



Deconstructing the Spurious Belief System behind Pilgrimage: Enlightening Youth towards Spirituality

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Abstract— This paper is written with an aim to create awareness that pilgrimage is incapable of bringing about permanent transformation in human beings, though sometimes it can be one of the stimulants to inspire humans to adopt righteousness in their lives. But, in most instances, pilgrims experience transient engendering of these benevolent feelings which can be considered to be equivalent to the concepts of “liminality” and “communitas” propounded by Victor Turner in his theory. This research undertakes to prove it by resolving the ambiguity between the concepts of spirituality and religion citing mainly the thoughts of Mirra Alfassa known to her followers as “The Mother”, Aurobindo Ghosh, Karl Marx & Victor Turner and employing them as bases to demonstrate that the “Kumbh Mela” and Hajj, the places of pilgrimage, are mere manifestations of religion, and therefore insignificant in bringing about any perpetual transformation in human beings, a view which was vehemently buttressed by Rene Guenon in his paper entitled “Pilgrimage=Transformation Journey”. The main purpose of this paper is to enlighten the youth to become spiritual and not religious because the latter has increasingly deviated from its role of emancipation of mankind.

Keywords— Liminality, Communitas, Structure, Anti-structure, Spirituality, Religion.

I. INTRODUCTION

Spirituality and religiosity are often taken as alternative terms by scholars. John Fisher, in his article “The Four Domains Model: Connecting Spirituality, Health and Well-Being” puts forth several viewpoints regarding religion and spirituality but the one propounded by Horsburgh sounds most apt to me. He maintains that religion focuses on ideology and rules (of faith and belief systems), whereas spirituality focuses on experience and relationships which go beyond religion. Abraham Maslow, presumed by many to be the father of humanistic psychology, and John Dewey, founder of the philosophical school of Pragmatism, consider spirituality to be part of a person’s being, therefore, existing earlier to and different from religiosity. However, many advocates of the

notion of evolutionary psychology fail to differentiate between “spiritual awareness as an inherent phenomenon [*i.e.*, innate] and religion as a belief system”, which is enculturated through family, education and community (Fisher 2011, 19).

There is no denying the fact that religion does serve as a source of inspiration to embark on the path of spirituality but now it has been largely reduced to a commodity by the state and capitalist economy. They have divested it of the ethereal experiences it afforded and have turned it into an almost political organization. The ignorance about the distinction between the two phenomena, religion and spirituality, has led to the rejection of Turner’s theoretical model of pilgrimage by most scholars, thereby ignorantly elevating pilgrimage to the echelon of spirituality. Perhaps, this ignorance about the

difference between religion and spirituality drove Rene Gothoni to entitle his paper “Pilgrimage=Transformation”. In my deconstructive study of pilgrimage, I have attempted to invalidate the belief that pilgrimage brings about everlasting transmutation which as a natural corollary, will uphold the universal validity of Turner’s theory. The paper first expounds the differences between religion and spirituality and then goes on to prove pilgrimage as a religious affair and not a spiritual one by citing two case studies related to Hindu and Muslim pilgrimages. The paper is concluded with several propositions based on the findings elucidated in this paper.

II. RELIGION

Religion can be defined as reminiscing the past- a yearning for structure & certainty and respect for authority. It is not related to the emancipation of soul, but is rather a construct equipped with government, policies and laws, with its rules and regulations binding upon its votaries, all absolute and unchallengeable (“Difference between Religion and Spirituality”, n.d.). According to Sri Aurobindo, the spiritual life (adhyatma-jivana), the religious life (dharma-jivana) and the ordinary human life, of which morality is a part, are quite different from each other. The ordinary life is that of the typical human consciousness separated from its own true self and from the Divine and led by the mundane conduct of the mind, life and body which are the manifestations of the laws of the Ignorance. The religious life may be a movement of an equivalent ignorant human consciousness, turning or trying to show far away from the world towards the Divine, but so far without knowledge and led by the dogmatic tenets and rules of some sect or creed which promises to have found the solution to get freedom from the bonds of the earth-consciousness into some beatific Beyond. The religious life could also be the primary approach to the spiritual, but fairly often it’s only a turning about during a round of rites, ceremonies and practices or set ideas and forms. The spiritual life, on the contrary, begins by affecting a change from the mundane consciousness, ignorant and separated from its true self and from God, to a greater consciousness- the level wherein one finds one’s true being and comes first into direct and living contact and then achieve union with the Divine. (Letters on Yoga, 137).

