then ofcourse the Tantras (both Hindu and Buddhist) are full of references and instructions pertinent to pilgrimage..." The mythical frame proved particularly instrumental in enlarging upon and enhancing the efficacy of certain rituals which figured only marginally in the preceding Brahmanical tradition. This is best illustrated by the Puranic treatment of tirthas. Whereas in the Dharmasutras and Dharmasastras the concept of pilgrimage occurs in an incipient form, large sections start getting devoted in the Mahabharata and major Puranas indicating the evolution of tirthas as a well structured institution. As explained in the chapter on *vrats*, tirthas too were an occasion when the greater tradition assimilated and transformed the local cult. A religious system catering essentially to the needs of the elite sections of society and yet holding appeal for the simple minded tribal folk was devised with the Puranas playing a crucial role. The Puranas evolved out of an interaction between the brahmanical tradition and local tradition and was composed with a view to revitalize the brahmanical social order which by now had been seriously undermined. The result was the creation of a composite, syncretic religious system which incorporated diverse rituals and beliefs without endangering the social supremacy of the brahmanas.

The ritual act of pilgrimage, in case of the Hindu tradition now became a substitute for Vedic yajnas and means of earning spiritual merit by one and all regardless of their caste and sex. The latter development as seen also in the chapter on vrats, implied a significant change in the Brahmanical attitude towards women and lower caste groups which had upto now been denied the right of ritual participation. A whole new range of tirtha related rituals and usages came to be recognised in the Puranas which invested the institution with an extraordinary popular appeal. Perhaps the most important change evident in the institution of tirtha from the period of the Puranas was the excessively broad parameters which were laid down and accepted concerning its definition vis-à-vis the concept of the sacred. Any place now treated as tirtha was either believed to be sanctified by traditional association with sages or with some sacred performance such as yajna or it was considered to possess certain intrinsic powers and efficacy for spiritual purification. Tirthas now embraced all possible objects ranging from water, land, body, fingers of the hand, time, cow, to places resorted to by gods or sages and these were held as pure and sacred.

There was a phenomenal increase in the number of tirthas. The Matsyapurana fixes their number at thirty-five million. With such an enormous increase, tirthas began to be hierarchically graded on the basis of their natural form, territorial extent, association with principal deities, functional propensity or even on the basis of their accessibility. According to VijayNath, the most striking feature about the tirtha related Puranic tradition is that majority of the legends about tirthas are heavily laced with tribal lore. More than often ancient tirthas or sacred rivers and mountains are supposed to have been bodily shifted to their present location in more outlying regions. It was a deliberate attempt to explain the existence of several newly created sacred centres in peripheral areas, which had been named after some particularly renowned tirtha, in order to emphasise their ancient and sacred character. It was instrumental in bringing them within the matrix of Brahmanical culture. Newly created tirthas like Virajatirtha in Orissa are situated on the banks of the mythical river Vaitarani. The latter was believed to be a terrible river of hell where no boat to cross over was available and which could be traversed only by making liberal gifts (dana) to the brahmanas as well as by performing certain other sacred rites at the tirthas situated on its banks. Such Puranic myths, played a crucial role in augmenting belief in the efficacy of ritual performances at the tirtha sites.

According to Diana Eck, the non vedic tradition of indigenous India was a locative tradition in which *genii loci* under a variety of names— *yaksas*, *nagas*, *ganas*, *matrikas*— were associated with groves and pools, hillocks and villages, wielding power for good or ill within their areas of jurisdiction. In the thousands of particular tales which attach to tirthas everywhere and which are recounted in the mahatmyas and sthala puranas of each place, one finds repeatedly the theme of the appearance of the divine, whether as Siva, Visnu, Krsna, or the Goddess. In this way countless local tirthas claim their part in a larger tradition.

5.5.2.: Aspects of pilgrimage

A very significant change which marked the Puranic concept of tirthas was that the latter had come to be regarded as a substitute for Vedic yajnas. Tirthas are not only those places where rites and sacrifices, well performed, will yield bountiful blessings, but also that tirthas are those places which may replace the performance of rites and sacrifices. The pilgrimage to a tirtha, therefore, becomes a substitute for other ritual activity.

