



On The Effect of Religious Tourism on Spiritual Health and Culture

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Abstract

Pilgrimage can be considered as one of the oldest manifestations of religious tourism history and it is coupled with the formation of religions among human beings. On the one hand, the shrines of the religious personalities enjoy a special place in religious convergence, and on the other hand, it is considered a suitable platform for cultural and spiritual awareness among pilgrims. Nowadays, proper management of pilgrimage and recognition of the capacity to convert these centers into cultural hubs of the country, especially with the geographical distribution of their influence, is very important. Accordingly, it is necessary to describe and analyze religious propositions and pay attention to the potential facilities and talents of religious tourism. This research uses the descriptive-analytical method based on library documents to investigate the impact of pilgrimage institutions as an effective mechanism on spirituality and cultural life.

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Introduction

Cultural planning for the growth and identity of people in society is among the topics that have attracted the attention of pioneers in the field of guidance and management based on collective intellect (Hakimi et al., 2001). It is designed by the foundations and intellectual backgrounds of human societies with a tremendous impact on individual life, dynamism, and social development (Aghaei, 2016). In the meantime, the holy monuments, as an example of places to remember God and the centers of transmission of divine teachings with a basis of cultural flourishing (Noor, 36, Haskani, 1992; Qomi Mashhadi, 1989) can be considered as a cultural hub more than ever by policymakers.

This study aims to answer the following questions: What role does religious tourism play in the cultural and spiritual awareness of tourists? How can public and private organizations take steps to improve the optimal cultural use of shrines and to remove potential barriers?

Therefore, the main objective of this study is to provide the most important opportunities for awareness-raising on optimal cultural and spiritual use of shrines, identifying possible limitations and challenges in realizing this opportunity. It also emphasizes the strategy and support of government and non-governmental organizations through decision-making, protection and management of sacred places in paving the way for leveling out this synergy. It also highlights the need for multidimensional effort and interaction on progress about religious tourism.

Literature Review

Although pilgrimage and its rituals have a devotional appearance and a religious orientation, many researchers have also addressed its non-worshipful angles and aspects. Accordingly, the scholars have considered the moral, mystical, political, social, historical, and even economic dimensions of this institution and have carefully studied its implicit and explicit functions. However, scientists in the field of behavioral sciences and culture have yet to pay due attention to this issue and its impact. They have also less explored the psychological and cultural dimensions of pilgrimage.

Reviewing the literature on the status quo of religious shrines and its impact on the spirituality and culture of religious tourists shows a positive correlation between religious customs and the quality of its impact on individuals and human relations (Khodapanahi & Heidari, 2003). Generally, the research literature can be divided into several categories. Some researchers have expressed the jurisprudential rules and rituals of performing pilgrimage rituals. Other researchers with a mystical and moral approach have clarified the philosophy and secrets hidden in the foundation of pilgrimage. Some other researchers have also considered the description of shrines and their buildings from a historical, architectural, and artistic point of view. The next category, which has emerged in the last few decades has explored the

educational, sociological effects of pilgrimage on mental health and the reduction of anxiety and depression. Alaearijy (1994) is among the most important recent researchers closer to the present study. Morris (1982) also investigated the effect of pilgrimage on anxiety, depression, and religious attitude in twenty-four elderly.

Therefore, despite the various works and the publication of extensive research on the basic functions of religion, the significance of the role of religion in human life (Azarbayjani, 2003; Ahmadi et al., 2008), studies of religion-oriented humanities on spiritual and cultural functions of pilgrimage and its impact on religious tourists is a new issue requiring more investigation in this field. The word "pilgrimage" means desiring something and turning away from something else. Therefore, meetings that have this theme and convey this message are called pilgrimage (Ibn Faris, 1992; Ibn Manzoor, 1994). The customary meaning of "pilgrimage" is also rooted in its principle of abrogation, i.e., desire and deviation. Therefore, the meaning of the word "pilgrimage" is different from that of words such as seeing, and observation since in these words, the only denotation meaning of the meeting is embedded. Rather, in the word "pilgrimage", connotation meanings such as meeting with desire, love, kindness, and honor need to be taken into account.

