Chapter I

Introduction
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The main purpose of the study is to analyse critically the sociological dimensions of religion with respect to the shrines of India and Iran. It also deals with the prospects and attribution of religion to the society.

According to Emile Durkheim 'a religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things'. It is an eminently collective phenomenon binding men together.

Religion and religious beliefs inspires human behaviours and culture of a nation. It is shaped according to the customs and traditions and plays an inevitable role in the formation of cultural values. Religious beliefs and observances aim at developing a relationship with super natural power and acts as a medium for the blessing of mankind. Human behaviour is shaped by a relationship between man and supernatural power in such a way that they are interwoven and inseparable.

Religion is essentially a social phenomenon it occurs in a social content and when men celebrate sacred things, they unwittingly celebrate the power of their society. The relationship between man and sacred things is similar to the relationship between man and society. It provides a means of adjusting and attuning to terms with difficult situation in one's life. Through rituals and pilgrimage an individual defends all adversities and it acts as tonic to self confidence.
According to Bronislow Malinowski 'religion promotes social solidarity by dealing with situations of emotional stress which threaten the stability of society'.

'Religion is part of the cultural system. Religious beliefs provide guidelines for human action and standards, against which man’s conduct can be evaluated'.

The religious places such as shrines, tombs, and important personalities such as Dargahs, Bibis, Lords, Syed and Imams were established and recognized generally after the spread of Islam in countries like India and Iran.

These places played an important role in forming the culture and beliefs of nations. The religious values relies on the buried saint in the shrine and varies on his/her religious performances. In shrines there are glorious tombs and buildings where sacrifices (Qurbani) and food is offered. The pilgrims seek solution of their problems through the saint and desire to bring favourable conditions for themselves and their families. They also pray at the tombs, pay respect to the saints. These places are considered as cultural, social and religious centres in relation to the societal beliefs, traditions, values and other socio-cultural aspects. This relationship naturally influences the beliefs, traditions and values of a society and of religion. In fact no culture exist in the world in which the religion plays no role.
The shrines reflect the past of each nation. These social and religious places manifest beliefs in an individual. Ceremonies and other religious rituals take place. It is a place for offerings, requests and resort for the sufferers, shelters for the homeless, and remedy for the ill people. These places are not only meant for worshipping and supplications, but also act as centres for social interaction and decision-making.

According to Bronislow Malinowski ‘anxiety and tension tend to disrupt social life. Situations which produce emotions include “crisis of life” such as birth, puberty, marriage and death. Malinowski notes that in all societies these life crises are surrounded with religious ritual’.

Celebrations, mourning and different rituals which are performed in shrines (though have been changed over periods of times), reflects the culture of a nation. These centres however, preserve their religious sanctity, people and the believers consider shrines as religions turning points and paths for connecting themselves to God.

Pilgrimage is essentially a religious phenomenon which connects the material world to the eternal and the pilgrims to his/her religious community.

There are three necessary things for a pilgrimage, namely, sacred place, sacred path, and sacred goal. Shrines in each area coincide with the pilgrims and devotees. This relation and unity maintains the Islamic sacred centres to be a historical elements. These places represent the regional history, origin and artistic construction of
the age. There are several references narrated about them, over all, they possess keys to open the blind doors of history.

Islamic shrines like other religious places control and cure various psychological diseases. Human beings in their life may become depressed and mentally tense, therefore, worshipping and pilgrimage to the shrines could give them solace.

Religious beliefs are such a kind of phenomenon through which one can release from mental problem. Therefore, the psychological functions of shrines offer an influential capacity which are regarded as the final resort for the oppressed belonging to all religions and cultures.

When man faces a large number of difficulties and obstacles in his/her life, she/he prays and hold fasts consequently her/his life will witnesses a change and he/she becomes a devotee of the saint, in particular and of God in general.\(^{5}\)

The existence of shrines and sacred places in an area constitutes a large gathering of pilgrims bringing economical gain to the areas by means of expenses, gifts or offerings purchased by pilgrims.

Shrines have also played an important role in the establishment and regulation of social laws. The social validity of these places can be recognized through the different sections/parts of society and their relations in the society. Similarly the social and urban development of
an area is influenced by the regional shrines due to their spiritual, religious and social rank. Their centralities affects the economy, triggers social activities, provides employment etc, in the locations.

Shrines are also considered as a shelter for the poor and oppressed, it is reflected through the behaviours and customs such as camping, holding fast and beseeching performed by pilgrims.

As far as religion is concerned it always influences the culture and vice versa. The countries where Islam endeavoured to bring change in the culture were primarily based on religious ideologies. Religion usually causes deletion of a cultural value or its modification.

Shrines, which came into existence through Islamic influence, manifest cultural values, traditions and beliefs among pilgrims. Due to the close affinity among the pilgrims visiting the shrines a strong cultural bond and relationship is formed.

Therefore, it is clear that all the above discussions results in the unity and homogeneity among the members of the society. Religion and faithfulness can be considered as effective factors in maintaining consistency of an individual in a society.

Religion enhances and forms relationship among the members of different societies. Since the values necessary for the fundamental structure of societal systems are common among all religions, societal values are easily maintained.
The fact that religion is capable to increase the consistency among the worshippers of the society mean that if the religious values are not of great importance among the members, they could act as a potential factor for inconsistency and bewilderment of societal relationship. The religious values function properly only if they are learned and used, that is to have appropriate positive functions.\textsuperscript{6}

The present study aims at analysing the sociological aspects of shrines. The sociology of a religion is to be analysed and it is of great importance due to the fact that it is impossible to find a society in which there is no trace of religion and the people do not believe in God.

