

## **MOTORABLE ROAD TO THE AMARNATH CAVE GOES AGAINST THE IDEA OF A PILGRIMAGE**

***"The Amarnath cave shrine in Jammu and Kashmir has been made accessible by motorable road for the first time." India Today, 7th Nov, 2023.***

*No matter, what happens to be the sacred site on the physical plane, Pilgrimage is really a symbolic ritual for a journey that is actually performed inwardly and spiritually. The outer pilgrimage is a symbolic form of an inner journey. In olden days, a pilgrimage always implied walking for months and transport wherever made available, was only of a primitive nature – horse drawn carriages or bullock carts. But they were meant only for the old and the infirm. The strong and the agile in body were always expected to walk. In India the great pilgrimage sites were usually located in the high mountains like Kedarnath and Badrinath or in difficult places like Tirumala or Sabarimala. Even when they were located on the plains, it involved weeks and months of travel by foot and resting on roadside inns during the long journey. During such long journeys away from home and family, the pilgrims were focused on only one thing: reaching the sacred shrine to obtain a Darshan of the deity. The paths used to be narrow and rough. They had to brave the inclemency of the weather and arduousness of the path leading through the jungles and mountains. On the nights they would gather at the roadside rest houses and would listen and discuss about the tales and parables associated with the deity and the next day they would again begin their long journey. Through all these difficulties the pilgrims used to remain steadfast on their aim of Darshan.*

*Coming to the symbolism of this long arduous journey, it could be called a mirror image of the spiritual journey that is undertaken by the devotee in the inner realm. The long arduous journey is equivalent to the years of Sadhana that a spiritual aspirant has to undertake through the process of inner purification. The location of the temples in difficult and inaccessible places signifies that the inner spiritual evolution is a long and difficult journey. The seeker has to be focused*

*and committed to his Sadhana in the same way the pilgrim in the outer dimension has to be single-minded during the long and difficult journey.*

*And finally, the pilgrim attains the Darshan. In the inner realm this is the experience of the Divine when we see and hear the Divine in the depths of our own being. Outwardly that is represented by the deity in the temple. So symbolically, the physical Darshan is an experience of the Divine.*

*But nowadays tour companies offer tour packages where the journey is performed by cars. The very spirit of hardship and single-minded commitment has got watered down and the inner significance of pilgrimage is entirely lost. Places like Amarnath were the last bastions that still retained some semblance of the hardship of pilgrimage. Making it accessible by car is bad news. Pilgrimage would be reduced to mere sight-seeing.*