

Mithila Pancakoshi Trip (Mithila Circuit)

Siddhi B. Ranjitkar

Walk a circuit called Mithila Pancakoshi Parikrama of 115 kilometers on foot for 15 days starting off on the first day and ending on the full moon of Falgun (February/March) making offerings to deities on the way, earn merits and get your wishes met. People living in the former Mithila kingdom believe that they can have whatever they wish for if they walk a circuit of Mithila. So, people in this region walk for three to fifteen kilometers a day for 15 days and make offerings to Lord Shiva enshrined in different names at different places. Walking on this Mithila Pancakoshi circuit has been a pre-historic tradition set at the time when Mithila kingdom was still undivided. Currently, some portions of this circuit are in the Indian Territory.

On the morning of the third day of their fifteen-day journey, holy persons and devotees formally begin walking the Mithila Pancakoshi Circuit at Kalyane-svore-nath making offerings to this god, and ends there on the full moon day called Fagu Purnima after making a 115 km circuit.

Mithila was a prosperous state in ancient time. The ancient monarch called Mithi laid the foundation of the Mithila kingdom. His ancestral deity was Mahadev: another name of Lord Shiva. He built four different shrines to Lord Shiva in four different names at four different directions at an equidistant of five kosh (one kosh <15 km) from the capital called Janakpurdham, and set Lord Mahadev in them in different names to protect the capital from evils and enemies as well. Those Mahadeves are called Kalyane-svore-nath set to the Southeast, Jalay-svore-nath to the Southwest, Chheray-svore-nath to the North, and Mithilay-svore-nath to the Northeast of Janakpurdham. In addition, other Mahadeves such as Kapilay-sovre-nath, Kupay-svore-nath, Jaladhi-nath, and Shila-nath were set close to the capital except for Shila-nath set at eight kosh from the capital.

Janakpurdham was believed to be the capital of the Mithila kingdom. Sita: one of the main characters in the ancient epic called Ramayan was born there. Janak was the monarch at that time. The name of the capital called Janakpurdham was derived from the name of the monarch. People speak the language called Maithili even today.

Walking the Mithila Pancakoshi Circuit begins at Kalyane-svore-nath and after fifteen days of arduous walk and trekking 115 km on foot, ends at the same shrine to Kalyane-svore-nath.

Some devotees carry the Hindu demigod Ram on one portable shrine and Sita: another demigoddess on another portable shrine. Thousands of holy persons and devotees follow the two main demigods called Ram Chandra popularly known as Mithila Bihari, and Janaki (another name of Sita) better known as Kisvoriji carried on portable shrines. Pilgrims chant the name 'Jaya Sitaram' on the way throughout the journey. They make offerings to various deities on the way.

Previously, people did this circuit in five days but most of the senior people and underage people could not do it and even physically fit persons had had hard time to complete it in five days. So, about a century ago, a saint called Siyaram Dass made it a fifteen-day pilgrimage instead of a five-day pilgrimage in view of making it possible for all the people of different ages to undertake this pilgrimage.

On the evening of the first day of the bright fortnight in Falgun, holy persons and devotees start off their journey at the temple to Goddess Janaki in Janakpurdham, and trek three

kilometers to reach Hanumangadi to the South of Janakpurdham, and halt there for an overnight stay. There is an age-old idol of the Monkey God called Hanuman.

On the morning of the second day, pilgrims make offerings to Hanuman, and set off for a journey of 13 km to Kalyane-svore-nath. After reaching the shrine to Kalyane-svore-nath by the evening, devotees make offerings to the deity, and stay overnight there. Kalyane-svore-nath is one of the Mahadeves, Monarch Janak set up.

On the third day, after performing worship to Kalyane-svore-nath, holy persons and devotees set off for a 12-km trek to Girijasthan. After reaching Girijasthan, pilgrims make offerings to the universal mother called Girija, and stay there overnight for a rest. A legend has it that Janaki: daughter of Monarch Janak used to perform a daily worship to Girija at this place. One day, when Janaki went for a regular worship to Girija, she met Ram Chandra at a garden there, and felt in love with him at the first sight.

On the early morning of the fourth day, pilgrims leave the Girijasthan for the continuation of a fifteen-day circuit. After some time they reach a village called Tulsi in the Nepalese territory, and make offerings to Lord Vishnu. There was an ancient shrine to Lord Vishnu at this place but the earthquake of 1934 destroyed it. After performing worship to Lord Vishnu, they walk slowly to Matihani. There is a four-hundred-year old fireplace of self-realized saint called Tasmaiya, and there is a temple to Lord Laksmi Narayan. Pilgrims make offerings to the saint and the lord after reaching the place. They stay there for an overnight rest.

On the early morning of the fifth day, pilgrims set off from Matihani to Jalay-svore. Jalay-svore is at six kilometers from Matihani; so, it is an easy walk for a day. There is Mahadev called Jalay-svore-nath. This is the second Mahadev of the four Mahadeves set up at four different corners of the ancient capital of the Mithila kingdom. Holy persons and devotees make offerings to Jalay-svore-nath, and then stay on there until next morning.

On the early morning of the sixth day, pilgrims take a look at Jalay-svore-nath and greet the god, and then depart for Madai. They make offerings to Lord Vishnu at the ancient relics of the shrine at Ratavada on the way. They reach Madai after walking six kilometers from Jalay-svore. It is also an easy one-day walk.