The first major Hindu treatment of tirthayatra is in the Tirthayatra Parva of the Mahabharata, where the Pandavas during their forest sojourn, undertake a circuit of the many tirthas. On their pilgrimage, they visit the various tirthas of rivers, mountains and forests. A great number of these are described as bestowing the benefits of some particular sacrifice such as the asvamedha, the rajasuya or the agnihotra. Such ritual equations of tirtha and sacrifice are common in the later Dharmasastras and Puranas.

“The development marked the culmination of the process by which the Vedic tradition with its narrow caste base and appeal was sought to be gradually subsumed by the Puranic tradition with its strong folk-orientation and being geared largely to appeal to the masses”. The other very noticeable aspect of pilgrimage is that it is less restrictive socially. The stance adopted by the Purana composers was pretty liberal when compared to the Smriti injunctions which lays down that japa tapas, pilgrimage to holy places, becoming an ascetic, efforts to attain mastery over mantras and worshipping deities in a priestly capacity— these six lead to sinfulness in the case of women and sudras. Attainment of salvation was no longer the prerogative of the elite classes alone rather was made accessible to all without any restrictions of caste and sex by the act of pilgrimage to holy sites. Even the rules of ritual pollution through touch were waived aside at the time of bathing at a place of pilgrimage. The dispensation of gender differentiation in the context of tirthas, was the most significant religious concession made to women during Gupta and post-Gupta times. The way of the tirtha is open and accessible to all, particularly to sudras, outcastes, and women who are otherwise excluded from brahmanical rites.

A strong folk-orientation also became manifest through the numerous tirtha practices recommended in the Puranas . Apart from religious rites like fire oblations, tapas (austerities), meditation, dana(religious gift making) etc, a pilgrimage also came to be associated with such popular practices as puja, kirtana (communal chanting), and yatra(religious processions) in which mass participation was necessary. The concept of bathing in holy waters underwent considerable elaboration at the hands of the Purana writers. Drawing appropriate legends from folk stories, the Purana writers successfully generated the widespread belief of the magical properties of all watery places. Bathing in a river more specifically under particular astronomical conjunctions such as Kumbha or on particular days of the month were declared in the Puranas to be sure means of attaining salvation. As discussed before in the chapter on vrats, the rules of pilgrimage as framed by Puranic composers also required the pilgrims to observe bodily cleanliness like shaving off their hair and bathing at tirtha sites and

such injunctions served as value referents to the pre literate groups and in making them imbibe select societal values.



(Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Surroundings.jpeg>)

Inspite of its Vaishnav provenience, there are strong tantric features in the worship of Jagannath at Puri. The 'mahaprasada' that is distributed among the devotees, thought to be food touched by the God, is sprinkled with wine on certain occasions.

Source:

5.5.3.: 'Pithas' and the myth of tradition

The pilgrimage tradition lives mostly on myths. Apart from the important dhamas one also hears of 'pithas' which again borrows a lot from constructed myths. One such myth associated with pilgrimage is from the Tantric stock. This is the story of Daksa's sacrifice. In the tantric tradition, a centre of pilgrimage is called 'pitha', a seat of the Goddess (shrines of Goddesses are known as pithas whereas sanctuaries of Gods, or mixed shrines of both Gods and Goddesses are known as 'tirthas'.

