Chapter 2  Introduction to Religious Tourism

2.1  Religion and Tourism – Perspectives

The evolution of religions and religious culture from the past till the present times has been explored through focus on theories by eminent social scientists. Global as well as Indian perspectives have been considered. The importance and motivation of travel in religion has been interpreted through motivation theories given by eminent scientists. The various types of religious travel has been explored namely pilgrimage, travel in religious space and travel during religious time.

“The religious person is one who seeks coherence and meaning in this world, and a religious culture is one that has a clearly structured world view. The religious impulse is to tie things together---All human beings are religious if religion is broadly defined as the impulse for coherence and meaning. The strength of the impulse varies enormously from culture to culture, and from person to person”.

--- Tuan (1976, in Monisha Chattopadhyaya, 2006)

“Many of the religions of the world have become so inextricably linked with particular racial groups, cultures, political systems and lifestyles, that it is difficult to imagine one without the other. It is hard to imagine Thailand without Buddhism, or India without Hinduism, for example, Christianity has become intricately bound up with the life style of Western culture”.

--- Tyler (1990, in Monisha Chattopadhyaya, 2006)

“It is all what the human being depends on in order to sharpen and strengthen his many intellectual and physical faculties seeking to subdue the world through knowledge and work. By virtue of the development in laws and ethics, he also aims at giving a human face to life in its social and family contexts. In his pursuit of the endeavor, he also depends on translating, publishing and archiving over the years great spiritual experiences and major human passions so that they can be used to further the progress of a greater number of people”.

--- Vatican City Council on Culture (in Monisha Chattopadhyaya, 2006)
All religions lead to God. Most of us are believers in God and we express our devotion to him through various rituals and religious practices. According to Hindu religion nobody created nor can anybody destroy God. There is much similarity between this belief and the law of conservation of energy given by the great scientist Einstein, according to which energy can neither be created nor destroyed but can only change its form and matter being also a form of energy.

God’s existence cannot be attributed to man, but religion is man’s medium to communicate with God, has evolved through a complex of psychologies, geography, historical events and social processes, sometimes serving to the well being of man and sometimes causing tension and strife.

Religion is functional; it expresses and serves many individual, social and cultural needs. The various theories on religion propounded by eminent social scientists shed some light on the need for religion and various religious practices that have evolved around the globe.

Table 2.1 Theories on Religion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Scientist</th>
<th>Theory</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tylor &amp; Frazor</td>
<td>Religion exists in order to help people make sense of events which would otherwise be incomprehensible by relying on unseen, hidden forces.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sigmund Freud</td>
<td>Religion is a mass neurosis and exists as a response to deep emotional conflicts and weaknesses.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emile Durkheim</td>
<td>Religion is a means of social organization. It is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden. His focus was on the importance of the concept of the “sacred” and its relevance to the welfare of the community.</td>
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<td>Karl Marx</td>
<td>Religion is an illusion whose chief purpose is to provide reasons and an excuse to keep society functioning as it is. Religion is opium of the masses.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mircea Eliade</td>
<td>Religion is a focus on the sacred. Eliade’s understanding rests on two concepts: the sacred and the profane. He focuses on timeless forms of ideas which keep recurring in religions all over the world; he ignores their specific historic contexts.</td>
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Stewart Elliot Guthrie | Religion is anthropomorphization gone awry. According to him religion is attribution of human characteristics to non human things or events

EE Evans-Pritchard | Religion has deep emotional roots

Clifford Geertz | Religion as culture and meaning. He treats religion as a vital component of cultural meanings. He argues that religion carries symbols which establish powerful moods or feelings


‘Based on these theories one may say that religion exists as an explanation for what we don’t understand, as a psychological reaction to our lives and surroundings, as an expression of social needs, as a tool of the status quo to keep some people in power and others out, as a focus upon supernatural and sacred aspects of our lives, and as an evolutionary strategy for survival. Religion is a complex human institution. Religion has complex origins and motivations’.

