

Strengthen Unity into the Glass of Pilgrimage in Kechopalri Lake in West Sikkim : Some Observations

*Hasibul Rahaman**

We all know that a coin has two sides, which are considered as a beauty of anything, person, and place, thoughts etc. Like it Unity and diversity, these two phenomenon are interrelated to each other. Unity has several dimensions like territory, language etc. Moreover pilgrimage is another significant element of bring togetherness and it has found under the umbrella tern diversity. This paper is trying to capture the necessity of unity in present context of India.

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1. Introduction

India is characterized by its unity and diversity. Pluralism is the inner and outer beauty of our country like India. The concept of

* **Assistant Professor and Head, Department of Sociology, Haldia Government College, P.O. Debhog, Haldia, Dist. Purba Medinipur, West Bengal (India) E-mail: <hasibulsociology@gmail.com; hasibulsona@gmail.com>**

plurality or diversity is primarily associated with the concept of Jajmani system that had existed in long years ago in rural India and this concept was tightly hold us together, in spite of the colorful caste, creed, religion, varna, language, gender and unlike occupational groups. These are also helpful to understand the sociological and anthropological concept of “Communitas” used by Victor Turner, that has been considered as the marker of social unity among themselves. In this study all the pilgrims have a feeling that they are in the in the same boat under the marker of the term of “Pilgrimage”, when they are visited of the different pilgrim sites of India in particular and at that time they are face to face to one another and they feel likeness which makes a social solidarity that has comes through differentiation.

2. Objectives of the Research

The main thrust of this paper is to how the pilgrims are making strong unity? Why is it necessary in the present scenario of India?

3. Research Design

The above questions are not allowing to sit me in a peaceful way. During my Ph.D work, I was lying in Kechopalri lake for number of months to find out such type questions answer and not only that very recently I was visited the sais area of the lake of West Sikkim and some other sacred lakes area of Northern part of Sikkim. During stay in study area I have taken abundant interview from the pilgrim or tourists from diverse background people basically in terms of various castes, creed, language, religion, varna, language, occupations, literate and illiterate and of course of different standard of educated people. At that time I have used number of sociological methods like unstructured interview schedule, observation and case-study and qualitative technique has given more emphasis than quantitative data.

4. Why Pilgrimage in the Present Scenario

Diversity is character of nature which can see in our daily life. The Almighty God has been given vibrant flora and fauna and that are supply us of several feeding oxygen for the subsist of human kind. It is evidenced that the Almighty God has affection with human beings. The another plurality that has given by the Almighty God has found in our physical structure, if we look into the physical structure

of our body, we invent the diversity but this diversity is spontaneously generate the unity of our physical entity and as result we feel healthy. So we can say that unity comes through the lens of diversity. But this sweetest bridge is under threat now a days which may visualize in everyday morning in the front page print media and as well as in lens of electronic and mass or social media also. In British India we found strong solidarity for make free from the rule of Britishers but then gradually we are stratified among ourselves in the name of religion and caste etc. At this moment the tolerance level of Indian people has come to end and it is based on religion, caste and pseudo nationalism and these are factors that are responsible for communal violence in India and unity if Indian becomes weaker to weakest. Sahinbag incident or movement was the product of this type of feeling of pseudo nationalism and violence of today's Manipur is also the surplus value of this kind of meki or artificial nationalism. This meki nationalism is extended day by day by the various party leaders and their only aims to capture power using inhuman kind speech and propaganda. As a result we find number communal violence that occurred every moment in every corner of India. In this critical, intolerance, inhuman, valueless and egocentric stage, the pilgrimage community has playing an crucial role of responsibilities for making unity through the lens of diversity and fill up the moral activities for the save of humankind. Here in this study my observation of the necessity of pilgrims is highlighted siting the example of Kechopalri lake of Sikkim.

5. Pilgrimage of Kechopalri Lake of Sikkim

All important religious groups of the world have placed unlimited emphasis on the sacredness of certain zones and have either enjoined or recommended with great insistence, pilgrimages to them. These places are renowned for miracles and the 'inspiration for religious life of the faithful or the restoration of faith'. A religious supporter in any culture may feel the call of such a place which may untruth at a distance and resolve to journey there, i.e., to undertake a pilgrimage to the sacred spot.

Most people understand pilgrimage as a journey to a holy place or shrine, either in the pilgrim's native land or abroad. The object of pilgrimage is to find some advantage – material, symbolic, moral or spiritual – which the holiness of the preferred spot is supposed to

confer. A pilgrimage may be assumed as such a trip is measured commendable. The idea of the achievement of divine service, either directly or through a saint, is generally connected with such a journey. The assistance expect & out of the labour or travail involved in the journey or expedition to the destination of pilgrimage, i.e., holy place, may range secure the satisfaction of current interests to the highest spiritual attainment. But the journey has a root in the religious beliefs of the person(s) undertaking it. The journey to the sacred spots always associated with some religious motive or purposes which are, in one mode or another, religious philosophies and principles.