Religion is increasingly becoming an exclusionary activity. Instead of embracing people of the world irrespective of their otherness, it seeks to exclude them. The National Public Radio of United States (2013) states that during the Iraq War in 2003, US troops frequently used the term “hajji”. The term is

most commonly used in an ironic manner for Muslims who have not performed Hajj, and has now expanded to a general derogatory term for any Iraqi, Arab, or other person of Middle Eastern or South Asian descent. The use of such terminology delimits the boundary between “my world” and “the world”- one of the bases of the division of mankind. According to Pattanaik, “the world” is objective, logical, universal, scientific and factual, while “my world” is emotional, subjective and personal- it is the belief system that we carry, the myth that we live in. (Pattanaik 2009).

Religious followers consider their tenets to be the one absolute truth and they try to impose them on others. They fail to rise above contradictions and scorn at those who do not accept their truth as the ultimate truth. The desire for a uniform structure and authority has given rise to the curse of religious fundamentalism. Islamic fundamentalism is an apparent example of it. Religious metanarratives such as ‘The Gita’, ‘The Ramayana’, ‘The Quran’, ‘The Bible’ etc., further aggravate the problem. I don’t say that they are not sacred but what is deplorable is that these pious books have been used as instruments to fulfill the selfish or sectarian motives of people which undoubtedly bring disgrace to any religion. People try to establish the supremacy of their religions by constant telling and retelling of their respective holy books and by showcasing their specific rituals through processions, organization of various congregations and broadcasting them on television. There are a number of religious organizations which hold ‘Bhagwad Katha’, ‘Ramayana’ etc. on a large scale for the alleged emancipation of human beings. Karl Marx conceived religion as the product of economic system. According to him, it may be a superstructure, a reflection of economic base or a part of the base on which the economic structure of the society is built. The telling and retelling of metanarratives can also be comprehended as a part of the base on which the economic structure of the society is built. It is a good source of income for various organizations. It has always been a dilemma to me, if this literal reading and telling of sacred books cause permanent transformation in human beings. This is known as the curse of literalism aptly indicated in the verse from the Bible (Corinthians 3:6): “Who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life”. It means that God has given human beings the potential to follow the new covenant which is concerned with realization of the ultimate truth by the soul and not related to just physical reading of teachings delineated in sacred books and metanarratives (“Difference between religion and spirituality”, n.d.).

Hyperreality of religion is another characteristic feature which is quite explicit in postmodern times. Contemporary religions are based on fictional texts such as films, novels, manga etc.; or include fictional texts in their canon of scriptures or inspirational phenomena. Scholarly investigation of present-day religions formally commenced during early 2000s, but it remains a little (though rapidly expanding) subfield. In their studies, scholars include both self-identified religious groups and non-self-identified, non-institutionalized religious and spiritual practices that are pursued by unorganized movements or by individuals under the rubrics 'fictional', 'invented' or 'hyper-real' religions (Cusack and Pavol n.d.). Personality cult is one such example of hyper-real religion. It is a situation in which a public figure is seen as an idealized, heroic and at times a worshipful image worthy of appreciation and adoration. The role of media is undeniable in elevating such people to the level of God. People comprehend them as they are portrayed by the media. I am citing an example from India where people have made temples of some such public figures and worship them just as they worship their Hindu gods and goddesses. Isn't it a mockery of religion? Or would it be more apt to say that religion has acquired derogatory connotations? People have forgotten the true meaning and purpose of religion. They have redefined idol worship by building temples of real life personalities like politicians, movie stars and sportsmen. The top ten such temples are:

1. Mahatama Gandhi Temple, Odisha
MLA Abhimayu Kumar thought of building it for dalits who were not allowed to enter temples because of their untouchable status. The head priest is also a dalit.
2. Sonia Gandhi, Andhra Pradesh
It is a gesture of gratefulness towards party president Sonia Gandhi for the creation of Telengana state. It contains a marble statue of Sonia Gandhi as well as portraits of other members of her family.
3. Narendra Modi, Gujarat
A group of BJP leaders built a temple for Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015.
4. Amitabh Bachchan, South Kolkata
It displays photographs from his films and the inner sanctum houses a chair used in his supernatural thriller 'Aks'. On it is placed a pair of white shoes which the actor wore in his movie "Agnipath".
5. Rajnikanth, Karnataka
It was built for the Tamil movie star, Rajnikanth. A special 'sahasra lingam' was installed to ensure good health of the actor.
6. Sachin Tendulkar, Bihar

It was built by the Bhojpuri actor Manoj Tiwari. It contains a life size marble statue of Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar.