It is a practice that sometimes takes the form of worship and meets some of the material and spiritual needs of the pilgrim (Jafari et al., 2000). In Islamic societies, for example, the human is a social being who gets his/her identity and meaning with his fellows and establishes a social relationship. Hence, meeting with the desire and love of human beings with each other is rooted in their nature and pilgrimage. It provides one of the natural needs of human beings. This natural need continues after the death of a loved one, although it may be less severe. Due to this natural need, visiting the graves of friends and relatives is common among all nations and people of the world. Since Islam is an innate religion, it pays special attention to the subject of pilgrimage. Islamic traditions have provided valuable guidelines for pilgrimage to make the most of this natural need of human beings for them to grow and flourish and to build an ideal society. A noteworthy point resulting from reflection on Islamic Hadiths¹, the criterion for recommending and encouraging them to pilgrimage is the extent of its effect and role in the individual and social construction of man. Thus, the more useful pilgrimage is to build a monotheistic society, the more it is emphasized. (Muhammadi Rayshahri, 2012).

¹ In Islam, Hadiths refers to what the majority of Muslims believe to be a record of the words, actions, and the silent approval of the Islamic prophet Muhammad as transmitted through chains of narrators

Religious Tourism

Religious tourism is an easy and restrained phenomenon. Despite its old history, which goes back to the history of human life and its encounter with religion, no common and precise definition has so far been provided. Rishnd (1992) considers a special scope for this type of tourism as the beginning of the formation of modern tourism while other researchers consider tourism as having a spiritual change in the human body. They do not emphasize the meaning of the holy journey and its roots in the human body. However, from a religious and supra-religious point of view, religious tourism is distinct from other types of tourism, and religious motivation and spiritual purposes are prominent and distinctive features of its tourists (Timothy & Olsen, 2006).

Considering its different conceptualization in the literature, the present study enjoys an independent approach to each of the two categories to discover the embedded intentions and causes of travel. It conceptualizes that regardless of any monotheistic and human religion of the tourists, pilgrimage is accepted as an institution associated with specific customs in human societies. However, the current life and placing religious tourism under the umbrella of mass tourism organization in itself indicates that we should not put aside those tourists who are multipurpose when traveling and they are not only are into participating in religious activities but also are interested in visiting other cultural and entertainment venues to promote their spirituality and cultural growth as well.

Notably, religious tourism is a special type of tourism rooted in religious stimuli in which the customer-centric approach and material benefits and losses for the tourist are not discussed. Rather, at the same time willingly or unwillingly, it is associated with social, political, cultural meets, and spending time in distant or near destinations takes place (Tomasi, 2002).

The Effectiveness of Pilgrimage on Spirituality among Pilgrims

The great loss of human beings in today's societies, known as the age of anxiety, (Dadsetan, 2001) is peace of mind or heart reassurance. This issue has been addressed in the recent literature as the relationship between religion and health. Despite the differences in the definition of religion and its sphere of influence, the positive correlation between the two variables i.e., religiosity and health have been proved.

Contemporary human frustration, along with the ability of humanities sciences to respond to genuine spiritual needs and also the emergence of human limitations in parallel with the advancement of science has given rise to the higher tendency to religion and attention to spirituality and hence requires more investigation in the field to achieve a joint language and common ground contributing to healing human suffering (Sheridan & Radmacher, 2004).

Although there exist some differences over the specific concept of right religion, the commonalities between the scholars in the field also indicate the special scientific background of the role of religion on health in the methodical scientific literature related to the nineteenth century. As methodical empirical studies also represent, research on the effect of a spiritual-religious factor (e.g., going to church) on a disease such as cancer begins (Thorsen, 2004), and other features have also been developed. In keeping with this, Fitchett, Burton, and Sevan have categorized human spiritual needs through their field research and have classified them into three categories: religious belief needs, religious behavior needs, and socio-religious support needs. Koenig also lists the psychological and spiritual needs of human beings in the three main categories, namely their own needs, the need for others, and the need for God. She made a distinction between psychological and spiritual needs. In their reading, spiritual needs are the same as those related to God, that is, the need to believe in the existence of God, the need to understand God's presence, the need to understand God's unconditional love, the need to pray, the need to worship (cited in Shojaii, 2008).

