

Chapter 13

Exposing Conscience and Experience Among Hindu Pilgrims in India: Interfacing Sacred and Profane

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Abstract

The notion of deeper experiences of Hindu devotees inspired by divine images and sacred places has roots in the historical past, going back to the Vedic period (ca. 2500 BCE), where we find rich literature on performances, rituals and merits of pilgrimages. Considered the bridge between human beings and divinities, the experiences received are the resultant ‘blissful fruit’ (*phala*) that helps the spiritual healing of pilgrims through awakening conscience and understanding the manifested meanings, symbolism, purposes and gains. This system can be viewed concerning the ‘texts’ (the mythology, ancient text and related narratives) and the ‘context’ (contemporality and living tradition). These rules and performances have regional perspectives of distinctions, but they also carry the sense of universality, i.e. locality (*sthānic*) and universality (*sarvavyāpika*) interfaces. The devout Hindus reflect their experiences in conception, perception, reception and co-sharedness – altogether making the wholistic network of belief systems, i.e. the religious wholes in Hindu society. This chapter deals with four aspects: the historical and cultural contexts, the meanings and merits received, the motives and the journey and interfacing experiences. The study is based on the experiential and questionnaire-based exposition and interviews of pilgrims at nine holy places during 2015–2019 on various festive occasions and is illustrated with ancient texts and treatises. The sacred cities included are Prayagraj,

Destination Conscience, 157–170



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doi:[10.1108/978-1-80455-960-420241014](https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80455-960-420241014)

Varanasi, Gaya, Ayodhya, Vindhyachal, Ganga Sagar, Chitrakut, Mathura Vrindavana and Bodh Gaya.

Keywords: Conscience; cultural context; experiential exposure; Hindu outlook; pilgrimages; ritual landscapes; sacred and profane; sacred time; *tīrtha-yātrā*; Sanātana Dharma

Background and Fulfilling the Quest: Cultural Context

Since the historical past in Hinduism (i.e. ‘Sanātana Dharma’, referring to the continuity and sustenance of the ancient tradition), the five religious duties (*dhārmic kartavya*, called *pañcha kriyā*) form the traditional minimal moral-duty practices. These duties are *upāsana* (worship of divine images, local to universal), *utsava* (festive celebration, on special days, related to astronomical happenings and associated folklore and glorifying stories), *dharma* (moral duties, making a pathway linking humanity to divinity), *tīrtha-yātrā* (pilgrimage to sacred sites and performance of rituals) and *sanskara* (rites of passage, life cycle rituals and related celebrations). The ancient tradition of pilgrimage, called *tīrtha-yātrā* (‘tour of the sacred fords’), connoted pilgrimage with taking a holy dip in the water bodies as a purificatory rite. The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* of the *Rig Veda* (7.15), dated ca. 2500 BCE, mentions: ‘Flower-like the heels of the wanderer, His Body growth and is fruitful; All his sins disappear, Slain by the toil of his Journeying’ (cf. Bhardwaj, 1973, p. 3). Pilgrimage is an understanding of meaning within the sacredscape through its imageability and expressive qualities. This, together with the simultaneous gain of a ‘moral sense of nature’, has been the ‘major discovery of the great seers and sages of the past. The system of pilgrimage is a “whole of reality” where holiness gets resorted in a *field* that is latently alive, filled with expression and meaning, and certainly deserves human reverence’ (Singh, 2011, p. 21).

In the context of life, pilgrimage involves all the matter, substance and consciousness of human beings in its drama of eternal journey (*ātma-yātrā*). It embodies the domain of divine life; only those with potential can experience and understand the meaning. Meaning is a form of being, and we need an eye of *clairvoyance* – ‘Clear Seeing’. However, ‘let they be trivialized by a secular society that destroys the inner meaning of everything it touches. But the reality is there’ (Berry, 1992, p. 131). The most common ritual act in any form of Hindu pilgrimage is *darshan* (‘auspicious glimpse’) taken by pilgrims. The *darshana* has at least three categories: *saṁparka* (direct contact, touch), *dṛṣṭigat* (visual, without touch) and *dūrasta* (seeing from a distance). For *saṁparka darshana*, very long queues of people waiting are common at the important temples/shrines (cf. Stanley, 1992, p. 85).

