

## **Tips to Pilgrimage to Prayag-Varanasi and Gaya**

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Every Brahmin in Tamil Nadu and Kerala like people in all other states of India believe that in their life time , they should at least once visit Allahabad, Varanasi and Gaya and give sacred oblations to their ancestors. Only people who have started performing Sraddhas to their father can do this. Other people no doubt can visit these places and visit the most holy temples there but cannot do the rites to the ancestors.

It is essential for the people with such intentions to do it in the proper religious way and go there accompanied by their wife (if she is alive) and do it without being exploited and do it as comfortably as possible. If younger brothers accompany the elder brothers, the eldest brother on their behalf would do most of the ceremonies and the younger brothers need not do these ceremonies again.

### **First Step: Visit to Rameshwaram**

The first step in this pilgrimage is to go to Rameshwaram, perform the Sraddha there, followed by Samudhra and Theertha Snana. After doing Samudhra Snana, we would be asked to bring sand from the sea. This is made in to three Siva Lingas-Sethu Madhava, Veni Madhava and Bindhu Madhava.After pooja the Linga representing Sethu Madhava is put back in to the sea. The priest then asks you to repeat the Sankalpa to the Varanasi-Prayag-Gaya pilgrimage. The sand lingas of Veni Madhava has to be deposited in the Prayag (Allahabad) and that of Bindhu Madhava in Varanasi.Then Sraddha to the ancestors is performed there. Instead of Pinda (cooked rice balls) in this place the pinda is made of wet uncooked rice.

The following are the addresses of the few priests who help us doing the ceremony in Rameshwaram:-

Sri.Kalyana Sundara Sastrigal,  
New street,  
Rameswaram -623526(Phone:04573-222068)

Sri.Surya Muthy Deekshithar  
95, South end street,  
Rameshwaram=623526,(Phone 04573-222302)

Sri Sethu Rama Sastrigal  
40 North end street,  
Rameswaram -623526(Phone 04573-222056)

Sri.Sethu Rama Iyer,  
15, East Car street,  
Rameswaram-623526(Phone 04573-22083)

Rameshwaram is easily accessible from Madras, Coimbatore, and Palakkad by trains and from Madurai by Bus.

## **Second step :Planning visit to Prayag, Varanasi and Gaya**

It is essential to plan this journey in advance. Rainy season, late Summer and Winter are not very suitable for doing a comfortable pilgrimage. The first place to visit according to Shastras is Allahabad, then Varanasi and then Gaya. People coming from the south India can take a direct ticket to Varanasi and break their journey at Allahabad. They can proceed from there to Varanasi after the ceremonies either the same day or next day by another train. Since it is only a few hours journey reservation is not necessary. There are umpteen trains from Allahabad to Varanasi. The ceremonies is then be done in Varanasi (A minimum of two days) and then in Gaya (minimum one day). It is preferable to reserve the ticket from Varanasi to Gaya and back before the start of the journey., Please note that the ceremonies in Gaya take about 6 hours starting in the morning. given So It is essential to reach Gaya in the morning. People who know Gaya warn us not to leave the railway station before day break. Since theft is rampant in the train, it would be better not to carry any costly ornaments. Buddha Gaya which is 10 miles from Gaya is a nice tourist spot. If reservation is done by night train from Gaya to Varanasi, this can also be visited. After return from Gaya, Ganga Pooja and Dhampathi Pooja are to be performed in Varanasi. For that we should carry with us Veshti and Uthariyam, Padinettu Muzha Pudavai and Blouse piece, Many people also carry with them Thali, Metti etc for the Dampathi Poojai.

In essence the following articles should be purchased and carried with us:-

1. Veshtis and Uttariyams-5 (4 to be given in Gaya and one for Dampathi pooja)
2. 9 Yard saree –1
3. Blouse pieces –more than 5
4. Thali. Metti. Bangles, mirror, Bindi for Dampathi Pooja
5. A torch (in these parts good part of the night there will be no electricity)

## **Third step::Ceremonies in Prayag**

The ceremonies in Prayag are arranged by

Sri.S.Natesa Sastrigal  
Shiva Mutt,  
Daragunj,  
Near daragunj Police station,  
Allahabad  
Phone: 0532-2500799

There are comfortable rooms in the Mutt. Sometimes there may be heavy rush and so it is essential that this organizer is informed about our visit. The other alternative is to request the priest who does the ceremonies for us in Varanasi to inform the Shiva Mutt about our programme .

