

Mazar of Pir (Islamic Mystics Shrines) as Tourist Destination in Bengal: Special Reference to Birbhum District of West Bengal

Abstract

A large number of Mazars are scattered throughout west Bengal, from north to south and west to East. The places where the mazars are situated, generally considered as the place of Pilgrimage. But in course of time these places become the tourist destination in the tourist map of west Bengal. Various mazar or Dargah which was erected upon the grave of the deceased Pir, mainly visited by the Muslims in general (believer of Pirbad) to seek blessings from Pir and any other worldly desire. Pir cult is the product of Bengal itself and becomes the part and parcel of popular Islam. Throughout Bengal, in every district, we may found mazar of Pir—historical and non historical or fictitious. Out of these a meager number of mazar spot flourished as tourist destination. During the time of Ursh (death anniversary of the deceased Pir) people from various places of Bengal and outside Bengal thronged in the mazar area and in this way the places become a tourist spot. Not only the devotees visit the mazar during ursh but throughout the year people visited the places. Matter of fact is that as the people from distance places came to the mazar they usually stay for one night or more and frequented the adjacent famous places. Obviously many more lodge and hotels set up for lodging and fooding nearby the mazar area. Many more shops are set up and they sell normally goods which are offered to the Pir. Local economy developed through tourist inflow in this area. The mazar places of Muslim Pirs flourish well as tourist destination through private and government initiative. A cultural and religious amalgamation may be seen here.

Keywords: Mazar—Tourist—Tourism—Private Initiative—Govt. Initiative--
- Places Developed As Tourist Spot—Religious Desire—
Economic Development.

Introduction

There are a large number of mazar in west Bengal. Mazar means the grave of the deceased Pir. Tomb erected upon the grave of the dead Pir which is naturally called Mazar. In this paper I would like to analyze the pattern of growth of tourism in and around the places of Mazar or Dargah of the Pirs, and its impact on socio-economic, cultural and religious life of the Muslims of Bengal as well as other religious people who believe in Pir cult. Believer or non-believer of Pir cult both are affected by the development of tourism in the site of Mazar. It is to be said that government and private initiatives are there for developing tourism in the places of mazar. Gradually these places become the place of pilgrimage. Economic factors are vehemently active behind the development of tourism. Not all the place of mazar, some of the places become tourist spot in west Bengal, a few famous mazar or Dargah become tourist spot.

Aim of the Study

Many scholarly works have been done on tourism in Bengal. Most of the scholarly works dealt with flourishing tourism in places like hill area or sea beach area or delta area covered with natural jungle. Many attempts have been taken to discuss development of tourism in Hindu pilgrimage area. But I never find any concrete work on development of tourism in Mazar spot of Muslim Pir. Many works dealt with Ursh mela and description of mazar spot and its impact on socio religious history of Bengal. But they never flash light on the course of development of tourism in the places attached to the Mazar of Pir. In this study I tried to discuss how the mazar

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places developed as tourist destination in the tourist map of West Bengal, and how socio-religious amalgamation process is developed. Though Pir cult emerged in Bengal probably in the 13th C.E., in this study I mainly mentioned modern times or present century. Hope, this humble attempt may provide enrichment in the tourism history of Modern Bengal.

Bengal has a rich heritage of tourism in colonial and post colonial era. There were various classic architectural monuments which are the treasure in Bengal tourism history. Most of the architectural monuments are belongs to religious places, many of them are the strong example of Indo-Islamic culture and some are solely Indian architect. Various mazar of Pir scattered in Bengal from 13th C.E. to the present age, which was erected on the grave of deceased Pir or Islamic mystics. They are being worshipped (Pir parosti) by their murid and believer of Pir cult. The shrines or mazar and Dargah of the Pir become the tourist spot for religious people. Mainly the Muslims visit the mazar for blessing of Pir and any other worldly desire. Non Muslims also visit the mazar and offer puja to the Pir.