7. MGR, Tamil Nadu
An admirer built the temple in 2011 for the chief minister and former actor of the state, M.G. Ramachandran.
8. Khushboo, Tamil Nadu
The supporters built the temple for Tamil movie star, Khushboo in 2001. However, in 2005, it was demolished because of her controversial stance on pre-marital sex.
9. Namitha, Tamil Nadu
The followers built the temple for the Tamil movie actress Namitha.
10. Mayawati, Uttar Pradesh
The temple is built for dalit leader Mayawati (*Deccan Chronicle* 2013).

Religion and popular culture are considered to be antithetical to each other; the first being the "sacred" reality and the latter a site of profanity (Cusack and Pavol, n.d.). However, the day is not far when the traditional religion will be replaced by popular culture. Apotheosis of human mortals is reprehensible for any religion. Perhaps, according to Karl Marx, this attitude towards religion is referred to as "inverted consciousness" that is ignorant of the real truth to strive for. We are living in a "hyperreal" world where we are unable to distinguish between reality and simulation of simulacrum. I think it would not be wrong to say that all religions have become "hyper-real" since they are based on simulation that lacks an original referent. The human consciousness is so much overpowered by these reproduced images that the simulacrum has become the real. These public figures are portrayed by the media as having all those pious qualities which have been known to us either by oral tradition or written in our holy books which are themselves simulacra. Hence, personality cult is the simulation of simulacrum which in due course of time will replace the simulacrum and itself become the real one for our future generations-they may become pilgrimage centers in times to come (Hyper-real Religion 2019). I remember the serial "Ramayana" directed by Ramanand Sagar which continued for several months. Here, the character of Lord Rama was played by Arun Govil, who, I believe, in due course of time will become the simulacrum of "Rama". In the absence of the original referent, the simulacrum (Arun Govil) will become the real one. The statement derives concreteness from the fact that even after so many years, whenever Lord Rama is remembered, the image of the fictional character of the serial Ramayana comes into the mind. The calendars of Lord Rama also portray the picture

of Arun Govil. Hence, it would not be irrational to assume that in future; Arun Govil may be venerated as Lord Rama. Possamai debuted the notion of “hyper-real religions” in his *Religion and Popular Culture: A Hyper-real Testament*. This term was derived from Jean Baudrillard’s notion of the hyperreal, in which “a new reality logic based upon simulation rather than representation constitutes the dominant organizing principle”. Objections have been raised to Possamai’s use of this term, chief of which is that Baudrillard regarded all religions as hyper-real (they are all simulations, as there is no supernatural realm for them to represent in the first place) (Cusack and Pavol, n.d.).

III. SPIRITUALITY

Mirra Alfassa, “The Mother” of Aurobindo Ashram, Puducherry says that spirituality means rediscovering the truth for oneself. It does not believe in the fixity of rules and traditions that have been handed down to us by our forefathers. The actions must be guided by an awakening intuition which elevates the consciousness above all contradictions. Spirituality is an inclusionary process which takes into account the personalities, nature and capacities of different people. Every person is a unique personality evolving in his/her own time by the truth of his/her own nature. This defines the contextual nature of spirituality, which I think is a postmodern feature thus categorizing spirituality as a postmodern phenomenon. “The spiritual spirit is not contrary to religious feelings of adoration, devotion and consecration. But what is wrong in the religion is the fixity of the mind clinging to one formula as an exclusive truth. One must always remember that formulas are only a mental expression of the truth and that this truth can always be expressed in many other ways.” (“Difference between religion and spirituality”, *Words of the Mother – III: Religion*, n.d.).