In all the happenings and rituals, the concept of *darshana* is inextricably linked to interconnecting devotees and divinity, especially in the Hindu pilgrimage (*tīrtha-yātrā*). One cannot easily understand how a Sanātana Hindu experiences pilgrimage without a deep appreciation for the not-so-obvious concept of *darshana*, which literally means ‘sight or vision’; however, this denotes a more

profound spiritual feeling (*ādhyātakima anubhūti*), which can be realised and revealed but in no way easily expressed explicitly. Of course, through symbolic expressions, anecdotes and stories, this can be shared and understood to a certain extent. In the Sanātana Hindu tradition, the direct encounter, or seeing/visioning, of the Divine (image) is the ideal that paves the pathway to pilgrimage. Similarly, Hindu devotees want to see holy men and women, holy shrines and images abiding in the ancient sanctums and surrounded by auxiliary deities. Ultimately, they want to see God, to have a personal, life-changing, bliss-engendering, *karma*-eradicating vision of Truth within themselves. The pilgrim also wants to be seen by God, to concede and expose himself/herself before God and thus to be known to Him and receive blessings. *Darshana* is the essence of every pilgrim's journey, the rationale, the ordained rules of the religious texts and the mundane and sacred goals.

A pilgrimage journey is a hierarchic rite of passage in Hindu traditions; however, it is also more than that. Commonly, it involves three stages of function: *initiation* (from awareness to start), *liminality* (the journey itself and experiences) and *reaggregation* (the homecoming). These stages refer to the march from mundane to sacred over time and ultimately receiving some deep sense of feelings. The human quest to get peace and eternal satisfaction and an experience of the manifestation of place encourages the *initiation*, which further advances the sense of faith and the wish for a sacred journey. The stage of *liminality* later develops into *experientiality* leading to the preparation for transmigration (*moksha*) in a broad context (cf. Singh, 1992, pp. 39–40, 2013, pp. 50–51). However, pilgrimages can be classified according to different motives, which generally vary from one sect to another and from one society to another. After having experiential feelings and religious gain, pilgrims return to their everyday life, and in the end, they expose their memories and emotions to society. This further promotes awareness and the wish for pilgrimage to other community members (Singh, 1987, p. 525526): This way, it forms a cyclic frame of travel, a *pilgrimage maṇḍala* (Fig. 13.1).

An example of the Hindu outlook on pilgrimage (cf. Fig. 13.2) would explain the above issue. From a believer (person) to the Ultimate, at least four layers exist but are interconnected through sacred space, sacred time and sacred functions (rituals) and functionaries. In a theological context, this is the eternal will to interconnect a person to the Ultimate; while in a social context, it refers to the march from individualism to universal humankindness. In this model, a multi-faceted approach should be applied, together with experiential understanding, to reach some meaningful and conclusive findings reflecting the intricacies and representing the cultural intricacies.

In the case of Rajasthan (the western part of India), it is noted that most pilgrims interviewed held that visiting *tīrthas* (sacred fords) does not give ultimate *moksha* (liberation from transmigration); but most agreed that it was of supreme merit. In the light of textually expressed values, it was astonishing to read how universal the idea was that bathing (*snāna*) in a pilgrimage site was of little spiritual or sometimes religious significance. At the same time, generosity was held up as especially efficacious and meritorious, as noted by Gold (1988, p. 263):