Before going to the description of the mazar or Dargah in Bengal general and especially in Birbhum district as tourist destination, I would like to discuss the growth of Pir cult in Bengal because sometime we mingled Pir cult with Sufism. Sufism is not equivalent to Pir cult or Pirism. Pirism is the product of Bengal, intermixture of Islamic theology and popular Islam influenced by Buddhism (therbad). In Bengal nowadays we generally mingled Sufism with Pirism or Pir cult. Pirism is the distorted form of old Sufism. It is the matter of confusion that not before 11th C.E. if there was any Pir cult in Sufism. In course of time Sufi doctrine almost vanished, the Pir cult emerged and being practiced in Bengal. It became the part and parcel of the religious belief of Bengali Muslims. But there is no such relation between theological Islam and Pir cult; actually it is the part of popular Islam. The Pir cult is practiced in Bengal widely in villages and urban areas irrespective of socio-economic condition of the masses.¹ (Md. Enamul Haque, Bange Sufi Pravab, pg. 134, Ananda Bhattacharya, Bangalay Sufi Andolon, Basarat Hossain, Sufibad).

Some Important Mazars of Bengal as Tourist Spot

Now I want to focus on the mazar of Bengal which become tourist destination. In the present Bengal from north to south so many mazar are there. During the performance of URSH(DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF PIR) it become the place of amalgamation of the people of Bengal and other state of India, irrespective of religion ,caste ,class and creed. Here, I would like to mention many Dargah and mazar of various Pir become tourist destination among the believer and non believer of Pir cult. The Malda district is famous for mazar of Nur Kutub E – Alam ,(Pandua), Gour is famous for kadam Rasul Mosque, in south 24 Parganas Ghutiari Sharif is famous tourist spot related to the mazar of Gazi Pir. In Hooghly district Furfura sharif is internationally famous pilgrimage place for Muslim and other religion. Pandua of Hooghly is also famous for the mazar of Pir

Shah Sufi Sultan. In North 24 Parganas, Haroa is famous for the mazar of Pir Gorachand. Howrah is famous for the mazar of Pir Azan Gazi (gachhi). Birbhum is famous for the Mazar of Mehubub Shah Wali or data baba. In every district we may found the mazar of Islamic mystics which are to be considered as tourist destination.²

Mazars of Birbhum

I would like to shift my focus on the mazar of Birbhum district which are developed as tourist spot and place of pilgrimage.

Nalhati

Here we can see the mazar of Shah Anwar. He was assassinated during the battle with bargis, another darhghah in Nalhati is called dargah of Bagha Shahid.

Kopa village

In this Muslim dominated area there is a mazar of Imam Shaheb, it is of more than three hundred years old.

Rudranagar

Mazar of naked Pir (nangta Pir), Mehubub Shah Fakir, and Choudhury Obedur Rahaman is also famous.

Bara village near lohapur

Majar of Pir Khondakar Lohajung /Hajrat Shah Farid/Shah Golam Ali Dastagir

Kumar Shanda village

Mazar of Shah Vala Pir

Nagar

Majar of Doa khan and Bara Khan.

Vadrapur

Mazar of kudrat Wala Pir.

Paikor

Majar of Ajan Shah.

Edrapur

Majar of Mehubub Shah.

Sumarpur

Majar of Kala Pir.

Suri town

There are mazar of six Pirs/of whom Gangelaskar Pir is famous, his original name is Syed Ismail.

Itagria

Majar of Khoaz Pir his real name Sekh Raja.

Makhdum nagar (muhammadbazar ps)

Majar of Makhdum Pir/his real name is Mukhdum Zakiuddin. There is the majar of Jangli Pir at Vankarata.

Margram

Mazar of Jafar Ali Khan.

Bodakuri

Mazar of Khurram Shah/Lavpur-Shah Kalu Sahid.

Chouhatta

Shah Babu and Bara Shaeb Majar.

Chandpur (near Suri)

Sirajul Munir Muhammad Kaderi. (KADERIA SILSILA)

Pathorchapori

Majar of data baba-Mehubub Shah Wali it is the famous mazar of west Bengal. (Chisti silsila)

Khustikri

Mazar of Hajrat Syeed Abdulla Kermani and at Sian (bolpur) Hajrat Shah Jalal.