Culture which has its roots in religion is not static; it continuously evolves to serve better the functions for which it initially came into existence. This is happening today, and happened many times in the past. The Bhakti and Sufi movements emerged as reform movements to the orthodox Hindu and Muslim cultures prevailing in the fifteenth century. Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism which were reform movements against Hinduism have established as distinct religions.

In the contemporary times, many people from India and abroad of various faiths have found solace in spirituality and Yoga and other mind control techniques like Vipasana which were practiced by the ancient Hindus and the Buddhists and are deeply rooted in these religious cultures. Spiritual retreats have become major tourists’ attractions and organizations like “The Art of Living” has gained worldwide appeal.

Designating certain places as sacred is common in all religions of the globe. There are various theories explaining the evolution of sacred places.
### Table 2.2 Theories on Sacred Places

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Scientists</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eade and Sallnow</td>
<td>“The power of a miraculous shrine is seen to derive solely from its inherent capacity to exert a devotional magnetism over pilgrims from far and wide and to exude of itself potent meanings and significance for the worshippers --- its power is internally generated and its meanings are largely predetermined”. This traditional viewpoint which holds that some places are inherently sacred, and the act of pilgrimage bestows inherent benefits.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eliade</td>
<td>Designation of a site as sacred is generally a response to two types of events. Some events (which he calls hierophanic) involve a direct manifestation on earth of a deity, whereas in other (theophanic) events somebody receives a message from the deity and interprets it for others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yi Fu Tuan</td>
<td>The true meaning of sacred goes beyond stereotype images of temples and shrines because at the level of experience sacred phenomena are those that stand out from the commonplace and interrupt routine. He puts an emphasis on qualities such as apartness, other worldliness, orderliness and wholeness in defining what is sacred. Sacred places also share two important properties – they are not transferable (they are valued because of their associated holiness), and they do not need to be re-established with each new generation (there is an inherited appreciation of the holiness of the site).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bowman</td>
<td>Holds a post modern view and is very different from the traditional view, because it argues that meanings are not inherent but are attributed by those who believe in the notion of sacred space. In the postmodern view “pilgrimages are journeys to the sacred, but the sacred is not something which stands beyond the domain of the cultural; it is imagined, defined and articulated within cultural practice”. In this perspective, therefore, different people bring their own perceptions and meanings to the sacred place. As a result, sacred spaces have projected onto them a range of different meanings and interpretation, even amongst believers.</td>
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Various events may strengthen the sacred or religious image of a place. It may be government involvement like in India Navratri, Kalchakra and Kumbh Mela have acquired immense religious and cultural importance due to government involvement and participation, and attracts great number of tourists from within and outside the country. The visit of some eminent personalities like Dalai Lama to India or The Pope to Jordan may further fortify the religious image of a place. Religion is a community sentiment and affects both macro and micro communities as such religious tourism can be promoted at macro and micro levels.

2.2 Characteristics of Religious Tourism

Defining religious tourism seems often a tough task. The tourism has got numerous literatures in which different authors had been categorized differently, where religious tourism, spiritual tourism, pilgrimage tourism, cultural tourism and cultural heritage tourism are often referred as synonyms. Because, in most cases cultural tourists prefer to visit pilgrimages as part of their travel, thus they often referred named as religious tourists. Religious tourism is the area where very less studies had been undertaken and interestingly it is also a very old form of tourism.

1. **To perform pilgrimage as an act of worship:** It is a widely acknowledged fact that majority of the religious travel is an act of worship and salvation barring Muslim and Jews who perform their religious travel to Mecca (Haj) and Jerusalem, respectively as conditionally obligatory. In both the religions, belief goes that all healthy and financially capable of undertaking such travel must visit the holy shrine at least once in their life time.

2. **To express gratitude, confess sin and to perform a vow:** Every one of us faces such crises in our life when we are not able to resolve our problems through worldly means, most of us turn to divine help. A visit to sacred site devoted to god/goddess we believe in, to facilitate communication with the ruling deity of the shrine for such help. Here believers confess and express their gratitude as well as declare new resolutions for a more blessed life in the future.