The myth of Daksa's sacrifice can be traced to Mahabharata and Puranas according to which the mother goddess, who was the wife of Siva, was in the form of Sati, one of the daughters of Daksa Prajapati. Daksa was celebrating a great sacrifice for which neither Siva nor Sati were invited. Sati however, went to this sacrifice uninvited where she was greatly insulted by Daksa. As a result of this, Sati is said to have died of yoga or as many say, she perished by putting herself into fire. In later times, probably the early medieval period, a new legend was engrafted to the original story simply for the sake of explaining the origin of the Pithas. Siva became inconsolable after the death of his beloved wife and after the destruction of Daksa's sacrifice, he wandered over the Earth in mad dance with Sati's body on his shoulders. The Gods now became anxious to free Siva from his infatuation and they hatched a plan to deprive him from Sati's dead body. Thereupon, Brahma, Vishnu and Sani entered the dead body through yoga and disposed of it gradually and bit by bit. The places where pieces of the dead body are said to have fallen became pithas i.e. holy seats of mother goddess in all of which she is represented to be constantly living with a Bhairava, a form of Siva. Sircar argues that the story may have some relation to the Buddhist legends of Buddha's corporeal relics and the construction of stupas in order to enshrine them.

Source: Source: Bharati, Agehananda. "Pilgrimage in the Indian Tradition", *History of Religions*, Vol.3, No.1, 1963

The 'performance of religion' through tirthas comes across as having no direct relation whatsoever with God. The devotees who travel large distances for a darsana of the God can hardly make it near him. Pilgrimages and tirthas have today become so commercial that most of them in order to accommodate the demand for darsana, have installed closed circuit televisions in the temple grounds where the image of God could be constantly projected to the devotees.

V.S. Agrawala suggests that the conferring of tirtha status on a piece of land represented a 'positive technique in the process of land grabbing', specially in the initial stages of cultural thrust into inimical territory. According to the Skandapurana tirtha at Venkatagiri was the gift of land, however small, to a brahmana. This kind of an argument implies that the development connected with the rise of new tirthas made it relatively easy for the aggrandising cultural agents to acquire tribal land in the name of upcoming centres of pilgrimage. Many aspirant ruling chieftains built shrines and pilgrimage centres and became closely associated with the enshrined deity thus acquiring the much needed religious sanction and popular backing for their political power. The origins of such religious centres could be attributed to a dream myth or in many cases a chance discovery. The Jagannatha temple at Puri is believed to be a result of the latter, a chance discovery of a wooden image of the

deity by a member of the Savara community. Tirthas situated in the more outlying areas became instrumental in instilling in the local populace a sense of regional loyalty and pride.

5.5.4: Local shrines and the politics of popular culture

Apart from primary pilgrimages, there are many folk or regional shrines in India. A folk shrine could be located in a number of places, not just in an enclosed structure, but also under a tree, or in a cave. Such shrines always have some kind of an icon or deity within it who are very sharply defined, with specific iconographies, narratives and symbols. While many of these deities are linked with very familiar and established mythologies, there are others whose identities continue to evolve. Kunal Chakraborti talks of how in Bengal, the Puranas chose a local goddess Mangalcandi, presumably because of her pervasive presence among the local people and constructed a regional cult which later became one of the major symbols of Bengal cultural tradition.

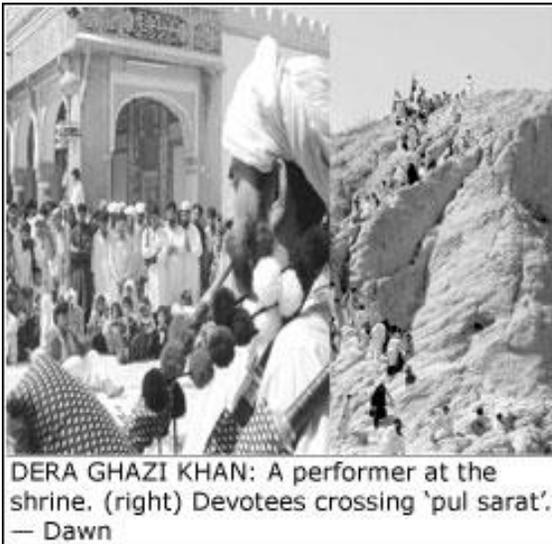
As for the Muslim pilgrimage in India, regional pilgrimage has secondary prestige, hajj being the primary one. However, there are thousands of tombs and graves of Muslim saints mainly of the sufi tradition, most of them martyrs of the faith.