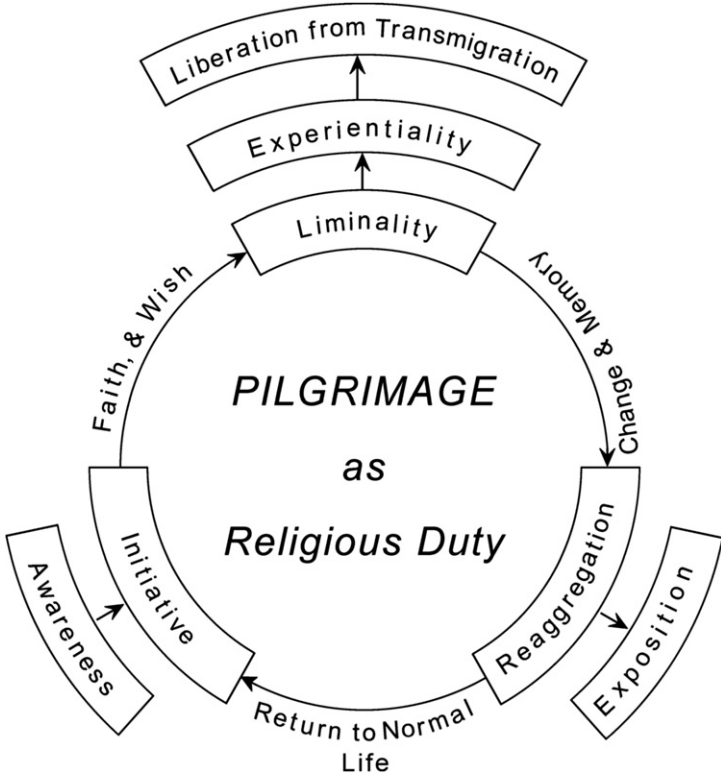


Fig. 13.1. Pilgrimage as Religious Duty (After Singh, 2013, p. 50).

Pilgrimage helps to loosen all kinds of bonds, but not because the waters of *tīrthas* cleanse the results of bad deeds from men’s souls; not one person among my informants evinced any trust in such reputed powers of *tīrthas*’ baths. Rather, pilgrimage helps because of the cumulative effect of being removed from daily routines and attachments at home, of taking many powerful *darshana* of the gods, of voluntarily enduring hardships on the road, and above all, of putting out money both for the sake of these experiences (the initial fare) and during them (the constant drain of *rupees* and *paisa* into the outstretched hands of *paṇḍās* and beggars) decidedly good for the soul. The effect is one of lightening; the returning pilgrim should be thinner and poorer.

The above study concludes that the pilgrims accept the view that the highest goal of pilgrimage is not simply ‘going to the place’ but the encounter with the divine spirit that is more likely to occur there and experienced through a variety of rituals. But, of course, stress is also placed on inner resolution (the ‘pilgrimage

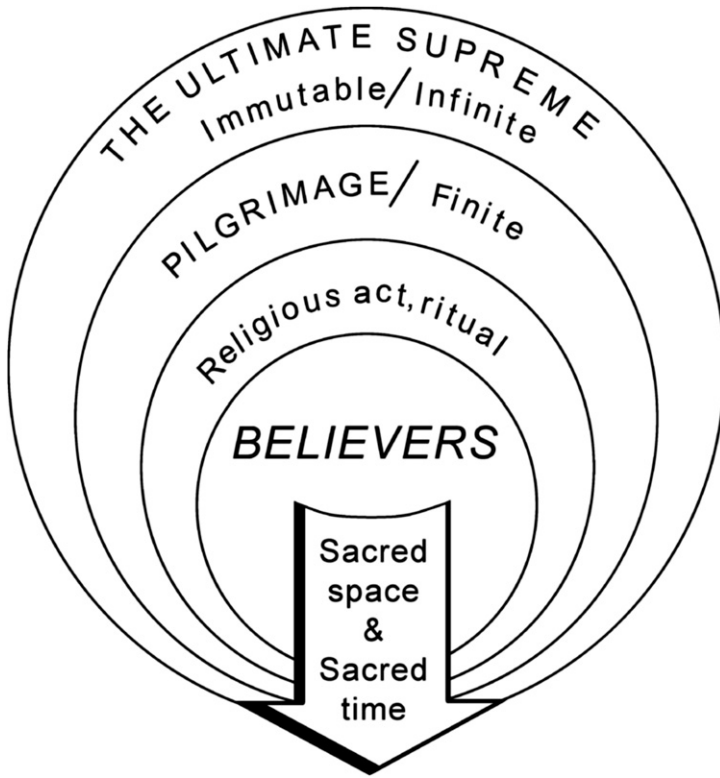


Fig. 13.2. Hindu Outlook on Pilgrimage (After Singh, 2013, p. 51).

within', *ātma-yātrā*) that ought equally to accompany an earthly or a spiritual quest as the source of a pilgrimage's – and a life's – greatest blessings (*puṇya*) and accomplishments.