Research shows that religions not only give the worldviews to their followers to use to understand the meaning of life but also establish institutions such as pilgrimage, positive emotions such as love of peace, gratitude, and hope. They also cultivate positive emotions that develop the mental space of believers and integrate them in their visions and expand important personal and social resources such as hope, learning, optimism, and social support. They can also contribute to improving the level of human health in various dimensions (Frederickson, 2009)

In addition to happiness, joys, and prosperities, human life willingly has many sufferings, calamities, failures, losses, bitterness, and frustrations that religious faith and proper utilization of pilgrimage as one of the behaviors commanded by religions strengthens the believers' possibility and probability to face problems. This issue is rooted in religious beliefs. Solving internal conflicts, integrating personality, and reducing abnormal behaviors can provide the ground for the spiritual health of the individual and society. Although its pilgrimage and rituals have a spiritual appearance, its non-spiritual aspects have been addressed. The most important effects of pilgrimage in providing spiritual health for individuals are as follows:

Enmity & Bonding

The need for affection as a two-way relationship between the loved and lover is one of the characteristics of spiritual health. On the one hand, the teachings of religions such as Islam on relation to God, enhance love and inner emotions. On the other hand, it directs part of it towards love for others, especially the righteous and believers to God. Among these pilgrimages, there is a kind of affection and heartfelt bond between the visitor to holy shrines and the visited. This emotional relationship moves the pilgrim, the

pilgrim appears before the beloved, expresses love and devotion to him, and most importantly, seeks nearness to the divine guardians with piety and righteous deeds, and bonds with them (At-Tawbah, 23).

In addition, being socialized with people, as one of the basic psychological needs of human beings, is such that it causes a person to distance himself from isolation and communicate with people. Pilgrimage causes socialization, densification, and unity among human beings. The process through which beliefs, tendencies, values, norms, and habits are taken from the culture and the person is given the possibility of retrieving his/her personality. In the light of the social development in the process of socialization, a person can be a human being and as a result of this process, man has his or her own identity (Mohseni, 1996).

Security & Empathy

The need for security (safety seeking) is one of the innate needs of human beings that can be examined both in physical and mental dimensions. Since s/he was separated from his/her dominance and joined the material body, the pure human spirit has always felt confused and seeks to provide security and tranquility in its shelter. Some explain the need for religion and relationship with God accordingly (Shojaii, 2008). The most basic source of fear and danger that reinforces the feeling of insecurity in the human soul is nature, the material world, and the rules governing it.

The majority of nature is not in human control. It may endanger safety at any moment and also lead to human death. Death is also considered one of the fundamental fears and sources of human urgency (Misiak & Sexton, 2002). The rich and blessed doctrine of pilgrimage is a response to the safety need of a pilgrim who has learned to nurture the concept of trust in the depths of his life, considering God as the only source of security in the storm of events and the culmination of intellectual and emotional turbulence.

Material effects and possibilities with all their beauty and attractions are such that usually, those who possess them are living in sorrow and fear of losing them or keeping them and regretting what they have. Hence, they do their best to collect more of them. Belonging and edict are equal to the sadness and anxiety of losing what is and feeling regretful for what is lost (Ahmadi et al., 2008). In places of pilgrimage, along with the feeling of attachment that arises to God and his guardians, another feeling also takes shape that man is cut off from whatever defective and rare nature is. Communicating with selected human beings keeps human beings away from being attached to the material world. During facing problems in the material world, s/he does not lose her/his peace and achieves true security.

Creating Hope & Peace

One of the characteristics of spiritual health is the feeling of hope and vitality in life. It is a pleasant and provocative feeling that leads man to work and ultimately self-realization and talent realization. It in turn leads to vitality, purposefulness, physical and mental health, and life satisfaction.

A person who experiences several failures following numerous attempts and his/her efforts do not result in success is afflicted with helplessness. This person has these unpleasant consequences in his/her body and soul as well as his/her individual and social life which may not be compensated. In the meantime, pilgrimage gives humans confidence and prevents them from drowning in the vortex of despair, and contributes to them to try more. Indeed, pilgrims resort to the divine base so that they find themselves in the domain of God's guardians. In practice, they never feel isolated and get prepared for the life of the world.