The significance of tirthas in India may be understood by taking account of the many strands of the Indian tradition which have converged in the tirtha: the popular locative traditions of folk piety, the sacrificial and ritual traditions of crossing between heaven and earth, and the wisdom traditions of crossing to the far shore of the river of samsara. Having accumulated all these traditions, they are sought by people with wide ranging religious aspirations— from healing to mukti. Popular religion in Punjab for example, was passionately involved with saints and their sacred shrines. In most of the localities, saints were revered without any religious distinctions. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs alike visited these shrines which had similar powers to bestow a child, provide protection from evil spirits, cure an illness, help sick cattle to recover etc. One such shrine in Western Punjab is that of Sakhi Sarvar. The myths and literary representations illustrating the life and miracles of Sakhi Sarvar helped in fostering a syncretistic tradition which partly accounts for the active participation of individuals of different denominations in what seemingly was a cult centred around a Muslim pir. The most important Sakhi Sarvar shrine was at Nigaha in the foothills of the Sulaiman mountains at a distance of thirty two kilometers from Dera Ghazi Khan.

One miracle story associated with Sakhi Sarvar was that representing Sikh devotion to the saint. Dani, the wife of a Sidhu peasant lived in Landeke of

the Mogha tehsil of the Ferozpur district. When after twelve years of marriage she did not bear a child, she ardently prayed to Sakhi Sarvar who blessed her with a son. Her wish having been granted she undertook a pilgrimage to the shrine of the saint at Nigaha. In the course of the pilgrimage she broke her original vows and, as retribution, her newly born child died. She pleaded for forgiveness from Sakhi Sarvar, who took pity on her state and revived the child.

Source: Oberoi, Harjot Singh. "The Worship of Pir Sakhi Sarvar: Illness, Healing and Popular Culture in the Punjab", *Studies in History*, 1987, 3: 29



DERA GHAZI KHAN: A performer at the shrine. (right) Devotees crossing 'pul sarat'. — Dawn

"The vast following of Sakhi Sarvar and the importance of the Pir in the popular religion of the Punjab is evident in the sacred geography of the Sarvar cult covering vast territories in the Punjab in its numerous and varied annual fairs, ballads sung in his praise, the conventions of annual pilgrimage and the local shrines and rituals". Apart from the pilgrimage itself, people participated in the annual fairs and festivals associated with Sakhi Sarvar. What then were the reasons for the popularity of saints like Sakhi Sarvar? Richard M. Eaton on the shrine of Baba Farid argues that lineages of holy men and their shrines in the Punjab acted as intermediaries between the masses and God and also 'made Islam accessible to the non lettered masses....'. Such popular Sufi shrines acted as connecting points between local religious traditions and the Quranic great tradition. However what such an explanation does not spell out is the participation of the non muslims, Hindus and the Sikhs in such pilgrimages. The answer, according to Harjot Oberoi lies in the indigenous societies' cognitive framework of illness and healing. The popular shrines catered not only to

the spiritual needs of a Muslim population, but also provided cures to invalids from different denominations and there was a kind of medical specialisation among the different pirs and their shrines.

Something that has not as yet been a subject of a good research is that there are many Christian pilgrimage places in India. Shrine of Our Lady of Graces near Meerut and Shrine of Our Lady of Health at Vailankanny in Tamil Nadu are some of the shrines visited not only by Christians but also by Muslims and Hindus. Such shrines provide a locale where the pilgrim's faith in the miraculous power of the saint or the deity becomes explicit and the expectancy of suprahuman intercession complete.

However pilgrimages to larger or local shrines tell us a different story as well. It unravels how certain groups share and collectively reproduce a popular culture through which bulk of its members define and interpret their lives and the social reality between them and aspects of this culture is shared between all, the superordinate and the subordinate.