The ceremonies to be performed are

1. Sankalpam,
2. Putting of sand brought from Rameshwaram in the river.
3. Veni Dhanam,

4. Bath in the Triveni Sangamam
5. Taking of pure Ganga Water for taking home
6. Vastra Dhanam
7. Hiranya Sraddham and Kshetra Pinda Dhanam.
8. Visit to Veni Madhava temple

### **1. Sankalpam**

After the initial Pooja and sankalpam each wife who has accompanied her husband should recite the Manthras and pray for permission to do Veni Dhanam so that all her sins of being born as a woman are excused and she may be permitted to lead a happy long married life with her husband. She asks for permission to do this from her husband as well as Sumangalis. While asking permission from Sumangalis, they are normally presented with Blouse piece, mirror, thambolam, comb, Kumkum etc. Each couple doing Veni Dhanam is charged separately for this sankalpam. When we went there recently we were charged Rs.200 per head.

### **2. Putting of sand brought from Rameshwaram**

The sand linga of Veni Madhava brought from Rameshwaram is mixed in Ganga

### **3. Veni Dhanam**

This is essentially offering a small piece of cut hair by the sumangali to the river. For this the couple have to proceed to the platform erected in the place where Ganga, Saraswathy and Yamuna merge with each other. The Panda who presides over each platform gives the help for the ceremony. Both the boatman and panda have fixed charges. It is better to enquire about this in Shiva Mutt itself. It is also necessary to take a can with us to collect pure Ganges water from River Ganga before it merges with River Yamuna.

On the platform there is a very brief ceremony. The scissor used to cut the hair is worshipped and the husband is asked to make the pleats of the hairs of his wife. A small portion at the end is cut and deposited in the river. Unlike normal this hair sinks in the river. After this holy bath is taken in the confluence of the three rivers. As is the practice in all pilgrimage spots the touts try to extract as much money as possible. All are requested to be very careful and follow the instruction of the priest at Shiva Mutt.

After return from the river, it is necessary to visit the Veni Madhava Temple near by. The clothes worn by all people who took the threertha snanam are discarded and given as Dhana

.After the Veni Dhanam eldest brother of the family performs pinda pradhana and Hiranya Sraddham. Seventeen Pindas are made. They are dedicated to three generation of late ancestors in the fathers side and mothers side (Father, Paternal grand father, Paternal great Grand father, Mother (If she is alive then paternal grand mother), grand mother (If mother is alive great grand mother), great grand mother (If mother is alive great great grand mother), maternal grand father, maternal great grand father, maternal great great grand father, maternal grand mother, Maternal great grand mother, Maternal great great grand mother receive their oblations in the form of one pinda each. (12 in all) Then Karunika Pithrus (that is Persons who become our Pithrus by reason), those who died in the family without children, those who died in the family in Kasi, those who died without

getting water and those who died without getting food all receive their oblations. Once the Pinda Pradhanam ceremony is over the pindas are fed to the cow. Arrangement are made for food in the Mutt on payment. In our case we paid Rs 350/ for the pinda pradhanam, and Rs 200/ each for the Veni dhana Sankalpam, Rs 25/= to the boatman, Rs 50/- for each couple to the Panda, The mutt charged us Rs 30/- per head for food.

#### **Fourth Step: Ceremonies at Varanasi**

The following ceremonies have to be performed in Varanasi:-

- 1.Sankalpam and Tharpanam
- 2.Manikarnika snanam
- 3,Hiranya sraddham
- 4.Pancha theertha sraddham
- 5.Ganga Pooja
- 6.Dampathi Pooja

Instead of Hiranya Sraddham Parvanika sraddham with homam can also be performed.It is also believed that Dhanam given in the shores of Ganges is very effective.These are left to the people themselves.