3. **To achieve social and spiritual salvation:** Socially, taking religious trips is a mark of piety which carries significance in almost all societies. Most particularly among Hindus a visit to holy places is one of the means for
accumulating religious merits whereas among Buddhists it is considered to be the first stop towards enlightenment. Another aspect related to their characteristic is this that among all religions it is common to find older members performing pilgrimage as a stage of retiring from social life and as a mark of final departure from this world.

4. **To commemorate and celebrate certain religious events:** Every religion has myths and rituals associated with certain events that are regarded as sacred among the believers. For example, when Lord Ram returned to Ayodhya, when Lord Krishna was born, when Christ was reborn, when Prophet Mohammad was born or died all these events are carefully documented in our mythologies or other sacred tenets such events are re-enacted during religious festivities to commemorate these events. Over the years, of course, new colors have been added to these events.

5. **To be in communication with co-religionists:** This motivation/purpose of religious travel is applied on most of the religious meetings which can be missionary or religious visits (pilgrimages). In fact, in all modern religions/religious beliefs one of the most expressed purposes of pilgrimage is to provide an occasion for social gathering of fellow believers.

### 2.3 Religious Tourism and Pilgrimages

According Novelli (2005) religious tourism is specially categorized and segmented under cultural tourism. In figure 2.1, it is illustrated that tourism can be divided into two types namely mass tourism and niche tourism. Based on Poon (1993, in Katri Nieminen 2012) mass tourism can be described as “large-scale phenomenon, packaging and selling standardized leisure services at fixed prices to a mass clientele”. Niche tourism, on the other hand, is understood to cater to more specifically defined groups where individuals are identified by the same specialized needs or interests for certain products. Niche tourism can further be divided into five different segments. Finally, cultural tourism is categorized into micro-niches, where religious tourism also belongs as seen in the figure 2.1 (Novelli, 2005 in Katri Nieminen 2012).
Religious tourism can be described in simple terms as Yeoman (2008 in Katri Nieminen 2012) kept this: “Traveling to visit a place, a building or a shrine, which is sacred”. This form of travelling trip can take place either for observing or participating in religious aspects in accordance with individual’s trust and faith. Then, there are religious tourists desirous to share their religious experiences with someone to convey devotional faith and witness. Thus, a tourism package might include a visit to a religious place, like a temple or church or cathedral. This does not make the trip religious, but rather cultural, as people visit temple as part of itinerary and they don’t travel for religious purposes. In fact, most cultural trips involve a visit to such religious place, which does not make them religious trips (Richard, 2007 in Katri Nieminen 2012). Visiting the Vatican as a sightseeing trip is not a pilgrimage. If there is a religious motive carried out by pilgrims, then only it can be named as a pilgrimage.
The word pilgrim originated from Latin word ‘peregrinus’, which means traveler or stranger, although these two terms can be a probable combination for the best explanation. The Latin term can also be referred as “the idea of wandering over a distance”. (Yeoman, 2008; Liguorian, 2012 in Katri Nieminen 2012)

For some, the journey itself to the locations is equally important. For instance the pilgrimage routes have become famous as part of the concept of religious tourism. The most known of these is the route to Santiago de Composela. It is claimed, however, that the focus on these routes is often on physical achievement rather than any spiritual motivation, which could question the categorization of them belonging to religious tourism (Richards, 2007 in Katri Nieminen 2012).

It can be summarized by highlighting one significant fact that pilgrimage and religious travels are often motivated by spiritual or religious motives, which strengthen pilgrim’s faith and trust on God. Even though it is very tough to define cultural and religious tourism precisely, motivation can be a major driving force which differentiates cultural and religious travel. It might be that the religious or cultural tourist does not always recognize once motives themselves either, but simply wants to travel to a certain religious sites and sometimes the motives will be defined only then, raising the question of whether this categorization between religious and cultural tourists is needed in the first place.