Spirituality does not dismiss contradictions inherent between various discourses, but it seeks to rise above these discontinuities by adopting thesis, antithesis, synthesis approach originated with Johann Fichte and is popularly used to describe the thought of German philosopher Friedrich Hegel (“Difference between religion and spirituality”, **Curse of Literalism**, n.d.). When one is born one finds itself surrounded by the given traditions of the family (thesis), but as one grows one is confronted with many divergent opinions (antithesis) which will help one to form a new understanding (synthesis)

Spirituality believes in rediscovering the truth. I have concluded that telling and re-telling of narratives does not

reveal the universal truth, but it is the second-hand knowledge which needs to be experienced by an individual, that is, it has to be empirically validated by the self (I or Soul) of human being. It does not mean that one should discard the words written and spoken by our great spiritual masters, in fact, in order to experience spirituality, one should follow the vedantic method of reading a text, which has three stages called ‘Sravana’ (hearing), ‘Manana’ (reflection) and ‘Nididhyasana’ (contemplation). Contemplation resolves contradictions and establishes harmony with oneself by synthesis (“Difference between religion and spirituality”, Inability to rise above contradictions, n.d.). Thus, the emphasis has been shifted to the ‘ontology of being’ (experiential and empirical validation by self or I). However, it does not completely reject the metanarratives as well, rather, it employs the dialectical approach including thesis, antithesis, synthesis which corresponds to sravana, manana and nididhyasana- viewing multiple perspectives and arriving at the most economical and reasonable reconciliation of seemingly contradictory information and postures. The word ‘seemingly’ in the above description suggests that contradictions are only superficial, beneath which all religions are inherently similar. The ultimate goal of all religions of the world is oneness with God. I can illustrate this concept of innate similarity within religions by citing several examples, but it would be beyond the scope of this paper.

Visit to a pilgrimage is often thought of bringing about a complete transformation in human beings. It is generally believed that at such places, people are absolved from their past sins and thus increase their chances of getting more happiness in life. Our youth and children are living their lives with this false belief system. Hence, it becomes incumbent upon us to make them conscious of the discordance between religion and spirituality. It would not be unjust, if pilgrimage is treated as a religious affair.

IV. PILGRIMAGE AS A RELIGIOUS AFFAIR

In this context, it becomes quite obligatory to give reference of Victor Turner (British Anthropologist) who has often been criticized by a number of scholars like Skar 1985; Aziz 1987; Sallnow 1981; Morinis 1984; Bowman 1985(as quoted in Gothoni 1993:102). Turner gave twin concepts of “liminality” and “communitas”. He says: “I have used the term “anti-structure,”...to describe both liminality and what I even have called “communitas”. I meant by it not a structural reversal...but the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints

incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses" (as quoted in Giovine 2011). According to Turner, liminality is the transitional state between the two stages- the state when the pilgrims feel that they are not part of the society they belonged to and the state which has not yet marked their return to the society from where they departed and set off for their journey to the holy place. Turner conceives the liminal phase to be outside the ordered universe, "a period betwixt and between the categories of ordinary social life"(as quoted in Gothoni 1993,103). It is for this brief period that Turner used the terms –liminality and *communitas*. This momentary phase is marked by the feeling of anti-structure which led to the attenuation of socially imposed hierarchies in the minds of the pilgrims. But this feeling is momentary and fragile and is incapable of subverting the power structures constructed by the society. That is why, Turner says that liminality and *communitas* do not imply structural reversal but liberation of human capacities from socially constructed norms which are obligatory for them to observe being part of a stratified society. Another point foregrounded by Turner is that "the return road is, psychologically, different from the approach road". This gives pilgrimage the form of an ellipse which culminates in return of the pilgrims to the same structured

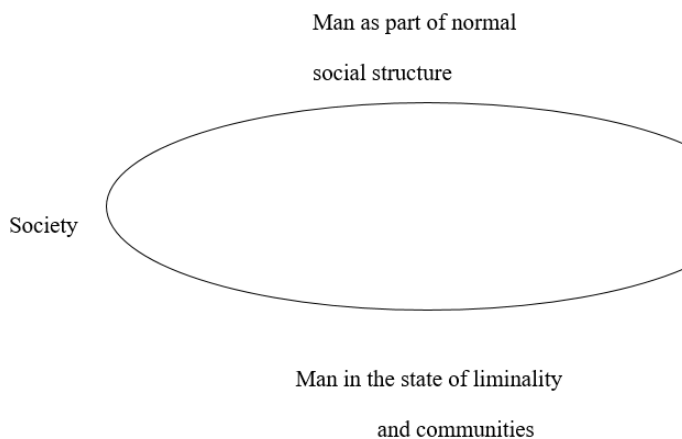


Fig1: Pilgrimage=Transformation Journey

From the above discussion, it can be very well established that Turner's idea of pilgrimage and "The Mother's" view of religion are not at loggerheads to each other, which, undoubtedly, establishes that pilgrimage is a religious affair incapable of bringing about complete and permanent transformation of an individual, although, it can be claimed to represent the preparatory stage of spirituality because of the feelings of "liminality" and "*communitas*" that it engenders.

