



Ritualistic Performance of Women Pilgrims in the Makhdum Shah Shrine, Sirajganj, Bangladesh

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ARTICLE	INFO	ABSTRACT
Received date: October 05, 2020 Accepted date: Dec. 18, 2020		Ritual is such an issue based on material culture as manifestations of structured symbolic practices. These practices endowed with an interrelated set of ideas, which establish a common mood to assert identity through performing the function. In the context of Bangladesh, a Shrine-based ritual has been performing for almost a thousand year, which put up heritage and identity by creating a kind of interrelationship between the Shrine and the followers. One of these remarkable shrines is located in Shahjampur of Sirajganj district, known as Makhdum Shah Shrine. This study was conducted through a close-ended based questionnaire survey on 350 women who visited Makhdum Shah Shrine in 2020 to investigate the reasons. This study has been carried out to keep the questions in mind- why women followers visit Shrine; what they offer; how the ritualistic performance is conducted during their visit; and scrutinize their relationship with Shrine through ritualistic performance. The attempt is to explore the reason of visiting women participants at Shrine-based cultural heritage. The present study was conducted to understand ritualistic performances of the women pilgrims in Makhdum Shah Shrine.

Key words: Cultural heritage, Performance, Pilgrims, Ritual, Shrine, Women

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1. INTRODUCTION

Sufis have a special role in propagating Islam in the context of Bangladesh. In Muslim philosophy, Sufism is narrated from a theoretical perspective, which teaches personal and mythical worship and union with God (Rytter, 2014). This philosophical thought may have developed in the South Asian context towards the ninth century, with the foremost goal of being a true human being (Rytter & Olwig, 2011). In the case of Bangladesh, the Sufis entered with their missionary zeal to propagate Islam, and as a result, communal harmony developed among the people of the region (Al-Masud et al., 2017; Bertocci, 2006; Pemberton, 2006). It is thought that most of the Sufis came to Bengal

from Arabia, Yemen, Iraq, Central Asia and Northern India to preach Islam (Elius et al., 2020; Zami & Lorea, 2016).

Sufi Shrine has an imperative position in the society of Bangladesh, especially Sufi character considered an intercessor that directed to almighty and final accomplishment of contentment. The major objective of the followers of the Shrine is the fulfillment of the aspirations based upon a social, financial, political, religious, physical, mental and mystical character of the pilgrim's life. Also, a large portion of the pilgrims visits them owing to devotion and reverence for the Sufi. As a result, it appears that the pilgrims have a firm belief that they would receive inner peace and mental satisfaction after their desires are fulfilled. The Sufis who came to Bengal lived in this region till their

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death, and after their death, they are buried in this land. At these shrines, many devotees take vows to fulfill their desires. Pilgrims also visit shrines to achieve peace of mind, meditation, and positive energy with confidence (Iqbal & Farid, 2017; Levin, 2008).

Shrine, currently used in Bengali as Dargahs, is a Persian word, the literary meaning of a Sufi mausoleum. Sufism is considered a religious, mystical, communal and cultural entity in South Asia (Haeri, 2000; Rozehnal, 2004; Schimmel, 1985). Shrines are a consign somewhere the Sufi brotherhood meets (Hassan, 1987). A diversity of ritualistic features of a community's cultural inheritance based on Shrines are developed where admirers organize their commencement and interpretations through conventional performances (Anjum, 2011).

The ritual is mostly practiced through customary principle and spiritual dichotomy that is a precise, visible and conceivable way of human beings. It is also determined by myth, symbolic activities, performances; gestures; speeches; social practices; daily life routines, and ritual plan (Eller, 2015). A ritual can be performed by different relatable dramatic actions, symbols, experience, and rationality. In a sense, something from daily life formalized, contains rules and social conventions, reproduces and legitimizes social-structure from historical background and connected with religious belief and supernatural aspects. Various types of theoretical analysis and interpretation have been discussed in the context of ritual (Schultz & Lavenda, 2014).