There are several priests in Varanasi who help us to conduct these in a proper way. They also help us to conduct the ceremonies at Gaya where they have to depute a cook with materials to help us perform Sraddham there. It is essential that we come to an agreement on the charges for performing the ceremonies at Gaya and Varanasi with the priest in Varanasi.They also provide us rooms for stay and food (on separate charges) on all the days. And help us arrange for transportation. On all the days of the stay it is essential that we take rice food only once and take Palaharams in the evening.

Some of the addresses of the priests are:-

1.Sri,V,Krishna Murthy Ganapadigal,  
B 5/311 , Hanuman Ghat,  
Varanasi-221001  
Phone:0542-2310134  
Fax:0542-2275173  
E-mail [rshiv\\_kumar@satyam.net.in](mailto:rshiv_kumar@satyam.net.in)  
[rshiv\\_kumar\\_73@yahoo.com](mailto:rshiv_kumar_73@yahoo.com)

Contact at Chennai  
8. SBI Colony Extn,  
Nanganallur,  
Chennai-600061  
Phone: 22331232

2.Sri.R.Nanda Kumar,  
B 5/304, Hanuman Ghat,  
Varanasi-221001  
Phone:0542-22310384

3.Sri.Narayana Iyer  
Kanchi Sankara Madam,  
B 5/5/304, Hanuman Ghat,  
Varanasi-221001  
Phone 0542-23116115  
0542-2277758

4.Sri.Angarai Venkata Krishna Ganapadigal,  
B 4/53. Bhajan mutt,  
Hanuman Ghat,  
Varanasi-221001  
Phone:0542-2313682

5.Sri.Mani Vadhyar,  
Kerala Mutt,  
Hanuman Ghat,  
Varanasi-221001

6.Sri.Rama Ganapadigal,  
Hanuman Ghat,  
Varanasi-221001

7.Sri.Raju Vadhyar(Electrical Raju)  
Hanuman Ghat,  
Varanasi-221001

8.Sri Maha deva Ganapadigal,  
B5/309 Hanuman Ghat,  
Varanasi-221001 Phone 0542-2277117

9.Sri Ganesa Ganapadigal,  
Narayana Patasala, B 5/304 A Awadgarbhi,  
Hanuman Ghat Varanasi-221001  
Phone 0542-2276732

The charges vary a lot. When we went there , we heard rates from Rs6000/ for a package to Varanasi and Gaya to Rs.10000/-. This does not include boat and transport charges and expenses on travel and food. Depending on the capacity to spend this can be arranged.

### **1.Sakalpam and Tharpanam**

This is done at the outset. It is interesting to know that Varanasi is referred in the Samkalpam as the forest of joy (Ananda Vanam) and Maha Smasanam(great cremation ground).During the sankalpam the possible sins which can be committed by an individual are listed out and prayer is made to pardon them.The remaining sand from Rameswaram is mixed in the Ganges here

## **2.Mani Karnika snanam**

After this we are taken in a boat (charges extra) to Manikarnika Ghat.Near Manikarnika Ghat is the Chakra Theertham.After Bathing in Manikarnika Ghat we have to bathe in Chakra Theertham also .It is believed that Lord Vishnu created this Theertham even before Ganges started flowing and did Thapas there for 50000 years. There is the temple of Bindhu Madhava near this Ghat This temple also needs to be visited.. Also the biggest and holiest cremation Ground in Kasi is adjoining this Ghat.

## **3.Hiranya Sradham**

After this one Hiranya Sraddham is performed.