Noada

Buro Pir and Syeed Hayatul Arefin are famous.

Rajnagar

Santal Pir and many more Pir.

Dubrajpur

Shah Alam or Alam Babar Mazar. It is of mazar of 15th C.E.

In Bodakuri jungle there is a mazar of Syeed Shah Hamid. Beside these mazar there are various mazar in birbhum.³ (Dr. Animesh Chattopadhyaya, Birbhume Hindu Muslim Sanskritir Samannay, pg 7---47). (I also done field study to collect records about Mazar). All this mazar are not famous as tourist spot. But many of them are become famous and identified as tourist spot. Most of them are locally famous and worshipped by their respective murid.

Mazars as Fairground

Mazar as fairground contribute much to the development of tourism. Actually in mazar of Pir or Dargah Ursh (death anniversary) observed. In this connection surrounding of mazar become a fairground, people from various places come here as tourist—they tour from far and wide. The tour experience enriched their knowledge of practical life as well as popular life. We may name a few fair of Pir—actually ursh. During the death Anniversary of the diseased Pir Ursh is held,

Which is colloquially called mela by the devotees of Pir. Fair of Shankshar at Bhangar of 24 Parganas south and Fair of Dada Pir at Kolkata, Prince Anwar Shah Road is famous. At Narendrapur fair of Raptan Gazi (Rakten Gazi) is held during the month of January, actually 1st Magh of every year.

Data Babar mela at Patharchpuri, near Suri, Birbhum District, is held on and from 11 to 12 Chaitra every year. The mela of Bhangar Pir is held on 16th Chaitra at Bhangar, South 24 Parganas. The mela of Gazi Pir held at Ghutiari Sharif South 24 Parganas on 7th Ashar- 17th Shraavan. Mela of Pir Gorachand at Haroa in North 24 Parganas held on and from 11—14th falgun.

Dada Pir Saheb's mela is held at Furfura Sharif, Hooghly on and from 21 to 23 falgun every year. Mela of Panch Pir at Birbhum near Tarapith on 13th Baishakh. Rakten Gazi's mela is held at Taldangra, Ushthi, 24 parganas, on 1st Magh. Banbibir mela at Harinarayanpur, Dakshin Barasat in Sundarban area is famous. Alam Babar mela is held at Dubrajpur, Birbhum, on the last Friday of Asharh every year. This fair is one day fair. Kushtigiri mela of Syeed Shah Abdulla Kirmani at Birbhum is held on and from 11th to 15th Falgun every year. During the mela period peoples from various places come here and in this way tourism developed. Various types of shops set up in the fairground. Makeshift hotels for fooding, shops of sweetmeat, dress materials, household utensils, handmade goods, low cost cosmetics and low cost toys etc. Mud pitcher is famous in Patharchapuri. Beside this circus, magic, merry-go-rounds and jatra performed here for

entertainment. Most entertaining and attractive cultural programmes are mussalmai letho gan and alkap song. Sufi songs also performed by the Faqirs in the Mela ground. Unnaturally we may find the shops of intoxicating goods like ganja and hashis which is consumed by mainly the fakirs (OBVIOUSLY BESHARA FAKIR) and their followers during the ursh mela. But intoxicating goods are not sold openly, it is open - secret.⁴