The admirer from different parts of the country visits Makhдум Shah Shrine almost every day to fulfill their aspirations. Among them, a large number of women participate in the ritual besides men. Religiously, followers of Hinduism also offer to the Shrine, beside the followers of Islam. In Bangladesh's Shrine, the female can be found more involved than the male in ritual practice. However, the idea is that literary behaviors as the Shrine open space for women to participate in the sacred activity in the Shrine (Eaton, 1996). Therefore, women in the South Asian context are acknowledged as the most passionate accomplice in widespread Sufi thought (Eaton, 1974; Pechilis & Raj, 2013). In the present study, a close-ended questionnaire-based survey was randomly conducted on women visiting Makhдум Shah Shrine at Shahjadpur in Sirajganj. The aim of the study is to recognize ritualistic performances for women's participation in the Shrine of Makhдум Shah.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Study Area

In 1904, Maulavi Abdul Wali mentioned that Shahjadpur was a prominent place for the Makhдум Shah Shrine where an annual fair is held near the Makhдум Shah Shrine (Wali, 1904). It is believed that Makhдум Shah Daula left his native land with the permission of his father and travelled a long way by ship with his sister's three children to preach Islam and ascended to Potajia in Shahjadpur. The

Shahjadpur Mosque was later built by the orders of Makhдум Shah for prayers (O'malley, 1923). In addition to the tomb of Makhдум Shah, there are tombs of a total of 18 saints at Shahjadpur (O'malley, 1923).

According to the historical information, many of these architectural designs of the mosque later changed due to various circumstances (O'malley, 1923).

A fair held at the end of the month of Chaitra every year near the Shrine, which is held for almost a month and ends on Boishakh (April-May). The fair is attended by locals from both Muslim and Hindu religions and from other parts of the country to fulfill their desire, visitors offer rice, fowls, sugar and sweets at the Shrine (Hunter, 1876; O'malley, 1923).

Religiously both Hindus and Muslims visit to the Makhдум Shah Shrine to fulfill their desire. The image of communal harmony is also perceptible among the locals from a religious point of view (Fig. 1). Estimated, a total of 31 Hindu temples are located in Shahjadpur municipality beside the mosques. Among the temples Sarkar Bari temple, Ashrom temple, Ma-Kali temple, Bani-pa temple, Shitala temple, Dolvita temple, Government college temple, bazaar Kali temple are notable within the radius of 1-2 km of the Shrine.



Fig. 1 Inside of the Makhдум Shah Shrine.

2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

As a method, random sample-based close-ended questionnaire survey has been conducted at Makhдум Shah Shrine throughout 2020 on the 350 women participants visiting at Makhдум Shah Shrine.

The obtained data have been analyzed by both quantitative and qualitative method. During the survey, the age; religious ideology; educational status; residence; visit purpose, and offering type information have been explored to comprehend the ritualistic perception of the women pilgrims.

Data from the survey were analyzed and reported through a simple statistical tool whereas, the qualitative data have analyzed systematically as per the norms of data dealing of participants at the following Chart 1.

Chart 1 Summary of sampling plan for questionnaire survey

Sampling Unit	Pilgrims visiting at Makhdum Shah Shrine
Time	2020
Sampling Technique	Non-probability convenience sampling procedure was used for Selecting tourists
Scaling technique	Close-ended Multiple choice questions
Items of questionnaire	Adopted from existing literature
Data Used	Primary
Sample Size	350

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Respondent's Demographic Profile

The questionnaire-based survey first conducted on the age of the respondents. Variables were used to determine age based on different ranges. Amongst the participants, 78 women were 19-29 years old; 102 women aged 30-39; 82 were 40-49 years old, 69 were 50-59 years old, and 19 women were above 60 years old (Fig. 2).