society to which they belong (109). Undoubtedly, the return journey is psychologically different but it does not lead to permanent transformation of man rather there is fleeting appearance and disappearance of religious sensibilities which can be described under an umbrella term "anti-structure". Hence, it would be no real blunder to accept that the transient phase of liminality during a pilgrimage is the reason behind the attribution of characteristic features which Turner conferred on a pilgrimage- the transient release from the mundane structure that normally binds; release from the burdens of stress, anxiety and guilt; movement from the mundane centre to a sacred periphery; homogenization of status; simplicity of dress and behaviour; reflection on the meaning of basic religious and cultural values; the ritualized enactment of correspondence between religious paradigms and shared human experience; and experience of human brother- and sisterhood (103). Hence, Rene Gothoni's accusation that Turner's model "is in fact a real blunder that calls for correction" does not hold true. There is no doubt that Turner has "postulated a universal process of pilgrimage" (101). Hence, the ellipse mentioned in Rene Gothoni's Paper "Pilgrimage=Transformation Journey" should be redrawn as:

Even Karl Marx viewpoint conforms to the one put forth by "The Mother". In "Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right", he says that religion is an inverted consciousness produced by an inverted world. I think Marx's "inverted world" refers to this state and this society. Religion is the most acceptable theory of this world, its encyclopedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual point d'honneur, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, and its universal basis of consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realization of the human essence since the human essence has not acquired any true reality. The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly the struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion. Karl Marx advocates for the abolition of religion as the condition to get real happiness. It will disillusion man, so that he may be able to think, act, and fashion his reality like a man. (Marx 1843) He further says that "It is not the consciousness of man that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, it is their social existence that determines their consciousness." (Bonadio 1960, 5–13) In the article titled "Marx and Religion" by Louis Dupre published in April 26, 1968 issue of *Commonweal*, it was asked, Can a true Marxist be a religious believer? To this, my answer is an emphatic 'NO'. This is because Karl Marx rejected religion altogether. Though not explicitly, but implicitly Karl Marx seemed to be aware of the difference between religion and spirituality. He

heralded the atheistic society, which he believed would soon come into existence, by demonstrating that an atheist could be an honourable man, that man degraded himself not by atheism but by superstition and idolatry (Bonadio 1960, 5–13). Perhaps this explains the reason because of which Karl Marx says that human essence has not acquired any true reality, that is, the reality of its existence which is defined by the consciousness inherently present in human beings.

In the era of late capitalism, religion has truly become the byproduct of economic system. These pilgrimages, besides being responsible for engendering the feelings of liminality and *communitas* have also become profit-maximizing firms for the state, the capitalist class and also to some extent a temporary source of livelihood for ordinary and poor people.

In order to support the above arguments, I am citing two case studies:

4.1 Case Study 1: Kumbh Mela

4.1.1 Kumbh: rooted in history

Kumbh is, undoubtedly, a religious affair- a modern phenomenon. It has been a historical tradition being practiced from generation to generation. The exact age of Kumbh Mela is uncertain. According to Hindu mythology, the origin of Kumbh Mela is rooted in a popular Hindu legend of *samudra manthan* (churning of ocean) where demons and gods fought over a pot or kumbh which contains *amrita* or nectar of immortality. In order to protect it from being seized by the demons, the divine physician, God Dhanvantari took it away, during the course of which the drops of nectar got spilled at four places where present day Kumbh is celebrated- the Ganges at Haridwar, the confluence of the Ganges, the Yamuna and the invisible Saraswati river at Allahabad, the Godavari river at Nasik and the Shipra river at Ujjain. At Haridwar and Allahabad, a “Maha” (Great) Kumbh Mela is held every 12 years, with an “Ardha” (Half) Kumbh Mela six years later. Multiple scholars including R. B. Bhattacharya, D. P. Dubey and Kama Maclean believe that the *samudra manthan* legend has been applied to the Kumbh Mela relatively recently, which by implication, points towards the absence of original referent. Its origin in history and its adherence to the Hindu legend of *samudra manthan*, a metanarrative, undoubtedly, makes it a modern phenomenon. Thus, Kumbh Mela can be seen as a congregation celebrating the past- a tradition which has been transmitted to us by our previous generations (Wikipedia; May2, 2019). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kumbh_Mela.