Development of Tourism in This Area

I have visited various places where mazar and Dargah are situated. Mainly the mazars of reputed Pir are being developed as tourist spot, and famous for tourism. Tourist from various corner of the state visits the spot throughout the year and mainly during the period of ursh. I have seen a large number of people (Men, women and children) came to the spot for pilgrimage. In case of the ursh of DATA BABA at Patharchapuri or ursh of Hazrat Abdullah Kirmani of kustigiri, and ursh of Gazi Pir of Ghutiari sharif or Dada Pir of Furfura Sharif, the murids of Pir visit the place with all belongings of daily life. The people of low economic conditions set up tent with polythene and bamboo and spent three to five days there to secure blessings from the Pir. The people of upper economic class booked the lodges and hotels to stay there. Many of the visitors used private cars as well as hire cars to enjoy the mela. Large number of people stays one day or one night and left the place by shopping the regular household utensils, cosmetics etc. They used to buy Chaddar to offer it to the Pir's mazar and other things such as incense sticks, candles and shirni to offer it in the name of Pir. They also offer goat, hen etc which will auctioned after the mela is over by the organizer of the mela. As the people come from distant places to the mazar area and stay here for a three to four days period, the places of mazar become a tourist spot. Throughout the year we may notice the flow of tourist in the mazar area. Besides the hotels and lodges, the houses of the adjacent villages and towns of private property near the mazar are being let out for tourist with high price. The matter of fact is that though, throughout the year peoples come to offer puja or pay homage (Pir parosti), the locality become tourist spot. Tourist lodges are set up nearby the Mazar area and during the mela time most of the household turned into lodge. The visitors rather the tourist arranged picnic nearby the mazar, as they offered animals in the name of the Pir to fulfill the mannat.

A large number of beggars thronged near the mazar throughout the year. But during the URSH various types of disabled human being (Khuda ka banda) thronged in the fair place to earn livelihood. The tourist obviously offers alms (cash and kind) to these beggars to secure blessings of Allah and Pir. We have seen a large number of disabled and abled persons, some physically unnatural, begged in the fair place accompanied by abled persons. Begging is the only source of income to this people, as like other tourist spot begging here is a profession. Langars are set up to distribute foods to the needy persons. Anyone can take food from the Langars; it is the tradition of Sufi saints. Throughout the year and

especially during ursh mela tourist gathered the mazar irrespective of religion. Hence in this way tourism developed centering mazar area.

Conclusion

The places where mazars are situated become important tourist spot but I have already mentioned that not all the mazars become important tourist spot, a few of them developed as tourist spot. The ursh mela has an important impact on Bengal's socio-economic, cultural and religious life. Economic side is very important. There is a very strong economic force behind the rise of mazar culture. All the activities performed here are evolving round economics. The visitors usually offered Chadar to the mazar, rosewater, incense sticks, candles, and shirni. The tourist offer cash to the khadim or Matowalli of the mazar for performing milad. As this places developed as tourist spot many local vehicles are used to carry the tourist, which helps the locale to earn their two square meals. The local people earn more money from the tourist so they live smooth life. A cultural and religious amalgamation may be seen here.

This essay is mainly the outcome of my personal experience which I gathered visiting the places where mazars are situated. I also used secondary sources to formulate this paper. The concept of tourism in Birbhum district develops rapidly by private initiative and also government initiative. The tour conducting agencies conducted tours to the mazar places as a matter of pilgrimage. So peoples become aware and eagerly visited the places of mazar privately or jointly with the tour conductor. I would like to conclude by saying this, that in future course of time the places of mazar of Muslim Pirs may flourish well as tourist destination if the government takes initiative by providing vehicles and security to the visitors. To be said that this mazar places helped a lot to flourish mix culture in Bengal, also it helps to grow syncretic tradition in Bengal.

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Footnotes

1. MD. Enamul Haque, *Bange Sufi Pravab*, pg, 134. Also we can consult for details- Ananda Bhattacharya: *Bangalay Sufi Andolon*, Basarat Hossain: *Sufibad*. But Sufism and Pirism is different, Sufism has universal appeal but Pirism is local in character, related to loukik Islam or FOLK Islam.
2. Through field study I have found these Mazar, mainly the Pirs are male but there are many female Pirani, historical or fictitious.
3. Dr. Animesh Chattopadhyaya, *Birbhume Hindu Muslim Sanskritir Samannaya*, pg, 7-47. I also visited most of these mazar.
4. Mainly I visited these mazar ground at mela time, consulted – Tripti Brahma, *Banglay Islami Sanskriti*.