In common sense, gazing at the divine images (*darshana*) is considered the central act of *tīrtha-yātrā*. The concept of pilgrimage in Hinduism has metaphoric explanations; besides being a means of the physical act of visiting the holy places, the act also implies to mental and moral code of purification (cf. *Skanda Purāṇa-Revā Khaṇḍa*, 227.23). Faith, firm determination and mental preparation are necessary for the pilgrimage; therefore, any time is good for it (*ibid.*: 227.20). One of the unique forms of manifestation of a sacred site is its close association with a particularly holy person (cf. Bharati, 1970, p. 89), or a deity. The *Yajur Veda* (16.42) described Lord Shiva himself as *tīrtha*; therefore, His resort city which He 'never-forsaken' (*avimukta*) becomes the most sacred site of pilgrimage: the city of Kashi (also called Varanasi, or Banaras) (Eck, 1982, p. 28). Body-place symbolism also appears concerning holy places, that is, how through yogic and *tāntric* function, one can receive the merit of a 'holy place', as discussed in the case of

Kashi (Kāshī *Khaṇḍa*, KKh, 5.25). This way, gazing at the holy person, the deity or his associated site is assumed to be an actual visit to a *tīrtha*.

Meanings and Merit Received: The Textual Context

The notion of *tīrtha* symbolises at least four connotations in ancient Sanātana Hindu literature: (i) a *route* going to a place where one can receive manifesting power (cf. *Rig Veda* 1.169.6; 1.173.11), (ii) the *bank of a river* where one can take holy dip as a rite of purification (cf. *Rig Veda* 8.47.11; 1.46.8), (iii) a *sacred site* wherein lies the power of manifestation (cf. *Rig Veda* 10.31.3) and (iv) the religious territory which became sacred due to religious activities and work of the god/s (cf. *Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 18.9). In all these connotations, spatial dimension lies in the background; thus, they reflect the cultural characteristics imposed upon varieties of mythologies referring to possessing spiritual power that devotees pray to receive as blissful merit (*phala*). Working diligently with themselves, the pilgrims observe their *yogas* (controlled physical path to reach) and their *sādhanas* (disciplined mental approach of awakening) so that their seeing may be pure and untainted. Traditional questors' practices of *snāna*, the sacred bath, especially at the confluences of holy rivers, and *muṇḍana*, shaving of the head, are part of attaining that purity and ultimately receiving the blissful merit.

The *Atharva Veda* (18.4-7), dated ca. 2000 BCE, says one can get released from suffering and troubles by performing pilgrimage; however, one must follow the ordained rules and moral conduct, supported by described rituals, austerity and behaviour. Other text of the post-Vedic period mentions that pilgrimage is a process of soul healing and provides peace, easiness and relief from poverty. The ancient texts (ca. CE 6th–12th centuries) describe meanings manifested therein and the inherent motives and messages (cf. TA-G, 1957, p. 63). To get the merit (*puṇya*) of pilgrimage, one should control sexual desire, anger, greed, tasty food, jealousy, pride and distorted mind (the *Devī Bhāgavata*, 8.8, cf. TA-G 1957, p. 749). According to the *Padma Purāṇa* (19.10-12), the ultimate aim of Hindu life is to link to the divine power, which will be received through visitation (*darshana*), associated rituals (*pūjās*) and above all, the pilgrim's conscience and awakened thought that are shaped and regulated by their belief systems.

According to the *Kāshī Khaṇḍa* (of *Skanda Purāṇa*, 6), the metaphysical notion of a sacred place denotes the path of truthfulness, forgiveness, control of mundane wishes, following the prescribed moral codes, and simplicity. In continuance, the texts also mention that one gets the same merits acquired by pilgrimage and associated rituals by donating to the needy, discontentment, celibacy and humbleness. By inference, pilgrimage also connotes cultivating an awakening conscience, patience, clairvoyance of thought and a compassionate mind. Having a dip in the holy river or water pool would provide religious merit if intentions and acts are good; moreover, the resultant fruits will be pure and spiritual.

Food restriction is essential to the pilgrimage to keep the purity of mind, eternal satisfaction and a healthy body. In Hindu tradition, food plays a

significant role in the system of religious performances and rituals; the food offered to the deities (*prasāda*) is thought to have the salvific quality that bestows considerable spiritual merit, purifying body, mind and spirit, thus in a way considered as a giver of spirituality that has a special place in the cultural traditions and lifestyles (Singh, 2023b, pp. 122–123). According to the classical religious texts of Hinduism, three broad categories of food are described for health, nutrition and interrelated lifestyles and resultantly overall effects: *sāttvika* (promoting goodness), *rājasika* (stimulating passion), *tāmasika* (fostering ignorance). Of these, *sāttvika* is prescribed during pilgrimages, representing the qualities of sweetness, softness and nourishment, and promoting vitality, strength and cheerfulness, illustrated with pure vegetarian foods, milk and fresh vegetables (Singh, 2023a, p. 4).