2.4 The Religious Tourist

The need lies here to distinguish the characteristics between tourist, pilgrim and religious tourist. According to Cohen (2001, in Katri Nieminen 2012) religious tourists are those who come to observe, but who will also time to time take part in devotion. Pilgrims are those who are praying the Gods / idol at the site whereas tourists are simply spectators who remain uninvolved. However, the character might change on the way. According to Harb (1996, in Katri Nieminen 2012) a person starting the tour as a cultural tourist, might change to a religious tourist on the way due to some kind of enlightening. What characterizes the true pious pilgrims is that they often interact only with the holy places, and the religious tourists and tourists engage less of their time at these sites, as they want to visit other attractions as well (Digance, 2003 in Katri Nieminen 2012).
Level of religious motivation can also be one of the significant factors to define religious tourist the one who travel to a destination. Some of the religious tourists are driven by worldly inspirations, which makes them secular tourist. When it comes to other edge some of the religious tourists are those motivated by trust and faith, religious fulfillment, which makes them pilgrims as show in figure 2.2. Pilgrim - tourist continuum. Individuals who fall in the middle are those who can be named and called as religious tourist, as this category convey little less motivated by religious spirituality than actual pilgrims or little more motivated than the tourist (Simone-Charteris & Boyd, 2011 in Katri Nieminen 2012).

**Figure 2.2 Pilgrimage – tourist continuum**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pilgrimage</th>
<th>Religious Tourism</th>
<th>Tourism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A. Pious Pilgrim  
B. Pilgrim > Tourist  
C. Pilgrim = Tourist  
D. Tourist > Pilgrimage  
E. Secular Tourist


Another figure to make the distinctions more clear is made by Richards (2007, in Katri Nieminen 2012) in figure 2.3. Pilgrimages are more spiritual and individual in their character than religious or cultural travel and are also more inner journeys than journeys to attractions. Although here it should be noted that many of the pilgrimages organized today don’t differ much from secular tours in the way they are packaged. They are often organized just as mass tourism packages
including flights, hotel bookings and attraction fees. So here in the figure 2.3 pilgrimages seem to mean traveling alone, the inner journey of the tour is important and often sought after. One can travel as part of the group and still be motivated mainly for individual inner journey rather than fellowship.

**Figure 2.3 Dimensions of religious tourism**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pilgrimage</th>
<th>Religious tourism</th>
<th>Cultural tourism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>Secular</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Organized</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner journey</td>
<td>Journey to attractions</td>
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In summary, when categorizing religious tourist, the motivational aspects are important, but also their actions which also divide the religious tourists from secular tourists. The latter are merely spectators, when pilgrims and even religious tourists, to some extent, are more actively seeking for an inner journey.

### 2.5 Categories in Religious Tourism

Religious tourism can be categorized into three categories. They are

1. Pilgrimages
2. Volunteer or Missionary travel

Pilgrimage in Hinduism is the practice of travelling to pilgrim places where religious powers, energy, wisdom or knowledge and experience are deemed especially accessible. In addition to holy places, temples even mountains, forests and
rivers are considered sacred and such they also part of what is called as Thirthas or shrines. Christian pilgrimages are some of the following: traveling around the roots of Christian trust and faith, finding out the contribution of Christianity to Western civilization. Performing pilgrimage as an act of worship is an extensively recognized information that most of the pilgrimage journey is an act of worship and salvation except for Jews and Muslim who perform their pilgrimage travel to Mecca (Haj) and Jerusalem, in that order as a provisionally missionary. In both the religions, faith goes that all sound and economically capable of undertaking such travel must visit the sacred shrine at least once in their life time. And also inspiration, reason to travel is executed on most of the religious gathered meetings which can be religious visits (pilgrimages) (Eickelman and Piscatori, 1996 in Katri Nieminen 2012).

In volunteer tourism tourists offer their assistance in different humanitarian needs, such as in the disorder caused after the hurricane Kathrina in New Orleans, where Christian love and affection is stated publicly in action. Both missionary and volunteer travels are planned by churches and missionary institution (Wright, 2008, Papathanassis, 2011 in Katri Nieminen 2012). Every religion has myths and rituals connected with certain events and programs that are regarded as holy among the believers. For instance, when Lord Sri Ram returned to Ayodhya, when Lord Krishna was born, when Christ was reborn, when Prophet Mohammad was born all these events are cautiously documented in our mythologies or other holy tenets such events are re-enacted during religious festivals to honor these events. Over the years, new colors have been added to these events.