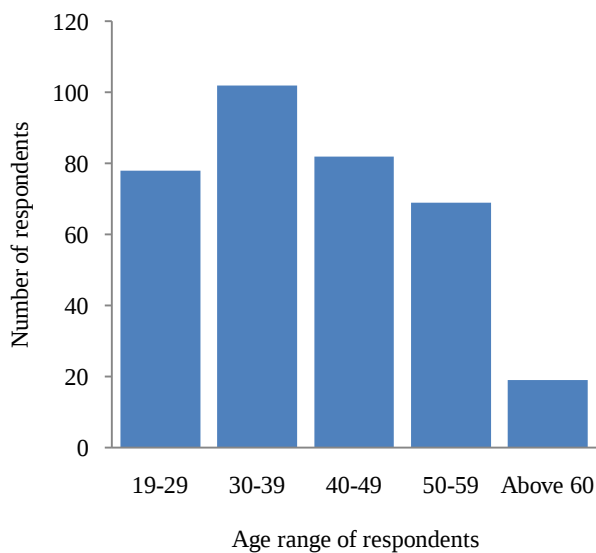


Fig. 2 Age of the women respondents.

The highest result in number was performed 30-39 aged women visitors whereas lowest number showed above 60 years old. It is recommended that less number of older pilgrim attendance due to their disability of health and lacking financial solvency.

The assessment of marital status is resulting that 319 participants were married and 31 participants were unmarried (Fig. 3). In the context of Bangladesh the married women are suffering family crisis more than that of unmarried women.

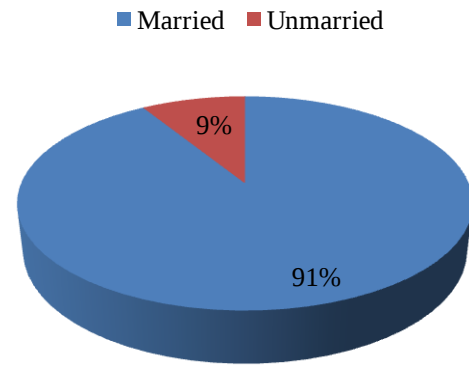


Fig. 3 Marital status of the respondents.

Therefore, releasing of family crisis the married women attended to shrine more. According to religious ideology, followers of Islam were 313 participants and rest 37 participants were the followers of Hinduism (Fig. 4).

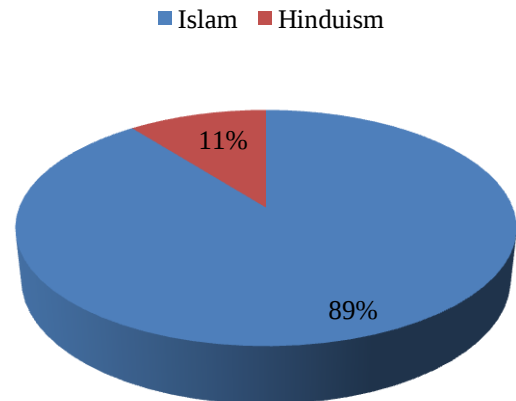


Fig. 4 Religious ideology.

The great difference occurs in the result due to higher frequency Muslim citizen live in surrounded area of Makhdum Shah Shrine. On the other hand Makhdum Shah Daula was born in a Muslim family therefore, followers of Islam was more seen in the place studied.

3.2. Educational Status

In the present study, the educational status of the women who took part in the survey revealed that 121 women participants had never received an education from institution. One hundred twenty-eight respondents completed the primary level. Seventy-nine of the participants completed the secondary level. The remaining 22 women studied up to higher secondary level education. One thing to note is that none of the women who participated in the survey studied up to the college level (Fig. 5). Women having no education and completed only primary education showed high attendance in Makhdum Shah Shrine.

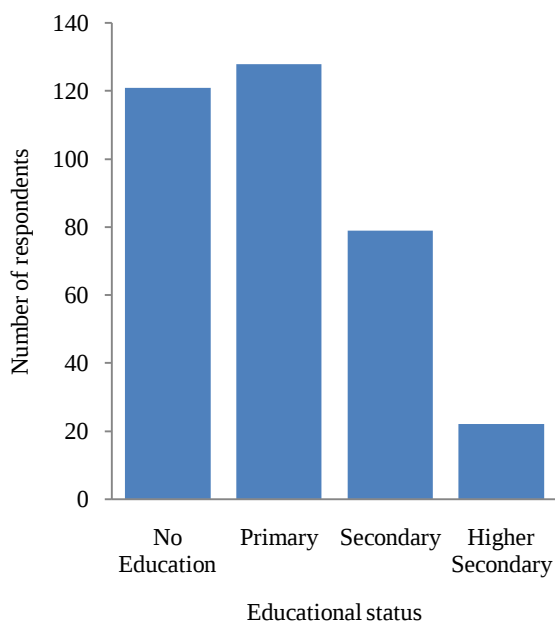


Fig. 5 Educational status of respondents.

It is clarifying that no as well as low literate women in Bangladesh face many social and family crises therefore they are highly depended on Shrine to relief from all crises.

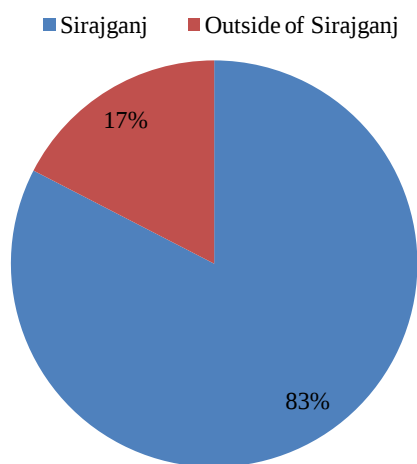


Fig. 6 Residence of respondents.

3.3. Residence of the Participants

Makhdum Shah Shrine is visited by pilgrims from different parts of Bangladesh. In the present study it is reported that Sirajganj district has the highest number of pilgrims (Fig. 6). Apart from the Sirajganj district, many pilgrims also come from Pabna, Bogura, Gaibandha, Natore, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Tangail, Dhaka, Manikganj and other districts. The questionnaire-based survey revealed that out of 350 women, 289 women came to visit from different places in the Sirajganj district and the remaining 61 women came to

visit from outside of the Sirajganj district (Fig. 6). In most cases, pilgrims use boats as a means of transportation to reach Makhdum Shah Shrine (Fig. 7). This Shrine, located on the banks of the Karatoya River, has the highest number of pilgrims during the monsoon season. It is noteworthy that men and women and Hindus and Muslims alike can enter Shrine.



Fig. 7 Pilgrims use boats as a means of transportation.

3.4. Purpose for the Visit

The questionnaire-based survey was prepared on well-being, infertility, economic problems, unmerited problem and land-related problems.

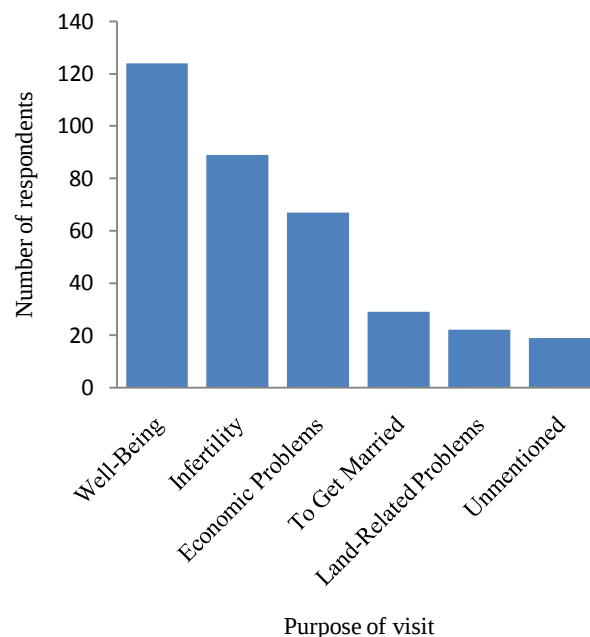


Fig. 8 Purpose for visit of respondents.