4.1.2 Kumbh: a showcase of superiority of akharas

According to Karl Marx, religion is a play of power structure of the society. He argues against the structural –functionalist approach of religion. Religion has divided people on the basis of social status as we have seen during “shahi snan” in Kumbh Mela. Besides this, it also performs several political, psychological and economic functions. According to Karl Marx, religion functions as opium for the sick people. It alleviates their suffering by providing them with gratifying delusions. It also serves as a latent tool for the power structures of the society to keep the oppressed pacified and under hallucination in which they are unable to see the pervading hierarchy around them.

Kumbh has been a showcase of superiority of akharas. It has been a scene of sectarian politics. Akharas are the various religious groups trying to establish their supremacy over one another. The bathing order indicate the status of akharas which led to many clashes in the past. At the 1789 Nasik Kumbh Mela, a clash broke out between Shaivite sanyasis and Vaishnavite bairagis. A copper plate inscription of the Maratha Peshwa claims that 12000 ascetics died in this clash. The dispute was over bathing order which was symbolic of the status of the akharas. In 1796, at Kumbh Mela in Haridwar, the Shaivites attacked and injured the Udasis for erecting their camp without their permission. The Khalsa Sikhs also sided with Udasis and killed around 500 Gosains (Wikipedia; May 2, 2019). https://wikivisually.com/wiki/Kumbh_Mela.

Unfortunately, even in present times, various “akharas” bathe depending on their social status. According to Press Information Bureau (2019), the most recent Kumbh was held in January 2019 at Prayagraj, Allahabad. The first royal bathing “shahi snan” was done by Sri Panchayati Akhara Mahanirvani along with Sri Panchayati Atal Akhara of Sanyasi sect. As reported by Nandita Sengupta of “The Times News Network”, the Juna, the Niranjani and the Mahanirvani akharas always precede. Saints and Sanyasis of Udasin akhara are the last to take the royal bathing. (as quoted in Kumbh mela, Encyclopedia 2018). However, in spite of all these reported facts, it is undeniable that pilgrims do manifest feelings of “liminality” and “communitas” often on an individual level, but sometimes these feelings may acquire a large dimension like the inclusion of “Kinnar Akhara” in 2019 Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, Allahabad. It is for the first time that Kinnar Akhara has been allowed to participate in the Kumbh Mela. Though it was not recognized by the Akhil Bharatiya Akhara Parishad, but it was allowed to take out its Peshwai (procession). (“Kumbh Mela 2019: Kinnar Akhara Peshwai”, 2019).

In earlier times and even in modern times to a certain extent, transgender are ostracized from the society, but now the situation has been gradually changing. Apart from their acceptability in the mundane life they are also accepted in such religious events either because of the feeling of liminality and *communitas* or because of the changing ideology in postmodern times. This may be due to power politics as well. However, the logic behind this is difficult to comprehend. But whatever is the reason, it shows a shift in the ideology of *akharas* and of people to some extent. This raises the question, do the pilgrims retain this feeling of acceptability towards “others”, or is it a momentary phase which disappears once the pilgrims return to the normative social structure to which they belong. That is why; “The Mother” has described religion as a yearning for structure and certainty which is beyond the power of religion to subvert. It also validates the model put forth by Turner.

4.1.3 Kumbh: a Part of Base or Superstructure

Besides its religious and spiritual significance (the liminary phase and *communitas* which can be said to mark the beginning of spirituality), it can also be viewed as a source of revenue generation and employment generation. According to the Confederation of Indian industries, the expected figures for Kumbh Mela 2019 are mentioned below:

Revenue Generation:	1.2 Lakh crore for Uttar Pradesh
Employment Generation:	Hospitality Sector- 2, 50,000
	Airlines and Airports- 1, 50,000
	Tour Operators- 45000
	Eco-tourism & Medical Tourism- 85000
	Unorganized sector- 55000
new jobs	
("Kumbh to generate revenue", 2019)	