An increasingly polarized elite culture by the late nineteenth century saw the gradual decline in the popularity of Sakhi Sarvar in Punjab. The vigorous opposition to the worship of the Sarvar and pilgrimage to his shrine was matched by a persistent articulation of what was considered to be a worthy, ideal and legitimate form of worship. The cultural values and practices sponsored by the elite culture are not always modern introductions, but often a complex reordering of cultural idioms whereby certain segments of tradition were dismantled while others were highlighted and reasserted. It is this process of conscious selection and disaggregation of traditions which must be emphasized and analyzed

Summary

- Brahmanism came under attack by the early centuries of the Christian era due to several reasons which compelled it to become more accommodating to the pre-literate indigenous groups. In order to make Brahmanism popular among these people a new 'folklore' was created through acculturation garnished with ideological constructs.
- The idea of 'crossing over' holds a lot of significance in the Indian tradition and tirthas claim to be places where such crossing over are possible
- Most of the Hindu shrines are associated with water and the idea of bathing in such waters is predominant.
- Unlike earlier Vedic rituals, it is not the puja or yajnas that is important, rather it is the arduous travel involved that makes one meritorious enough.
- Tirthas replaced Vedic ritual observances, became more open to women and sudras and projected itself to be extremely egalitarian in order to appeal greatly to the non-brahmanical people.

- Also evident was the predominant 'folk' culture in the new Puranic Hinduism.
- Construction of myth around extension of dhamas and pithas in local areas and the simultaneous sanskritisation of most of the cults.
- It has been argued that conferring of tirtha status to a certain region was a well thought of technique by the Brahmans who grabbed land in the peripheral areas on the pretext of converting it into a tirtha.
- Apart from such pilgrimages, there happen to be numerous shrines of Muslim pirs, mother goddesses etc. which are visited by devotees across religions. These shrines are not meant to enable 'crossing over' rather they had varied roles, healing being the most important one.
- Culture and tradition are subject to a process of constant selection on one hand and a simultaneous disaggregation on the other.

Exercises

Essay questions

- 1.1 What role do pilgrimages play in the Indian tradition?
- 1.2 Elaborate on how the meanings and efficacy of 'tirtha' underwent a change in Puranas.
- 1.3 What was the role played by women and sudras in the performance of this ritual?
- 1.4 What purpose did it serve the elites in conferring certain area as a tirtha?
- 1.5 Account for the popularity of local and regional shrines in India.

Objective questions

Question Number	Type of question	LOD
1	Match the following	

Question

Match the following:

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| a) Jagannath Puri | i) South |
| b) Dvarka | ii) East |
| c) Rameshwaram | iii) West |
| d) Badrinath | iv) North |

Correct Answer / Option(s)	a) and ii) b) and iii) c) and i)
-----------------------------------	--

	d) and iv)
--	------------

Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

'Dhamas' are abodes of Gods. In India, there are four famous 'dhamas' situated in the four different directions. Jagannath Puri is in Orissa state and hence in the east direction. Dvarka is in Gujrat, hence west, Rameshwaram is in the Tamil Nadu state which lies in the south. Finally Badrinath is in Uttaranchal and so a 'dhama' of northern India.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

Other combinations are false due to reasons mentioned above.

Reviewer's Comment:

--

Question Number	Type of question	LOD
2	True or False	

Question

True or False?

- Pilgrimages are places where social distinctions consolidate themselves.
- The ritual act of pilgrimage came to substitute the Vedic yajnas.
- Bathing is an important ritual act associated with hindu pilgrimages
- Regional or local shrines hold primary significance for muslim pilgrims.

Correct Answer / Option(s)

- Pilgrimages are places where social distinctions consolidate themselves. : False
- The ritual act of pilgrimage came to substitute the Vedic yajnas. :True
- Bathing is an important ritual act associated with hindu pilgrimages. : True
- Regional or local shrines hold primary significance for muslim pilgrims. : False

Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

Tirthas are not only those places where rites and sacrifices, well performed, will yield bountiful blessings, but also that tirthas are those places which may replace the performance of rites and sacrifices. In many cases, performance of a tirthas has been equated to the performance of Vedic rites like the rajasuya or even the ashvamedha.