Today, religious events like camps to the select sites, conferences, seminars and retreats form an enormous part of religious tourism. The significance of these is very important for the entire sector of tourism as tour operators, hotels and transporters are included. Some world pilgrimage events like World Youth Day can draw more than one million people (Papathanasssis, 2011 in Katri Nieminen 2012). Though, travelling nationally to religious events of some class appears well-liked in almost all nations. There is a development of pleasant appearance in fellowship tours where people with identical goals board on pilgrimage tours. Contributing together with likeminded people also for recreational purposes makes the experience
more blissful and significant and in itself makes stronger the belief and the purpose of the trip (Wright, 2008 in Katri Nieminen 2012).

2.6 Motives behind Religious Tourism

Why do people travel? Travel is a form of searching. It is our nature to seek, through seeking we unravel the mysteries of universe, we seek as much and as far as we can. Scientifically speaking all entities seeks a state of equilibrium and travelling for religion can be said to be one of the ways in reaching the equilibrium state, when this equilibrium is disturbed we again undertake search for sustaining our existence. Looking at travel from the geographical angle people undertake travel to seek what they are not able to get in their own places of inhabitance. Tourism is like a migration of a very short duration.

Maslow has categorized various types of need in his need hierarchy theory:

- Basic needs which are physiological needs like food, water and shelter
- Safety needs like freedom from threat, attack, and anxiety
- Belonging and social needs like giving, affection, love and friendship
- Esteem needs
- Self actualization needs

Motives for undertaking religious tourism differ from person to person. Pilgrims may be driven by a feeling of anxiety, fear of death and consequences after death, which is safety need, or they may be motivated towards self actualization needs, or even esteem needs as in case of Haj pilgrims. People traveling to sacred and religious places may be driven by a social need to belong and association with their community or they may want to understand history and culture associated with religion.

Religious and traveling for faith addresses a very complex set of needs the meaning of which are not clear to seeker of the service, as compared to other services or products which satisfy basic needs, like people undertaking medical tourism travel to destination where they can get best services at reasonable cost, people on business tours seeking to promote their businesses, these needs have direct explanation which consumer is able to relate with easily and there are no
complexities. The religious component in a man relates to psychological needs which is very much a grey area, there is only an awareness of this urge and humans act on various stimuli unexplained to their own selves.

Traveling for religion is guided by a complex of motivations and can be classified as below depending upon the intensity of religious feeling.

- **Pilgrimage** – Travel purely motivated by religious motives and obligations. Example Varanasi, Mecca, Medina

- **Tourism in religious space** – Undertaking of multifunctional journey by tourists, religious motivation being one of them. Religious monuments are usually located amidst beautiful natural landscape and / or they have high artistic significance which attracts large number of tourists irrespective of their religion belief, for example Dilwara Temples, Mount Abu in Rajasthan.

- **Tourism during religious time** – Festivals; an example of this could be the Navratri and Durga Puja festivals attract hung number of domestic and foreign tourists to India.

Thus as a summary, the motivations for religious tourists can be:

- Spiritual
- Deep soul-searching
- Intimacy with deity
- Admiration of architectural or natural wonders
- Educational interest in the history of the site
- Motive to observe and search understanding of other cultures, different ways of life, traditions, values and belief systems
- Curiosity
- Commemorative / Desire for authentic experiences

### 2.7 Conclusion

Religion has evolved things often influenced by different faiths, beliefs, historical events and social processes. Designating certain sacred places belonging to certain faiths as the pilgrimage destinations has led to the advent of religious tourism. Pilgrimages are often motivated by spiritual or religious motives. Although
of late, a religious tourist is transformed into a cultural tourist. To make it distinct, one has to be spiritual, have an admiration of architectural wonders and evince an interest for the historical significance of the place and have the interest to observe other cultures, traditions, values and beliefs.

References: