

# Essay on Swimming

*Swimming* is growing in popularity every day. Of course, the art was known and practiced all over the world and at all times. Those living near a river or the sea take to the water as naturally as a duck or a frog. It almost seems as if the man was meant to be a natural swimmer. It is a natural gift, but it has to be cultivated and improved upon. Generally, it is a form of recreation that is indulged in purely for fun or the joy of it. It is, says Swinburne, who was a lover of water if ever there was one, –

*A purer passion, a lordlier leisure  
A place more happy than lives on land;  
Fulfills with pulse of divine pleasure  
The dreaming head and the steering hand.*

At first practiced either for necessity or as a form of recreation, its utility as a form of exercise has been gradually recognized. Indeed it shares with walking the distinction of being a perfect exercise. As all healthy exercises should do, it exercises the limbs without straining them, and the pace can be varied as one feels inclined. It can also be practiced at any time of the day—morning or evening.

Almost every club or gymnasium in Europe and America has a fully equipped swimming-pool, attached to it, where members can drop in and refresh themselves after day's hard work. And the sea-beaches in summer especially, are full of gay swimmers disporting themselves playfully and luxuriously.

One should learn to swim, if not to exercise the limbs, certainly to enable one, should the emergency ever arise, to save a drowning man's life. In this case, it becomes an accomplishment whose usefulness

far exceeds that of any other form of recreation. A good swimmer is a social asset. How many lives have been saved by sturdy swimmers in a boat-wreck or even in a shipwreck; many can claim the honor of saving lives in accidents on land, but in the water, a good swimmer is our only helper. Thus it is an accomplishment in which every one should try to acquire some mastery. A good swimmer is always a potential life-saver and there is no other sport which combines so noble a service with pleasure and fun.

As an art, swimming is practiced in many forms. The chief is, of course, the 'breast-stroke' which is the one practiced everywhere and is needed for life-saving purposes. But other strokes have been devised for gaining greater speed. Of these the most interesting is the 'side-stroke', but it is very exhausting; the 'crawl' ensures the greatest speed. There are two methods of swimming on the back-one is an equivalent of the breast-stroke, and the other is the 'back-crawl'. These different forms are practiced by experts who compete to gain prizes.

Swimming has come to have an important place in the competitive sport. The Olympic Games have events ranging from 100 yards to a mile. Longer distances are attempted in amateur competition. A variant of the sport is 'the water polo'. Some even go so far as to attempt imitations of the ballet in water, but these are only curiosities and have no merit either as art or as a sport. The swimming of the English Channel is an annual affair, and the success of Sri Mihir sen, Dr. Chandra and Miss Arati Saha of India and Sri Brojen das of Pakistan have given a tremendous publicity to long-distance swimming in our sub-continent.