While performing a pilgrimage, one must completely avoid greediness, selfishness, denial, unkindness and a wicked mind. The five types of people who never receive the resultant merit (*puṇya*) from pilgrimage include non-believers, those with a cruel or doubtful mind, detectives and those practicing detective-related inauspicious activities (cf. TA-G, 1957, pp. 63–64). The *Padma Purāṇa* (41.12, 59.11, and 63.14) also prescribes that during the pilgrimage, the following also be treated as attributes of pilgrimage and treated similarly to receive the merits: a sage, mother, father, guru, husband and wife (in case of a married couple).

Motives and the Journey: Experiential Exposure

People form a sense of themselves and their environmental surroundings at a variety of scales (*spatialities*), time frames (*sequentialities*), functions (*activities*), mobilities (e.g. *pilgrimages*), quests (*sacrality*) and mental states (*belief systems*) (Singh et al., 2022, p. 135). At the local scale, people first experience the spirit and power of places (*genius loci*) and then proceed to share this spirit and power at larger scales (Singh & Rana, 2020, p. 97). Generally, travel to holy places has been considered a pilgrimage with a strong religious or spiritual motivation, and often involves long journeys from distant places on foot to arrive at a sacred site. Although the goal of such travel is to *see and be seen by* the deity [and saints] and seek blessings, pilgrims also engage in ordained rituals considered necessary by priests or religious functionaries for travel. These religious functionaries help the pilgrims be firm in their motives and merits (cf. Singh & Rana, 2023). This is the way the profane attributes support the sacred; thus, they become part of the sacred and help to regulate the cycle of sacred-profane reciprocally. Touristic pilgrimage develops when the latter dominates in this system, promoting mundane motives. In this context, the famous proclamation of *a pilgrim being half-tourist and the tourist being half-pilgrim* is reasonably accepted.

A survey conducted in 1972–73 interviewing 500 pilgrims noted that more than half the pilgrims had come to Kashi (one of the holiest cities in India) for special performances, especially for purification and ancestral worship; these respondents exemplify the typical pilgrims who travel to a distant place because the object of devotion is located there (Vidyarthi et al., 1979, p. 136). Similarly, another report

(2019) was made by the author that supported the above observation, indicating that this seat of pilgrimage has still continued its sacred character that evolved in the historical past. Although the journey may be meaningful, the primary reason for movement is merely to get from one place to another (i.e. from home to the pilgrimage place) to acquire religious merit (*puṇya*). However, due to its particular value for ancestral rites, just over 12% of the interviewed pilgrims reported that they undertook a circumambulation (*parikramā*) and/or associated with post-funeral ceremonies and some secondary-level religious activities. Similarly, pilgrims often have multiple reasons for their sacred journey, including special performances like fulfilling the vow to relieve suffering or possessing evil spirits (Singh, 1997, p. 206). Since the ancient past, a passion for place attachment to receive divine merit has been a basic norm in Hindu tradition. A sacred place as a 'storied place' is eulogised in Hindu mythology, or oral epics, with divine connotation – myth and *terra firma* intersect there (Singh & Rana, 2021, p. 139). Most of the holy and pilgrimages places are such distinct places recoding mythologies, folklores and beliefs about their association with gods and their activities (*hīlās*). In Hindu tradition, such journeys are primarily for religious or spiritual gain; of course, pilgrimage is also supported by the profane (secular, mundane), and after a complex web of rituals, the profane gets transformed into 'sacred'. This cycle is regulated in a spiral manner.

