

Religious places require better environment



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In the Indian life style religion has got most important place and everybody in this democratic country is free to worship one's Almighty in one's own way. But the religious people are divided among themselves on the pattern of worship, be they Christians, Muslims or Hindus. Many factions have emerged out in the Christianity and Islam too, but maximum division is visible in Hinduism. Though the religious teachings are about the purity of mind and hearts, in practice the followers react otherwise. Same is the case with the institutions running the religious Trusts throughout the country. In India there are thousands of religious places for Hindus, both big and small. Among them the richest is the Lord Venkateswara shrine of the Thirumala-Thirupati Devasthanam (TTD) in Andhra Pradesh.

The TTD is well established and connected with website and e-mail etc. Online booking facility for advance reservation of Sevas and accommodation is also available for the convenience of the devotees. The Trust offers certain guidelines with an appeal to the pilgrims in connection to the maintenance of discipline and expects that their activities should be within the parameters of moral, ethical and spiritual values, without any slightest aberration. Devotees are asked to take Sudarshan token for Darshan immediately after reaching Thirupati.

At Thirupati, the TTD has big Choultries (Dharmashalas), where so-called 'rent-free', unfurnished bedrooms are allotted to the registered pilgrims for 24 hours from the time of occupation. Interestingly, a room rent is collected for those 'rent-free' accommodations. For further extension of 24 hours or part thereof, the pilgrims have to pay the rent again, as initially they are requested to vacate the same within 24 hours. The pilgrims have to deposit an amount as 'caution money' too, which is refundable after the room is vacated. This amount, if not collected within six hours from the time of vacating the room, is credited to the Corpus fund of the TTD.

The TTD management advises the pilgrims not to fall prey to touts, although a number of them are found loitering there keeping their eyes, especially on the devotees visiting the place from outside the state, but the TTD keeps its eyes closed on their activities. The pilgrims are also advised not to encourage beggary and corruption by giving tips to the staff members of the Trust. But the Sevaks (staff) openly ask for tips in the name of cleaning of the rooms and bed-covers etc; provided to them, although the beds do not seem to be cleaned for years together. The condition of beds and bed-covers are found to be in a pitiable condition. Similar scenes are observed when one goes for the refund of the caution money. The pilgrims are bound to pay tips there too. If such corruption prevails at the administrative level, how the TTD can check the same at lower levels.

Of course, at the Thirumala Hills where Lord Venkateswara's temple is situated, the environment is completely changed. The real religious feeling come to the mind when one reaches the land of Lord Venkateswara. The pilgrims waiting for Darshan for several hours rush to worship the Lord in groups at the time allotted to them at the time of registering their names. The surroundings on the Thirumala Hills give pleasant look and free bus services provided to the pilgrims by the Trust, to see the beautiful natural gift around the shrine gives an additional attraction. It's pleasure to visit this place again and again.

There are a number of sevas (pujas) carried out at different times and with varied charges. Those are daily, weekly and periodicals, number of persons allowed, charges and timings for these pujas. Unlike other temples, Lord Venkateswara temple remains open almost round the clock with short breaks.

Besides, a religious place, Thirupati and Thirumala have developed as good business centers. Hotels, lodges and travel agencies have flourished maximum. A large number of devotees come to offer their hair at Thirumala, where tonsuring facilities are available. While devotees pay for the work done, hairs are exported to foreign countries and earn foreign exchange for the country. As regards the Prasad (Laddoos) the TTD have their own arrangements to sell it and discourage purchases of the same from the outside. Finally, the TTD itself runs the biggest business house in Thirupati. Here also the money plays an important role and the 'demerits of superstitions' are covered in the name of the Lord. The religious Trusts should improve their activities and bring purity both inside and outside. Preaching must be at par with the functioning and performance. It needs to provide better environments. Remember, God has his eyes on all the human deeds.

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BY DAYA NATH SINGH

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