It was noticed that 124 women were suffering from various physical and mental problems. To keep well, they came to

offer and pray at Shrine. Among the respondents, 89 women have been dealing with infertility since marriage. They came to offer at Shrine in the hope of having children. Therefore, they were pray and offer to Shrine. Sixty-seven women who are facing economic problems came to visit Shrine to overcome economic problems.

Of the respondents, 29 respondents think they were over the age of marriage but not getting married. So they came to visit Shrine to fulfil their desire. Twenty-two respondents replied that they have been dealing with their land-related problems for a long time.

They came to Shrine to take a vow to get rid of this problem. And the remaining 19 women refused to mention their problems. They think that if the problem is leaked, their intention will not be fulfilled (Fig. 8).

3.5. Offerings

At Makhdum Shah Shrine, pilgrims offer many kinds of offerings to fulfil their aspirations. The questionnaire-based survey showed that out of 350 participants, 139 respondents offered chickens; 89 respondents offered pigeons; 54 respondents offered duck; 13 women offered goat to fulfil their desire. The remaining 55 women did not offer anything (Fig. 9).

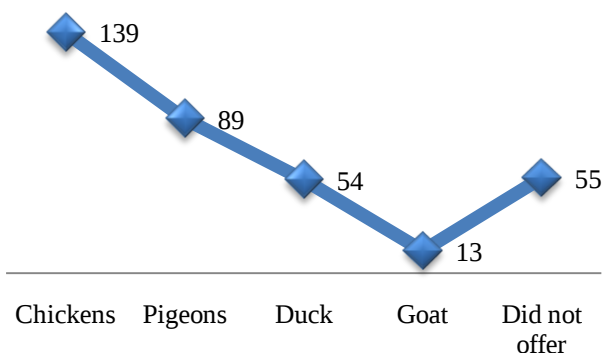


Fig. 9 Offerings by pilgrims to Makhdum Shah Shrine.

Apart from these, other pilgrims have been seen offering batasha (local sweet) at Shrine. It is clarified that low invest for the offering was observed at the highest level respondent.

Regardless of pilgrims' religion, Khadem of Makhdum Shah Mosque, slaughter the animals that the pilgrims offer (Fig. 10). Later, women pilgrims cooked slaughtered animal using Shrine's kitchen.

A large number of women participants believe that offering at Shrine will cure their illness. Apart from this, a verbal communication to women pilgrims, it is erudite that many women take vows at Shrine in anticipate of having children. And in this case, after the vow, many are freed from infertility and can have children. For this reason, many women pilgrims perform ritual at Shrine in the optimism of having children.



Fig. 1 Goat offering at the Makhdum Shah Shrine.

According to a striking fact in the survey, 29 of the women participants visit to offer at Shrine because they were not getting married. In the context of Bangladesh, if rural girls do not get married after reaching adulthood, they have to go through various forms of social oppression. As a result, adult unmarried women suffer from an inferiority complex in order to overcome this psychological problem.

Makhdum Shah Shrine plays a special role in developing communal harmony in society, in which, besides the followers of Islam, the followers of Hinduism also participate to fulfill their desire. It has also been observed in the field that liberal relations exist between the two religions in terms of observance of religious rites and principles. Apart from the local Muslim community, Makhdum Shah is also known to the followers of the local Hindu religion as a man of supernatural powers. So everyone pays their respects to this shrine. Many people of the Hindu religion show respect and devotion to fulfill their desire and offerings as well.

4. CONCLUSION

Surveys have revealed that women are involved in Makhdum Shah Shrine, and the foremost reason is they get peace of mind, meditation and positive energy, which helps them be confident. Because they believe that Makhdum

Shah is a great Sufi with whom the Creator has direct contact. Therefore, women pilgrims get social and psychological satisfaction after offering at Shrine. In the context of Bangladesh, Shrine allows women besides men, so in the case of ritualistic practice, women's participation performed more in the ritualistic context in the Shrine. The present study will be an evidence for the current status of performances in Makhdom Shah Shrine that later on show difference from the future data on the performances when social as well as economic status of women pilgrims will more advanced.

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