Recent surveys of pilgrims in the nine pilgrimage cities of north India (see Table 13.1) clearly show the predominance of spiritual merit as the main object (i.e. over half of the respondent pilgrims). However, this predominant motive varies according to the unique character or personality of the holy place as narrated in the religious treatises (cf. Table 13.2), e.g. the main motive to visit Gaya, famous for ancestral rites, is ancestral ritual (i.e. 65%), while Vindhyachal, as a regional centre of goddess worship, following the local and folk tradition, is popular for tonsure and fulfilling vows (i.e. 48% of respondent pilgrims). The holy places of Prayagraj, Varanasi, Ayodhya and Mathura are eulogised as sacred land associated with the various acts of a distinct divinity; therefore, at these places, more than half of respondents expressed motives to have spiritual merits (cf. Table 13.1). In some places, where natural scenery like hills, falls, rapids and caves exist near the holy places, side-by-side touristic pilgrimage becomes more common in comparison to other places, for example, Bodh Gaya, which is a place related to the Buddha's enlightenment that also attracts pilgrims for peace and union with nature spirit (cf. Tables 13.1 and 13.2).

Along with mountains, water is one of the most sacred symbols in Hinduism. Water sites, in the form of rivers (*tīrthas*) and the confluence of those rivers, are considered sacred, and bathing in these water bodies allows a person to experience cosmic energy and be purified from sin (Singh, 2020). Of all the rivers in India, the seven most holy or sacred rivers are the Gaṅgā, Yamunā, Godāvarī, Sarasvatī, Narmadā, Sindhu (Indus) and Kāverī rivers, making the whole of India intensely sacralised. This has powerfully promoted the development of a huge mass of sacred places along these rivers and replicating of other sacred places from various parts of India in the frame of spatial transposition. Furthermore, small ponds (*kuṇḍas*) and lakes are also considered sacred (Singh et al., 2022, p. 138).

Table 13.1. Motives of Pilgrims in the Nine Holy Places of India (Number in %).

Se	Main Purpose/Gain (<i>lābha</i>)	1, Pr	2, Va	3, Ga	4, Ay	5, Vi	6, Gs	7, Ch	8, Ma	9, Bg
1.	Spiritual merit (<i>puṇya</i>)	52	58	12	53	23	17	11	37	12
2.	Blessing of holy men (<i>āshisha</i>)	11	10	8	21	7	10	13	13	17
3.	Ancestral ritual (<i>shrādhā</i>)	14	14	65	9	9	15	4	–	2
4.	Tonsure (<i>munḍana</i>)	4	4	5	2	28	6	3	–	–
5.	Fulfilling vows (<i>manautī</i>)	3	2	2	2	20	9	8	3	3
6.	Liberation (<i>moksha</i>)	4	4	3	3	1	32	12	13	3
7.	Self-peace (<i>shānti</i>)	4	2	1	4	1	2	18	15	32
8.	Relief from suffering (<i>mukti</i>)	5	1	1	3	2	4	26	6	11
9.	Donation/charity (<i>dāna</i>)	1	2	2	1	1	3	3	4	8
10.	Touristic pilgrimage (<i>yātrā</i>)	2	3	1	2	8	2	2	9	12
	Percentage of respondents	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	Total respondents (N)	380	432	320	418	290	113	120	149	212

Source: Personal surveys and interviews in different periods of festivities, 2015–2019.

Note: **Pr** Prayagraj, **Va** Varanasi, **Ga** Gaya, **Ay** Ayodhya, **Vi** Vindhyachal, **Gs** Ganga Sagar, **Ch** Chitrakut, **Ma** Mathura Vrindavana, **Bg** Bodh Gaya. For the religious characteristics and manifested merits of these holy cities, see Table 13.2.

This observation supports the ancient epic of the *Mahābhārata* (13.108.16-18), which states: ‘Just as certain limbs of the body are purer than others, so are certain places on the earth more sacred – some on account of their situation, others because of their sparkling waters, and others because of the association or habitation of saintly people’. These cantos also mention the generalised and distinctive rules, the ways and the codes of conduct to be followed during the pilgrimage at the various places, as well as the hierarchy and degree of sanctity of various places. One pilgrim respondent said: ‘The objective of pilgrimage takes my concern for more meaning when I realize the purpose of life. Life is meant to become free from the wheel of *samsara*, which means the continuous cycle of birth and death. It is for making spiritual advancement and to perceive our real identity as human beings’ (Singh & Rana, 2021, p. 142).

Table 13.2. Religious Characteristics of the Nine Holy Places of India.