**1-3 are performed continuously and take about 2-3 hours.**

## **4.Pancha Theertha Sraddham**

Sradham and Pinda Dhanam is performed at the following ghats:-

- 1.Asi Ghat- Here the river Asi joins the river Ganga
- 2.Dashwamedha Ghat –The Rudra Sarovar mixes with Ganga in this ghat.
- 3.Varuna Ghat- The waters which washes God Vishnu’s feet is suppose to merge in Ganga in this Ghat
- 4.Pancha Ganga Ghat- Here the waters of the five rivers of Dharmanadha, Dhoodhapapa, Kirana, Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswathi is suppose to merge.It is believed that the bath here is holiest.
- 5.Mani Karnika Ghat

After performing the Pinda Pradhanam(preparing cooked rice, forming in to balls and then telling the manthra with sprinkling of Thil and offering it in the Ghat), we are taken to each Ghat .Like Prayag here also seventeen Pindas are made each time. By the time one reaches the next ghat, the pinda for that Ghat is cooked and gets ready. In each ghat we have to take bath and do Pinda Pradhanam. . This is repeated till we do the ceremony in all the five Ghats.

Bathing in some Ghats have become very difficult due to the extreme slippery nature of the Ghat and the depth of water near it. In such Ghats Sankalpa snana is performed.

## **5.Ganga Pooja ( 5-6 Normally after the Gaya visit)**

This is the worshipping of the river Ganga.It is believed that before this we visit the temples of Lord Kasi Viswanatha, Goddess Annapurna, Goddess Visalakshi, Lord Kala Bhairava, Lord Dhanda Pani, Goddess Kaudi Bai, Durga Kund, Sankat Mochan Hanuman and other important temples.(Please note that visit to these temples is at our expense and does not come under the contract amount) The pooja is directly performed to the river ,Oblations of Milk , Curd etc are directly poured in to the river besides Coins. It is also a practice to offer new Vasthra (nowadays blouse pieces) to the river.

## **6.Dhampathi Pooja**

An old learned couple is worshipped as God and Goddess. Normally Veshti and Angavastram to the male and 9 yards sari to the wife is given. It is a practice to give the Lady whom we worship all the signs of a sumangali like Thali, Bangles, metti, Comb, Mirror etc, This brings to an end the ceremonies at Varanasi , Gaya and Allahabad, .This Pooja is preferably performed after the Sraddha at Gaya .People who can afford can also do Dasa Dhana, Godhan etc because it is considered that done at Varanasi they are very efficacious.

## **Fifth Step:Gaya Sraddham**

It is believed that once upon a time there was an Asura called Gayasura .He did penance and demanded as a boon that whosoever touches him would directly go to heaven. Due to his boon , the hell became empty and heaven over crowded. Then Lord Brahma requested the Asura for permission to perform Yagna on his body.After this Yagna, he demanded that who ever does Piinda Pradhan there and satisfies the Gaya Brahmins would send all his ancestors to heaven. There are two very holy spots for the Hindus where Pinda Pradhan is done.(47 or 65 pindas are made according to mother is alive or not). They are The Vishnu Padha and the Akshaya Vata.At Vishnu Pada, the rice has to be cooked by ourselves.and at Akshaya Vata the Pindas of the Sraddham done is offered. Since there is no south Indian cook available in Gaya.This cook is sent along with us (at his expense) by the Sastrigal who arranges the trip.He also sends along with the cook all essentials for cooking. In Vishnu padha Pinda dhan is first done. Pindas are dedicated to any of your relatives , teachers, pets and so on. It is better that a list is taken with us because , it would be difficult to remember all of them instantly.

The Pindas cooked in the waters of holy river Phalguni after bath in the river are put directly on the Vishnu Padha. Afterwards a full scale Sraddha is performed with homam (Parvana Sradham) and four Gaya Brahmins are fed. Then the pindas of this sraddham are put in The Akshaya Vata. A Pooja also is performed to this tree.One Gaya Brahmin is asked whether he is satisfied by our performance of rites and he answers in the affirmative. It is also a practice to take a vow to stop using a vegetable, a fruit and a leaf below the Akshaya Vata.

There is just one south Indian Shastri in Gaya and he does not have any infrastructure .So contract for performance of rites at Gaya has necessarily done at Varanasi. However the help for performance of the rites are available in Sringeri Mutt, Kanchi Mutt in Gaya

This pilgrimage is complete only when along with the Ganga water collected from Prayag we again visit Rameswaram and do Abhishekam to Ramanatha Swami there.