4.2 Case Study 2: Hajj

4.2.1 History

“Hajj” is the Arabic version of pilgrimage. It is a five-day pilgrimage to Mecca and nearby holy sites in Saudi Arabia. Islam exhorts all Muslims who are physically and financially able to perform Hajj at least once in their lives. During these five days of the hajj, pilgrims perform a number of rituals meant to symbolize their unity with other believers and to pay tribute to God. On the last three days of the hajj, pilgrims as well as all other Muslims around the world celebrate Eid al-Adha, or the Festival of Sacrifice. At the end of the hajj,

pilgrims return home and are given the venerated title of “hajji”. According to Wikipedia, there is no authentic record of the history of Hajj. Islamic writings say that the pilgrimage was introduced during the time of prophet Ibrahim (Abraham). As per Islamic tradition, God commanded Abraham to leave his wife Hagar (Hajar) and his son Ishmael (Ismail) alone in the desert of ancient Mecca with little food and water that soon ended. In search of water, Hagar frantically ran seven times between the two hills of Safa and Marwah but found none. Then, she saw her baby scratching the ground with his leg and a water fountain underneath was visible. The Quran states that Ibrahim, along with his son Ishmael, laid the foundation of a house that is identified as the Kaaba. After the placing of the Black Stone in the Eastern corner of the Kaaba, Ibrahim received a revelation in which Allah told the aged prophet that he should now go and proclaim the pilgrimage to mankind. The practice of this pilgrimage is rooted in history of which there is no authentic record (Wikipedia; June 2, 2019). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criticism_of_the_Quran).

4.2.2 Otherness in Hajj

According to Quran “... and Hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah) to the House (Ka’bah) is a duty that mankind owes to Allah, those who can afford the expenses (for conveyance, provision and residence); and whoever disbelieves (i.e. denies Hajj, then he is a disbeliever of Allah), then Allah stands not in need of any of the ‘Alâmin (mankind and jinn).” (Qur’an 3:97) (Ibrahim, Mardhiah. “Afford and Effort in Hajj and Umrah: The Issue of Muslims’ Faith”. (Blog). 2018. Accessed June 10, 2019. <https://www.globalsadaqah.com/blog/afford-effort-hajj-umrah/> . It is clearly mentioned here that it is the duty of ‘mankind’ which refers to the entire human race. Then, why are non-Muslims not allowed to visit this holy place? Is it forbidden in Quran? If Prophet Muhammad believes in monotheism, that is, one God then whom the non-Muslims will worship? Does God discriminate between people belonging to different religions or it is the discrimination enforced by the state or society? Who has made these religions? The answer to all these questions is that religion is a construct of society. It is similar to the Kumbh Mela where Kinnar akhara was not allowed to participate until recently. Don’t these facts prove the constructive quality of religion?

4.2.3 Economics of Hajj

Ahmed Maher of BBC Arabic, Mecca reported that Hajj has become a great financial asset to the economy of the oil-rich kingdom. Restaurants, travel agents, airlines and mobile

phone companies earn considerably during the Hajj, and the government benefits in the form of taxes. The highest rents in Saudi Arabia are found in the holy city of Mecca, the birthplace of Islam. Owners of hotels close to the main mosque ask for \$700 a night, blaming the skyrocketing prices of land for the sharp rise in rates. Mohamed Saed al-Jahni, one of Mecca's real estate tycoons said that he has been investing in this sector for 35 years and he remembers the time when he sold a meter of land in Mecca for just 15 rials (\$3), which has now reached 80,000 rials (\$22,000). The demand is above supply and that is why many buildings and hotels have been built in recent years to accommodate the increasing number of pilgrims. Many pilgrims, however, struggle to reconcile their spiritual needs with their wallets. Mohammed Zayan, a 53-year-old pilgrim from Tunisia, has waited a lifetime to perform the religious obligation, which does not come free. He says, "I spent up to \$6,000 (£3,700) on my Hajj," and "I thank God that he enabled me to save this amount of money but I'm sad I could not afford taking my wife and son with me". Ahmed Abdel Rahman, Mauritian Hajj pilgrim said, "I don't find shop owners opportunists but we help our brothers in Islam to make profit and make ends meet". He says that he feels a great spiritual relief when he spends his money in Mecca. This statement is not only representative of the psyche of Hajj pilgrims but of almost all the pilgrims who visit such sacred places. Buying Mecca souvenirs during Hajj is also considered very sacred. The price of these souvenirs is exorbitantly high, but in spite of that, pilgrims buy it thinking that it will bring good luck to them ("The economics of Hajj", October 25, 2012). It describes the temporary feeling of communities and liminality or the anti-structure as propounded by Turner in his universal approach to pilgrimage. Once they return to the normal structure of their society, the philanthropic attitude vanishes after sometime.