Water has great significance in the hindu pilgrimage tradition of India, where almost all the major shrines are associated with the ritual act of bathing in these waters. These water bodies are seen as aiding the 'crossing over' and possessing great divine powers.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

Pilgrimages are places where social distinctions disappear. It has to be performed by all including the women, sudras and the outcastes and hence becomes one ritual where all social distinctions dissolve.

The regional or local shrines have secondary importance to muslim pilgrims who look at the hajj as their primary pilgrimage.

Reviewer's Comment:

--

Question Number	Type of question	LOD
3	Multiple choice	

Question

Choose the correct answer:

- What is the most important aspect of pilgrimage which makes it extraordinary (a)the journey (b)rites (c)bathing (d)donations to brahmanas
- The shrines of goddesses are known as (a) tirthas (b)dhamas (c) pithas (d) none of these
- Which of these has not been an innovation of Puranic Hinduism?(a) vrats (b)tirthas (c) festivals (d) yajnas

Correct Answer / Option(s)

- What is the most important aspect of pilgrimage which makes it extraordinary (a)the journey (b)rites (c)bathing (d)donations to brahmanas
Answer: (a)
- The shrines of goddesses are known as (a) tirthas (b)dhamas (c) pithas (d) none of these
Answer: (c)
- Which of these has not been an innovation of Puranic Hinduism?(a) vrats (b)tirthas (c) festivals (d) yajnas.

Answer: (d)

Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

The rites performed at the tirtha do not differ from those performed at home; it is the journey and the place itself which make the ordinary extraordinary. It is the power of the place itself and the journey undertaken to reach the place that is supposed to be transforming. Hence, (a).

The seats or shrines of goddesses are known as 'Pithas'. So, (c) is the correct option. Vedic Yajnas belong to the Early Vedic times in which participation was restricted. They were not part of the Puranic project of acculturation. Hence, (d)

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

Only (a) is correct since rites, bathing and donations constitute a part of what is known as performing pilgrimage. However they are not the ones which transform pilgrimage into being more extraordinary than the rites performed at home.

Tirthas are used to refer to mixed shrines which house both gods and deities. Dhamas are abodes of Gods. So only option (c) is correct.

Vrats, Tirthas and Festivals are part of the new ritual formation which Puranic Hinduism aimed for.

Reviewer's Comment:

Glossary

Syncretism: Reconciliation or fusion of differing systems of belief

Aggrandize: Increase the power or status of.

Pir: It is a Persian word referring to a Sufi master who guides and instructs his disciples on the Sufi path.

Further readings

Bharati, Aghananda. "Pilgrimage in the Indian Tradition", *History of Religions*, Vol.3, No.1, 1963

Bhardwaj, Surinder M. "Single Religion Shrines, Multi Religion Pilgrimages", *The National Geographical Journal of India*, Vol.33, No.4, Dec 1987.

Bharucha, Rustom. *Rajasthan an oral history: Conversations with Komal Kothari*, Penguin Books, 2003.

Chakrabarti, Kunal. "Cult Region: The Puranas and the making of the Cultural territory of Bengal", *Studies in History*, 2000, 16:1

Eaton, Richard M. "The Political and Religious Authority of the Shrine of Baba Farid", in B.D.Metcalf ed. *Moral Conduct and Authority*, Berkeley, 1984.

Eck, Diana L. "India's 'Tirthas': 'Crossings' in Sacred geography", *History of Religions*, Vol.20, No.4, 1981.

Nath, Vijay. 2001. *Puranas and Acculturation: A Historico- Anthropological Perspective*, New Delhi.

Nath, Vijay. 2001. "From 'Brahmanism' to 'Hinduism': Negotiating the myth of the Great tradition", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 29, No.3/4.

Oberoi, Harjot Singh. "The Worship of Pir Sakhi Sarvar: Illness, Healing and Popular Culture in the Punjab", *Studies in History*, 1987, 3: 29