This branch of sociology in which the religious organizations and rituals are taken into consideration, focuses on the religious relationship as well as the changes in cultural structure and religious norms. On the other hand, the relationship between culture, religion and society are investigated in the present study.

In the present study the following aspects is highlighted and brought under discussion:

The individual and historical significance of the saints and their shrines, its building, halls and different location and parts associated with their comprehensive functions.

Employees attached to the shrines such as Khadims etc and services like banks, restaurant, taxi service, hotel, museum and
libraries are investigated. Employees of the shrine are directly and indirectly associated. The system of shrine, rituals and other ceremonies performed in the shrine is taken under investigation, and lastly the importance of the shrine and its impact on society and individuals and its functions such as religious, psychological, cultural, social and economical services rendered by the shrine have been taken into account.

**Importance of the study**

Every research work has its own importance. An intensive study requires deep involvement, logical approach, and objective analysis in such a way that all the aspects of research are covered with clear perspective and positive conclusion.

The present study will be conducted with the above mentioned approach in order to bring to light the validity and relevance of the work for the society from social and religious point of view.

**Religious aspects:** In Islamic world shrines are regarded as pious places where God’s blessings are showered and spiritual satisfactions are attained. These shrines offer spiritual favour to the society and strengthens it against disintegration. Shrines also provide shelters to those who wish peace and harmony against the onslaught of materialism. Pilgrims resort to shrines during Urs and other ceremonies to come closer to God. They express devotion based on their relations with the saints.
They perform prayers and also hold fast fence (Zarih) at the shrine to purify their inner-self and faith. This act of devotion expressed by the pilgrims brings them closer to each other spiritually and ideologically.

**Psychological aspects:** Needy pilgrims come in large numbers to the shrines, to fulfill their wishes from the God through the medium of the saints. They show reverence to their saints for attaining their goals. They put their requests to saint in the form of written petitions on a piece of paper or by tying strings on the fences or trees. They believe that through the intercession of saints, God will bestow his blessings upon them. They also hold the belief that by showing reverence to saints they are showered with bliss in this material world. This belief gives pilgrims a psychological strength and they feel that in adversities they are secure and protected by the superpower which helps them through the medium of saints. It enables them to develop a sense of confidence in undertaking difficult tasks and facing hardships.

Study of shrines in terms of psychological analysis of the pilgrims reveals the fact that shrines have also wielded influence on the society through individual's psychology.

**Cultural, social and economy aspects:** The most important and significant role of shrines is that they are the meeting point of the people of various classes, religion and creeds. When they come at one place to perform the rituals and observe the customs they come closer by lifting the barriers of religious differences. They exchange views
and reciprocate ideas. This kind of meeting and closeness results into cultural and social bonding. Shrine renders social services through different institution like library, clinical centres, school and charity houses.

This casual contact during the visit to shrine sometimes turns into a permanent and longer relation either by the way of matrimonial relationships or by the way of other social and economic activities like trade and commerce. Shrines are also the centres of generating economy. Gifts and presents are offered by the pilgrims in the form of cash which provides subsistence to the Khadims of the shrines. During the period of Urs income is also generated by levying taxes on the visitors. This income goes to the government exchequer and to the local bodies which is spent on the development of the city and expansion of the area where the shrine lies.

Study of customs, ceremonies and rituals related to the saints and their tombs are worth from the sociological point of view as the above mentioned activities have religious, psychological, cultural, social and economic dimensions. A critical and evaluative study of these dimensions of shrines will bring forth the services which they have rendered to the society. This study will also explain the importance of shrines as a social institutions which play a significant role in moulding religious and social way of life of a big section of the society.
Objectives of the study

The objectives of the present study are as follows:

1. The study aims at analysing various aspects of shrines such as its origin, history and its sociological contribution.
2. To study rituals and ceremonies performed in the shrines, as well as recognition of religious, psychological, cultural, social and economical aspects.
3. To study the beliefs and attitude of the pilgrims while visiting the shrines. Religious, psychological, cultural, social and economical significance and contribution of the shrines, will also be taken under the study.
4. To recognize the effect on the life of the believers with relation to the role and function offered by the shrines.
5. An attempt is made to compare and contrast the above mentioned aspects of the shrines of India and Iran respectively and to trace the similarities and differences between the two.
6. An attempt is made to conclude and find out various aspects and affairs of the shrine and its functions.

Methodology

The methodology of this work is primarily based on the secondary resources and observation of the physical features of the shrine. The observation is through participation. Field work includes studying the behaviours of pilgrims, rituals and ceremonies performed
by them as well as by the permanent and casual employees of the shrines. Interviews of Mutawallis (incharge), Khadims, descendants of the saints and the pilgrims of the shrine was taken. Interview is mainly about the purpose of visit and degree of devotion of pilgrims and employees of the shrine for the saint. It also includes to study the purpose of performing ritual by the pilgrims, Khadims, employees and Mutawallis. Photography of the buildings, parts and functioning of the shrine is done to present a clear and visual pictures of the field work.

**Study under Investigation**

There are several Islamic shrines and tombs in India and Iran. In this study an attempt is being made to investigate some eminent shrines, their pivotal roles, significance and importance in the society as well as concern of the people and believers. Accordingly two Islamic shrines in India, namely Hazrat Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti's shrine in Ajmer and Hazrat Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya's shrine in Delhi and two Islamic shrines in Iran accordingly Hazrat Abdul Azim Hasani's shrine in Ray (Tehran) and Hazrat Imamzadeh Saleh's shrine in the north of Tehran are taken under the study.
References