V. CONCLUSION

1. All pilgrimages are rooted in history. This can be applied invariably to any pilgrimage, whether; it is a Christian pilgrimage, a Hindu pilgrimage or an Islamic pilgrimage. The historical background of any pilgrimage is that inherent frailty which has been used as a bait by various agencies to entice the followers. This attitude has degraded these pilgrimage places as part of hyperreal religion. The historicity and sacredness of these pilgrimage places are given such extensive media coverage that people do not bother to think about the difference between religion and spirituality. Many films are made on these places of pilgrimage which further accentuate the adhoc belief system of people. The film "Into the Wild"

directed by Sean Penn is one such film which has affected the psyche of a large number of people. This film is based on the story of 24-year old Chris McCandless who died in 1992. His story was first told by the writer and mountaineer, Jon Krakauer in the book "Into the Wild," and later it was made into a film directed by Sean Penn. McCandless was financially secure and successful, but he got frustrated by the materialism of contemporary America and set off to explore the meaning of life. He ended up living off the Alaskan land for a few months and finally died of starvation. Since then, dozens of people have started following McCandless' footsteps. This phenomenon is called "film-induced pilgrimage", where people travel to locations previously unknown and in this act they believe themselves to be spiritual seekers. The belief in that supreme power is replaced by the belief in that image which is shown in the film. Is it spirituality or people are misled by such propaganda? There are stories of other films, other locations and other journeys as well. Tourists, for example, go to Rosslyn chapel in Scotland after "The Da Vinci Code," visit Devil's Tower, Wyoming after "Close Encounters" or imitate "Rocky" on the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art ("When do moviegoers become pilgrims?", n.d.). The youth and children should be awakened to such false propaganda of pilgrimage. They should be taught that permanent transformation is brought about only by spirituality.

In 1970s, anthropologists Edith and Victor Turner undertook the study of pilgrimage and published their findings in "Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture". In an introduction to this text, Deborah Ross says that the book examines two major aspects of pilgrimage practice: the significance of context, or the theological conditions giving rise to pilgrimage and the folk traditions enabling worshippers to absorb the meaning of the event; and the images and symbols embodying the experience of pilgrimage and transmitting its visions in varying ways. On this basis, it can be very well deduced that pilgrimages have been reduced to images of images in the absence of any original referent- people are guided by theology, context(historical or contemporary), folk traditions and the images and symbols. Similar is the case with Kumbh Mela, 2019 where the "coffee table book" was published in order to explain the historical significance of Kumbh Mela. According to Baudrillard, in the absence of original referent, everything is simulacrum. It does not hide reality or mediates it, but it is the reality itself. It has become impossible for us to distinguish the real. Baudrillard claims that our current society has replaced all reality and meaning with symbols and signs, and that human experience is a

simulation of reality. Pilgrimage is one such symbol. These are the constructs of society and the state. By constantly telling and retelling about them and displaying video images of such places, they have been elevated to the level of spiritual significance and are claimed to be capable of transforming people.

2. The pilgrimages have become a source of revenue for the state which is surely one of the reasons for its deterioration to hyperrealism.

3. Undoubtedly, all pilgrimages do affect the psyche of the pilgrims defined by the terms “communitas”, “liminality” or “anti-structure”. But this transformation is ephemeral. There is no denying the fact that the conscience of all human beings is aware of the principles of moral correctness which gets awakened by the sacredness of such places and which is further reinforced by hyperrealism. But as soon as one comes out of this make-believe aura of pilgrimages, one returns to one’s real self.

4. Pilgrimages bring about temporary transformation. Hence, I found structure, anti-structure, and structure model of Turner as universal and valid.

5. A Pilgrimage cannot be accepted as a spiritual affair. It is a part of religion which has all those defining features of religion enlisted by me in this paper.

6. Most scholars have often rejected Turner’s theory as a theoretical concept lacking any empirical evidence. Islamic fundamentalism, hierarchy in Kumbh Mela, exclusion of Kinnar akhara until recently are some of the concrete examples in support of Turner’s theory. The pilgrims definitely experience the feeling of equality, but it is not easier to express and implement such feelings because it is all controlled by state and state governed organizations and age old customs of various religious sects- the so called “structure”.

7. The difference between religion and spirituality validates the universality of Turner’s universal approach to pilgrimage.

8. The youth should be made aware of the concepts of religion, spirituality, liminality, communitas, hyperreality, simulacrum etc. by giving them examples from daily lives such as the condemnation of pilgrimage as depicted in this paper and supported by the popular case studies of Kumbh Mela and Hajj. It would be priceless, if this research is able to transform the thinking of youth and children who have been following the false belief system passed on to them by their parents, family and society.

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