Se	Holy Place	Affinity With the Deity/God; Sacred Attribute	Textually Defined Religious Characteristics and Merits
1.	Pr , Prayagraj	3-rivers confluence: the Ganga, the Yamuna and the Sarasvati rivers; Sage Bhardwaj; every year, one-month fair	Release from sin and purification; pleasing the ancestors
2.	Va , Varanasi	Shiva Vishvanatha, Annapurna, Bhairava; the Ganga River;	Release from sin and purification; pleasing the ancestors
3.	Ga , Gaya	Vishnu/ancestors' spirit; the Sun god; the Phalgu river	Blessings of the ancestors and settling of their spirit into the divine realm
4.	Ay , Ayodhya	Rama – birth, childhood, capital; the Sarayu River	Release from sin and purification; pleasing the ancestors
5.	Vi , Vindhyachal	Goddess Vindhyavasini, together with Ashtabulja, and Kali; the Ganga River	Blessings from the Goddesses for the overall well-being of the family, especially the children
6.	Gs , Ganga Sagar	Sage Kapila and sacred ocean, where the Ganga merges into the Indian Ocean	Blessing for getting release from transmigration; purification
7.	Ch , Chitrakut	Rama – past ca. ten years while in exile	Austerity, peace, solace
8.	Ma , Mathura Vrindavana	Krishna-Radha; sacred groves; the Yamuna River	Blessings for overall well-being; peace in the family
9.	Bg , Bodh Gaya	The Buddha – get enlightened here; the Niranjana (Phalgu) River	Self-awakening, peace and contemplation

Source: Based on various religious treatises, dating from ca. CE 6th to 12th centuries.

Hindu Pilgrims' Experiences: Interfaces and Stepping

Based on experiential, participatory and expository information, Hindu pilgrims' experience should be theorised in the interlocking network of phase-wise changes regarding interfaces among power, legitimacy and reciprocity (cf. Fig. 3, cf. [Singh & Rana, 2021](#)). Here, 'power' refers to the relationship among cultural

actors in which one cultural actor (a) can get another (b) to make some pilgrimage that 'b' would not have otherwise done. The strength and bases for *power* are maintained by the 'Continuity of tradition' through cultural traits (i.e. Life-Culture) – identified as A in Fig. 13.3. In addition, the power of cultural continuity serves as a 'coercive force' maintained by the three forms of religious incentives: material, solidary and purposive.

Legitimacy is conceived as a generalised perception or adaptability of the religious actions of the social groups that are desirable, proper or appropriate within some traditionally and culturally constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and code of conduct. This is represented by the system of tourism-recreation in the purview of Life-World – shown as B in Fig. 13.3. The bases for legitimacy can be individual, organisational and/or institutional.

Reciprocity is a transformative channel interlinking the passage of 'succession-sustenance-sustainability' and maintains counter actions between the pilgrims (sacred), and the functionaries (profane) involved therein, i.e. it influences the other and is influenced by the other; this way, this process is constantly going on in the frame of a spiritual quest under the belief systems (i.e. Life-Philosophy) – shown as C in Fig. 13.3. These three together make the platform of 'Life state'. The last one influences the dormant condition (*asakriyātmaka*, (1); which passes through the state of discretionary (*ātmanirṇayātmaka*, (2); reaches to a set of desires (self-searching; *ātmānusaṁdhānātmaka*, (3). These three mental states will further form three successive conditions: difficult (*ākṛāntya-janya*, (4); dominant (*anubhava-janya*, (5); and dependent (*āshrita-janya*, (6). And thus, ultimately, the cycle reaches the resultant 'definitive' (revelation, *anubhūti*, (7). In the six phases of passing the mental state and condition, pilgrims ultimately receive the final form of faith-healing, i.e. from initiation of 'realization' (*anubhava*, as physical experience) to the final state of 'revelation' (*anubhūti*, spiritual gain).