Praying and Strengthening the Feeling of Gratitude

One of the acts performed in the places of pilgrimage is supplication. Communicating with God and supplication causes emotional evacuation and release of human inner energies. Also, this spiritual relationship is the creator of increasing consciousness and feelings of happiness. Supplication from a psychological point of view, on the one hand, in human beings revives the light of hope for achieving its goals, and on the other hand, in addition to emotional evacuation and a sense of calm, it creates a sense of closeness to God in human beings (Janbozorgi, 1999).

Feelings of gratitude are another indicator of the spiritual health of individuals.

Therefore, supplication is both demanding and desirable. It is an instrument and ultimate. It is the introduction and the result. Therefore, those pious to God never feel any boredom. (Motahari, 1996). Feelings of praying and thanksgiving lead to the spiritual development of man and humanity. Through supplication, the supplicatory tries to create God's attributes in himself/herself and strives as s/he describes God with attributes such as kindness and forgiveness, and s/he becomes kind and merciful with others. The greatest benefit of supplication and even worship is to prevent the rebellion of the soul. The destruction of selfishness constitutes the rooting of all moral disadvantages and preparing oneself for the acquisition of all virtues (Misbah, 2001).

The effectiveness of pilgrimage on pilgrims' culture, opportunities, and challenges

The shrines of *religious personalities* are considered as social determinant and religious institution of knowledge. These holy places, as the most important channel of social communication, have always acted as a source of cultural movements not only in the spiritual purification dimension but also as a source of knowledge and information about the people (Mowlana, 1996, p.148). In the meantime, one

of the realities that strongly affects culture and cultural institutions such as religious shrines is political power or governmentality. Today, in addition to the natural movement in cultural life, a large part of cultural efforts and activities are based on the plans and policies of the government and its executive arm (Vahid, 2003, 152).

Considering propagating official ideological ideals and goals, the need for achieving their own political goals and objectives, and also the new functions they have acquired and the expectations they have, for the time being, the states need to plan, design, execute, control, and supervise cultural activities. In this regard, they consciously take on a role and responsibility, and in general, make a significant impact (Homayoon & Foroozan, 2009, p.64). Considering the above-mentioned reading, using the institution of pilgrimage aiming at the effectiveness of the culture of pilgrims and the limitations facing it can in turn be seen as an opportunity.

Opportunity to Increase Social Capital & Centrality to Religious Institutions

Cultural, social functioning, and public services of pilgrimage institutions is a matter that has been reduced and lost its centrality when being encountered with the growth and development of dedicated institutions related to cultural and social issues, and the centrality of government budgets towards designated and dedicated institutions. Indeed, these centers found only religious color and smell to perform ritual practices (Hillenbrand, 2000).

The history of villages, cities, and regions with pilgrimage centers is infused with that of these institutions. They are of functions affecting different aspects of social life and preserve the traditions and cultural identity of the communities where they are located (Valavi et al., 2014).

Paying attention to local religious institutions as a platform for cultural and social development not only eliminates this imposed isolation but also provides the ground for the survival and re-representation of the role of religious settlements. This can take place when such institutes are brought together to meet the needs of society and conformity with the necessities of the social system (Goldner, 2004).

The synergy of relevant organizations and avoiding the spirit of tenure can be considered a valuable opportunity to increase welfare, cultural and recreational services obvious and recognized functions, unseen and potentially valuable functions (Giddens, 1997). On the one hand, it will increase the number of visitors and provide the possibility of introducing holy shrines and improve the epistemological level of pilgrims and tourists. On the other hand, it will improve the local recreational cultural facilities of religious institutions, the maximum presence of religious tourists, turnover, and economic prosperity.

Reducing the recreational costs of sport provided and tailored in religious institutions along with the support of upstream institutions at local levels can reduce the cost of recreation sports and the health of the low-income stratum. It can in turn reduce the rate of disease in such levels and prevents social

deviance. Economically, this results in the development of religious places, an increase of endowments, received funds, and the price of graves embedded in the nave. Consequently, the increase of financial ability of religious institutions will result in better management grounds in these affairs.

In addition to the obvious effects mentioned, this way of managing will be able to promote and develop the environment and roads, migration, and employment of servants and specialists in the field of better maintenance of shrines in cultural, industrial, and health care fields as unseen functions.

The Challenge of Sanctification and Its Outflow

Cultural and recreational synergies in pilgrimage sites will pave the way for the formation of two different cultural, recreational and religious spaces. At one glance, the two spaces present not only a challenge of conflict of thought and sanctity of breaking but also a complementary and enriching opportunity.

