

## The City of Prayer and Pilgrimage in Circle

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**Abstract:** Many years ago, when I studied at BHU (Banaras Hindu University) in Varanasi, I used to be woken up in the morning by the sound of prayer voices from nearby temples, and also used to see the streets lined with many buses filled with pilgrims during the pilgrimage season carrying their cooking utensils and blankets. In Hindi language such terms as *yatra*, *parikrama*, and *pradakshina* refer to the act of ‘pilgrimage,’ and a pilgrimage to sacred places is said to be a ‘*thirtha-yatra*.’ The famous ‘*thirtha-yatra*’ written about in the great epic literature Mahabharata is the route from Pushkar to Prayaga (Allahabad) which was taken in a clockwise direction around India. Varanasi, also known as Banaras or Kashi is the holiest of the seven sacred cities (SaptaPuri) in Hinduism, and Jainism, and also played an important role in the development of Buddhism. In India some ‘*thirtha*’ (sacred places) are grouped together such as SaptaPuri and have the pilgrimage route drawn with a single stroke. Varanasi itself is a sacred destination spot; however there are also 42 pilgrimage routes to temples and sacred places inside of Varanasi, including various concentric circles around the Vishvanath Temple. Among them five concentric circle routes are well travelled by pilgrims, and *Chaurasikroshi* is the outside and *Panchakroshi* is the inside. In this presentation, I would like to pay particular attention to the concentric circle routes, with respect to the sacred existence of the centre of the routes. At the same time I wish to show where the pilgrims achieve a wholeness indicated by the concentric circle route, that is, the outer world itself is incorporated into the pilgrim’s inner world. Thus, the *yatra* re-produces a spiritual heritage again and again through the pilgrims’ dedicated activities.