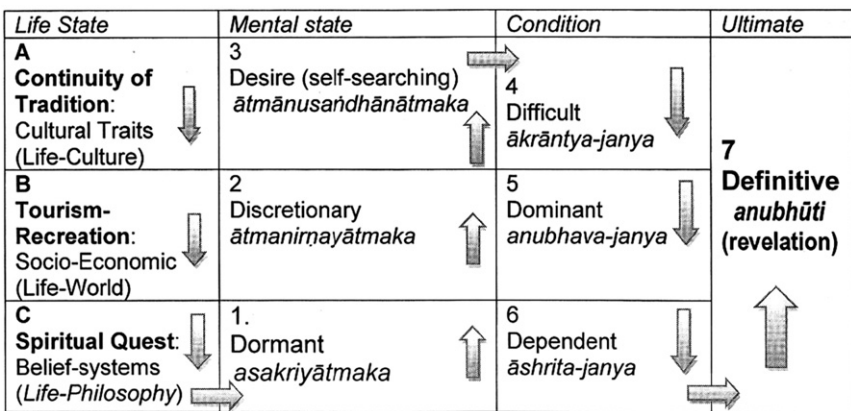


Fig. 13.3. Hindu Pilgrims' Experiences and Interfaces (After Singh & Rana, 2021, p. 144).

Concluding Remarks

An earlier study concludes that devout Hindus were motivated by spiritual ideals rather than curiosity or hedonism, as observed in the case study of pilgrims in the Kumbha Mela in 2013, held at Prayagraj. It is noted that motives articulated by participants imbued them to attend the pilgrimage and encompassed a need for *spiritual connectivity* (devotion) and *spiritual knowledge attainment* (from saints). It was noted that ‘in many ways, the pilgrimage was a coping strategy for the existential challenges faced by participants and an opportunity to hope for a better future. The activities undertaken by participants were aligned with the articulated motives. Two key activities that occupied participants’ time and endeavours entailed voluntary services are – ‘*serving self*’ which included engaging in prayer, meditation, bathing in the revered and holy rivers (geopiety), listening to spiritual discourses, as well as *serving others*’ (Buzinde et al., 2014, p. 1). Descriptions of the experiential component encompassed experiences of *spirituality* and *social unity*. The former entailed accounts of experiencing the divine; a level of geopiety underpinned these expressions. The latter included sentiments of solidarity (Buzinde et al., 2014, p. 16).

Like similar studies, the meaning and value of insights and revelations from Hindu pilgrimages can be assumed by being open to messages received and voices from ordinary and extraordinary sources, bearing witness to the inhuman and struggling through the stages of transcendental learning to awaken to cosmic consciousness. This process connects one to the legacy of humanity and the realm of divinity and thus may take ownership of one’s role as a global citizen (Tamashiro, 2018, p. 8).

Ongoing pilgrimage is a learning cycle through awe, wonder and deep experiences that enables pilgrims to reach transcendence (cf. Ki, 2022, p. 16). It is also noted that experiencing exceptional psychological processes during the pilgrimage is common. These experiences also tend to lead to positive long-term psychosocial effects, as in the case of Camino de Santiago (cf. Lavric et al., 2022, pp. 9–10). The hardship pilgrims faced was probably due to the explicit motivation for some pilgrims to walk barefoot, run or crawl. Many of them valued the journey for the positive feelings they experienced. However, these were not directly associated with merits (Preston, 1992). However, certain hardships and austerities were self-imposed and intended; therefore, people were ready to conceive of any difficulties along the journey as potentially merit-yielding. For most pilgrims, ‘the experiences of pilgrimage, particularly hardships, were valued simply because they were encountered rather than being consciously sought out’ (Nordin, 2011, p. 668).

How *spiritual magnetism* at a sacred site derives from human concepts and values via historical, geographical, cultural and faith forces also needs special attention. Turner and Turner’s (1978) analogy that ‘pilgrimage is exteriorised mysticism while mysticism is an interior pilgrimage’ needs detailed investigation. Such study may be benefited from the use of alchemy – after all, we need to understand the ultimate reality and place of human beings in the cosmos. Following Geertz’s (1983) insight into ethnological writings as ‘fictions of both of

another cultural reality and their mode of production', Gold's (1988) great work of exploration and deep thought on Rajasthani pilgrimage combines intimate sensing, experiential feelings and religious understanding and finally provides a unique account of perigrinology – leading to understanding Destination Conscience. She says: 'Mostly I tell what people did and what they said about what they did to each other and to me' (Gold's, 1988, p. xiii). This chapter may lead to a new path to an extent on how the human science paradigm (*Geisteswissenschaften*) can be used to achieve an explanation and finally to seek understanding (*Verstehen*) of pilgrimage studies in India.

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