In the view of critics, in the aggregation of recreational cultural activities, no basis exists between the religious and spiritual spirit governing the holy shrines and recreational spaces. As a result, bringing these two together will have nothing but loss of spiritual effects on pilgrimage and reverence. Notably, observing the rules governing pilgrimage sites' cultural synergy not only does not endanger the spirituality of tourists but also creates the opportunity for maximum community-purpose presence. This synergy can add to the cultural dynamics of the pilgrimage institution and the spiritual influence and religious orientation of the cultural user because of the predictable attraction of recreational activities for religious tourists, especially children, adolescents, and young people. Cultural synergy has an active and dynamic relationship with social and cultural environmental assessment, complementary approach of local institutions, public and private sector activists (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Indeed, negligence of the constructive and negative geographical consequences of this activity can lead to inverse and unwanted results. Also negligence the dimensions of its human impact can be effective on unpleasant results.

Therefore, one of the main tools for achieving optimal governance, and maximum productivity of social capital as a manifestation of commitments and social connections is to build solidarity and coalition between power-dependent institutions. This can give rise to better responding to the requirements and needs of the present world (Bourdieu, 1977) and also to make the proper and optimal use of the talents of religious shrines and the presence of tourists. Cultural including of institutions aligned with the government aiming to establish an efficient and influential cultural complex related to pilgrimage sites will make the presence of these institutions in these zones more distinct. It will lead to an increase in their credibility and social capital as well.

Drawing attention to religious origins, shrines, and tourists of holy places, on the one hand, and the necessities of establishing cultural recreational activities, on the other hand, necessitates comprehensive planning in shaping a targeted approach tailored to the time, place of religious institutions. It also contributes to considering the needs of different spectrums of its audience to achieve high individual and social goals.

This view demands a charter based on the correct management system and integrated organization on pilgrimage sites in the country which in turn demands the compilation of documented, anti-superstitious certificates from religious shrines. Also, accurate identification of the audience and objective needs of tourists and pilgrims, the appointment of specialized human resources by the stewardship of holy shrines to supervise the implementation of religious instructions, and its appropriateness with the emerging recreational cultural space are other proposed requirements to develop the utilization of the capacities of pilgrimage sites.

It can be stated that drawing a new design tailored to the pilgrimage collections with new needs and also providing the conditions for the activation of recreational cultural activities according to the local and historical identity of the place can represent the historical heritage of pilgrimage places. Likewise, preserving the traditional symbols of Iranian Islamic architecture and its aesthetic aspects can influence the souls and lives of pilgrims and tourists.

The presence of incongruous buildings around religious shrines requires the reconstruction of the shrine building and the proportionality of the architecture of the neighboring buildings and sometimes the physical development of the building of religious institutions as a difficult but essential affair. In keeping with this, more cooperation from government agencies in the field of construction and urban management is demanded.

Conclusions

In addition to religious functioning in terms of history, art, architecture, and relationship with culture and traditions, ritual places are of great importance as cultural heritage of the communities where they are located. In keeping with, presence in religious shrines and mixing pilgrimages and epistemology can pave the way for the pilgrim's cognitive development and adjustment of spiritual and physical health.

Such an approach can be read as an event that revives human life and increases the spirit of hope, solidarity, and empathy. This approach can also be viewed as what provides psychological security for pilgrims and neighbors and reduces psychological abnormalities and ominous effects by reducing the level of depression, anxiety, and ineffectiveness. This will bring about social dimension and cultural context, religious centralism, the aggregation of religious institutions, the attraction of youth, the restoration of regional identity symbols, the increase of social capital, the physical development of the

shrine building, the reduction of the cost of recreational cultural activities, and the increase of social vitality.

The general approach of the present study on religious shrines is a manifestation for other studies on important studies such as the pilgrimage of The House of God and the analysis of its impact on investigating the approach of the righteous predecessor and receiving the views of scholars in the field of religious studies and the implementation and presentation of new methods in the use of this religious institution more than before. What has been explained can plan and map the route for decision-makers and advisors in the field of tourism and management of pilgrimage sites. It can also provide the ground for the formation of a targeted approach meeting the time, place, and needs of different spectrums of the audience to achieve high individual and social goals.

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