

CHAPTER SIX

Tīrthādhyāya
(Sacred Places)

Pārāśarya said:

1. O Sūta, O illustrious one, listen to the story comparable (in sanctity) to Śruti which, if retained in the heart, enables a man to attain all his aims in life.

2. Thereafter, the sage accompanied by his wife took a plunge in the holy river with the current of nectarine bliss arising from the vision of Śrī. He derived the highest joy and bliss.

3. O Sūta of pure mind, you are born of the sacred pit of sacrificial fire;¹ listen to a saying uttered by those who know the ancient lore.

4. If a keen sense of helping others is ever wakeful in the heart of the good, all their adversities perish and riches accrue at every step.

5. What is obtained by extending help (to others) cannot be derived through severe austerities; that purity cannot be had through the holy ablution and the sacred waters; that benefit cannot be had through plentiful gifts.

6. The piety resulting from helping others and the piety born of gifts etc., were weighed together in one balance by Brahmā. The former was weightier.

7. After churning through the network of verbal discussions, this is the conclusion arrived at—there is no piety greater than helping others and no heinous sin greater than injuring others.

8. The example is set by Agastya who was keen in helping (the gods). Where is such a misery born (of the separation) from Kāśī? Where is such a benign sight of the face of Śrī?

9. Life and different types of wealth are as fickle as the tips of the ears of an elephant. Hence the only thing to be carried out by a learned man is rendering help to others.

1. According to Vāyu Purāna I.i.28-33, Sūta was born on the Sutyā day in the sacrifice of Pṛthu, from the sacrificial fire, but was regarded as of mixed caste as the oblation meant for Bṛhaspati was mixed with that of Indra.

10. The sage felt to have achieved all his objects by directly seeing that Lakṣmī by uttering whose name a man becomes highly boosted so as not to be contained within anything (i.e. becomes greater still).

11. As he went ahead, he casually espied Śrī Śaila from afar, where Lord Śiva, the slayer of Tripura, was directly present.

12-14. The sage spoke to his wife with a delighted mind: "O my beloved, standing here alone, you look at the extremely brilliant peak of Śrī Śaila. It is glorious and by perceiving it, men will not be reborn here in this world. The extent of this mountain is eighty-four Yojanas. Since it is full of Liṅgas all over, one should circumambulate it."

Loṣāṃudrā said.

15. I wish to submit something if it is permitted by my lord and master. A woman who speaks before obtaining the permission of her master becomes fallen.

Agastya said:

16. O lady, what is it that you are desirous of saying? Say that unhesitatingly. Indeed no statement of women like you can cause grief to the husbands.

17. Then the pious lady bowed down to the sage and asked for the sake of the welfare of all and for the removal of her own doubts:

Loṣāṃudrā said:

18. (You say:) By looking at the peak of Śrī Śaila one has no rebirth. If this is the truth, why is Kāśī sought (by you and others)?

Agastya said:

19. O beautiful lady, listen. O pure lady, what you ask is true. This has been decided on many occasions by sages, the seekers of truth.

20. There are many holy spots bringing about salvation. Decision has been arrived at in regard to that also. I shall enumerate them to you. Listen with attention for a short while.

21. The first and the foremost is the well reputed king of Tirthas (Tirtharāja) named Prayāga. It is conducive to the realization of the wishes of all the holy spots. (Other holy spots incur the sins of those who resort to them. In order to wipe off those sins, they have to resort to Prayāga.) It accords piety, love, wealth and salvation.

22-25. The others are Naimiṣa, Kurukṣetra, Gaṅgādvāra, Avantikā, Ayodhyā, Mathurā, Dvārakā and Amarāvati, the place where Sarasvatī and Sindhu join the sea, the meeting place of Gaṅgā and the ocean, Kāntī (Kāñcī), Tryambaka and Saptagodāvarī*, Kālañjara, Prabhāsa, Badarikāśrama, Mahālaya, Omkārakṣetra (Amarakaṅṭhaka), Jagannāthapurī which is the most excellent of all the shrines of Viṣṇu, Gokarṇa, Bhṛgukaccha (Broach—Gujarat), Bhṛgutūṅga (in Nepal—De), Puṣkara, Śrīparvata and other holy spots and Dhārātūrtha.

26. O my beloved, there are mental holy spots such as Truth etc. These too are the bestowers of salvation. No doubt need be entertained in this regard.

27. The holy spot called Gayātūrtha bestows salvation to the Pitṛs (Manes). Their sons too are liberated from indebtedness to the grandfathers.