On the morning of the seventh day, fifteen-day-round travelers leave Madai for a ten-kilometer trek to reach Dhruva-kund. It is a daylong walk for all pilgrims. So, pilgrims have a good night sleep while staying there for an overnight rest. They greet a divine devotee Dhruva famous in the religious stories with the offerings of worship.

On the eighth day, again pilgrims make offerings to devotee Dhruva, and leave Dhruva-kund for a 13-kilometer journey to Kanchan-van. They make a camp on the Beach of Bidhi River. They sing special songs of the Holi festival, and enjoy the charm of the Holi festival at night. There were 12-beautiful forests in ancient time; one of them was here where Lord Ram celebrated a Holi festival with playmates splashing colored water to each other.

On the ninth day, pilgrims take a holy dip in the waters of Bidhi River and set off for the next destination. After trekking 13 kilometers from the Bidhi River, pilgrims reach Chheray-svore-nath: the third of the four Mahadeves on the round tour. There, they make offerings to Chheray-svore-nath. Thereafter, they continue walking for three kilometers to reach Parvata where they stay on for an overnight. People believe that this area is called Parvata means a hill because there were seven hillocks in the past but nothing of that sort is left there, now. However, people can watch the Himalayan mountain range from this place. Pilgrims make a journey to Parvata because there is nothing left at Chheray-svore-nath for

staying overnight. The earthquake of 1934 destroyed the ancient temple to Chheray-svore-nath there.

On the tenth day, pilgrims make a journey from Parvata to Dhanusha-dham. They need to cover only the distance of six kilometers to reach Dhanusha-dham. This area is called by the name of the relics of the divine bow called Shiva Dhanush. Holy persons and devotees make offerings to the divine bow. This area has been the holy place for all Hindus due to the Shiva Dhanush since Lord Ram broke it up. Monarch Janak had set the condition that he would give his daughter Sita in marriage to anybody breaking up this divine bow. Only Lord Ram could do it. So, Hindus make a pilgrimage to this area on the occasions such as every Sunday of the month called Magha (January/Feb.) in particular and throughout the year in general.

On the eleventh day, pilgrims walk 12 kilometers from Dhanusha-dham to Satoshar. Some pilgrims travel via Makhanaha others travel via Kamalasan to Satoshar. They make offerings to Mithilay-svore-nath on the way. Mithilay-svore-nath is the fourth Mahadev set up to the North-East of Janakpurdham. However, Lord Mithilay-svore-nath has disappeared from this area. Then, pilgrims make offerings to Kamlay-svore-nath at Satoshar, and stay there for an overnight rest. This area is called Satoshar: the name derived from the seven ponds used by seven holy men when they performed atonement there.

Pilgrims move on from Satoshar to Aurahi-harusaha on the 12th day. The distance is 13 kilometers. They take a holy dip in the Bimala River and take a rest staying at Aurahi-harusaha for overnight.

Pilgrims trek from Aurahi-harusaha to Karuna in the Indian Territory on the 13th day. There is a temple to God Ram and his consort Sita. People believe that Monarch Janak drowned in the pond called Karuna when his much-loved daughter Sita went with her spouse Ram to Ayodhya after marriage in Janakpurdham. So, a temple to these two demigods was built in this area in the memory of Monarch Janak.

On the fourteenth day, holy persons and devotees make offerings to Ram and Sita at Karuna. Then, they trek three kilometers to Kalyane-svore-nath where they have started off their circular tour called Mithila Pancakoshi since twelve days ago. Since then they have already made the 115-kilometer journey on foot. They complete the Mithila Pancakoshi Circuit here after performing worship to Kalyane-svore-nath in the Nepalese territory, however, their fifteen-day pilgrimage will complete only the next day after making a round tour called Anta-griha-parikrama in Janakpurdham. They walk three kilometers and reach Bisvamisra Ashram at Bishaul where they stay for an overnight rest.

Pilgrims travel to Janakpurdham from Bishaul on the 15th day, take a rest there, and make preparation for a mini-circular tour called Anta-griha-parikrama next day.

On the 16th day, holy persons and devotees take a holy dip in the waters of Gangasagar and Agnikund Ponds and Dudhmati River in Janakpurdham. And they make a mini round trip called Anta-griha-parikrama means inter-house tour around the ancient palace of Monarch Janak making offerings to different deities there on the full moon day called Fagu Purnima. This ends the fifteen-day round tour.

People can make three different round tours according to the Mithila Holy Scriptures. These three round tours are called large, medium and mini round tours. It takes about three months to complete the large round tour because it starts at the Koshi River in Eastern Nepal and then it takes to the Gandak River in central Nepal, and then back to the Koshi River thus covering Eastern and Central Nepal on foot, and making offerings to Mahadeves

on the way. Only a few people could make it. The medium round tour is the 15-day trip mentioned above, and the most popular one because many devotees and holy persons can make it. Recently, this 15-day circular trip has been popular among all the people particularly the Hindus. The mini round tour is of one-day tour done on the full moon day called Fagu Purnima.

February 20, 2010.

Note: the circuit is of 12-day walk but the first two-day walk and the last one-day walk added to the 12-day walk makes a 15-day walk.

References:

1. Publication titled "Mithila Pancakoshi Fair" by Rajesvore Nepali published in the 'Gorkhapatra' Supplement in Nepali, Fagun 15, 2055 (February 27, 1999)
2. Publication titled "Mithila Pancakoshi Parikrama" by Nagendra Kumar Karna published in Maithili in the section called 'Naya Nepal' of 'Gorkhapatra', Fagun 2, 2066 (February 14, 2010)