Sadharmiṇī (The partner in pious practices, wife i.e., Lopāmudrā) said:

28. O highly intelligent one, what are those holy spots called mental holy spots? It behoves you to narrate them.

Agastya said:

29-32. O sinless lady, listen even as I enumerate the mental holy spots. By scrupulously taking the holy dips in them a man attains the greatest goal.

Truth is a Tīrtha (holy place); forbearance is a Tīrtha; control of the organs of sense and action is a Tīrtha; compassion for all living beings is a Tīrtha; straightforwardness is a Tīrtha.

Religious gifting is a Tīrtha; self-restraint is a Tīrtha; contentedness is mentioned as a Tīrtha; celibacy is the greatest Tīrtha; speaking pleasing words is a Tīrtha.

* A holy place in Andhra Pradesh, near Solangipur, 16 miles from Pithapur, West Godavari District.

Knowledge is a Tirtha; courage (fortitude) is a Tirtha; penance is cited as a Tirtha; the absolute purity of the mind is the holiest of all holy Tirthas.

33-35. Holy ablution is not the mere drenching of the body in water. He who has the purificatory bath of mental control, is really the one who has had his holy ablution; he is (really) clean; he has removed all the impurities of the mind.

One who is covetous, slanderous, cruel, a hypocrite and sensualist is sinful and dirty, even if he takes a plunge in all the sacred waters.

A man does not become free from impurities only by doing away with the bodily dirt. If the mental dirt is wiped away, one becomes internally pure.

36. Aquatic beings are born and die in water. But they do not go to heaven because their mental impurities have not been cleansed.

37. Too much of attachment to sensual objects is called mental impurity. Non-attachment to them is cited as freedom from impurities.

38. If the mind within is defiled, it does not become purified by taking a holy dip in sacred waters. It is impure like a pot of toddy washed hundreds of times in water.

39. If the mental predilection is not pure, all these, viz. liberal gifts, sacrifice, penance, cleanliness, pilgrimage and learning, become non-Tirthas.

40. Wherever a man who has curbed all his organs of sense and action lives, there he has his (holy places like) Kurukṣetra, Naimiṣa, Puṣkara etc.

41. He who takes his holy bath in the mental holy spot that is cleansed with perfect knowledge, that has meditation for its waters and that removes the dirt of attachment and hatred, attains the greatest goal.

42. These characteristics of the mental holy places have been recounted to you, O noble lady. Listen to the cause that brings about sanctity to worldly holy spots.

43. Just as there are certain excellent parts of the body considered very holy and pure, so also some regions of the earth are considered most meritorious.

44. The meritoriousness of holy spots is considered to be a result of the mysterious influence of the ground, of the

water and of the fire thereof as well as of the backing and acceptance (as holy) by sages.

45. Hence he who takes his holy bath in both the holy spots, i.e., the worldly holy spots and the mental holy spots, attains the greatest goal.

46. A man becomes poor by not observing fast for three whole nights, by not resorting to the holy spots and by not giving gold and cows.

47. The benefit that one obtains by undertaking pilgrimages to holy spots is not obtained by performing holy sacrifices including Agniṣṭoma etc., along with liberal monetary gifts.

48. He whose hands, feet and mind are well-controlled, he who possesses learning, penance and reputation enjoys the benefit of a holy spot.

49. One who desists from accepting monetary gifts, one who is contented with whatever accrues to him and one who is devoid of egotistic tendencies enjoys the benefit of pilgrimage to holy spots.

50. One who is free from religious hypocrisy, one who never undertakes (unholy activities), one who eats but very limited quantities, one who has conquered the organs of sense and action and one who is completely free from affectionate attachments enjoys the benefit of the pilgrimage to holy spots.

51. One who is free from anger, one whose intellect is free from impurities, one who is invariably truthful in utterance, one who strictly adheres to holy vows and observances, one who considers all living beings on an equal footing with one's self, enjoys the benefit of pilgrimage to holy spots.

52. If one visits holy spots with an understanding of what is righteous and what is not, if one has sincerity, full faith, mental courage and concentration, he becomes pure even if he perpetrates sins, and still more pure becomes one who regularly performs holy rites.

53. He is not reborn as a brute; he does not take birth in dismal godforsaken places; he never becomes miserable; he attains heaven and gets the means of salvation.

54. A person who has no faith, a sinful soul, an atheist, one who is constantly in doubt and one who is too much a rationalist—these five never attain the benefit of pilgrimage to holy spots.