“Pilgrimages are sacred journeys extraordinary” (Saraswati, 1975). True, pilgrimage as experienced in India and somewhere else is directed by the greatly expanded motives of the pilgrims.

From the above definitions it is categorically clear that two weighty features which do persist in pilgrimages are :

1. Sacred places and
2. The act of travelling or journeying itself.

The sacred is a category of things and actions set apart as holy and entitled to reverence. Such a category is often held to represent symbolically the key values of a society. The sacred is often understood in contrast with the profane. The sacredness of the site accounts for the great concern with purity among pilgrims. The pilgrims must eliminate the faults of impurity from their physique and mind. In case of Hindu pilgrims, for instance, the journey is itself purification by austerities. For the quality of sacredness involved to pilgrimage and pilgrim center to discover out the difference between being sacred and being auspicious.

5.1 Buddhist Pilgrimage

Buddhist pilgrimage is a concrete example of the announcement that mysticism is an “interior pilgrimage” and pilgrimage is “exteriorized mysticism”. The internal pilgrimage or meditation carries a Buddhist nearer to the goal of nirvana (pali, nibbana). But the turning to the Buddha who is paradoxically represented in the marks of his existence on earth or in relics is measured a significant opening step along the path to insight. In addition to bodily relics (Pali, sariradhatu), Buddhist tradition also identifies :

1. Paribhogikadhatu or relics or objects that the Buddha used (e.g., his alms bowl) or mhks (such as a footprint or shadow) that he let on earth and
2. Uddesikadhatu which refer to routine reminders, such as images and stupas, known not to contain actual relics. Stupas or chaityas related to these indications of Buddha's presence in the world have grown into centers of pilgrimage by Buddhists.

The secondary tradition makes Buddha himself determine the goals of pilgrimage :

1. Where he was born (Lumbini in Nepal),
2. Where bodhi or the highest insight or enlightenment was achieved. (Bodh Gaya in India).
3. Where he "turned the wheel of the Law", i.e. preached his first sermon (the Deer Park at Sarnath near Banaras), and
4. Where he passed, into the state of nirvana (Kushinagar in Uttar Pradesh).

6. Sikkim : Pilgrimage Centres

Some of the Buddhist shrines and monasteries are Tusklakhang, the royal gompa of former Chogyal of Sikkim where crowning of the kings of the state used to take place, Enchey Monastery which contains a literary and a fine collection of dance masks, Rumtak Monastery, 37 kms west of Gangtok, Pemagangtse Monastery, a well - known seat of Tantric Buddhism and Tashiding Momastery, which is considered to be the holiest of Buddhist gompas in Sikkim, where thousands of Buddhists congregate to participate in the festival every spring (Khanna, 2003).

The epics mention tirthayatra; the epic of pilgrimage for excellence is the Mahabharata. A section of the Vanaprava entitled 'Tirthayatra Parva' is exclusively devoted to pilgrimage.

6.1 Pilgrims of Surrounding over the Kechopalri Lake

There is no a proper documentary source or record in regard to the numerical number of pilgrims of the study area. So far as field work is concerned that there are numbers of pilgrims are likely to visit the lake and are comes from different corners of India. It is came to know from present lama of the monastery through field work that approximately there are 10,000-15,000 pilgrims are likely to visit this sacred centre in every year. They are mainly coming from various

states of India as like as West Bengal, Bihar, Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir and seven sisters of north east India and also from foreign like Nepal, Tibet and China etc. During field work we interviewed of 50 visitors who mainly came from West Bengal, Sikkim, within in different districts and Nepal purposively. There are 60% visitors visited this sacred place, primarily because of religious faith and remaining came here for different purposes like trekking (20%), tour and travel (15), business (4%) and research (1%).

Sex wise composition of pilgrims consists of 40% females and 60% are males. We can say that there are 80% pilgrims are literate. Among the literates the educational status is 50% up to matriculation, 20% graduation and 10% have completed their post-graduation and above.

The field survey shows that 60% visitors are Hindus by faith, 30% Buddhists, 7% Christians and 3% are basically belongs to Muslims and others as well. Income wise distributions of pilgrims are as 25,000 - 50,000 (50%), 51,000 - 100,000 (30%), and one lakh and above (20%) accordingly. Out of total number of pilgrims 60% are of urban background and 40% come from rural and semi urban areas. By profession 60% are mainly engaged in governmental service as well as private sector, 30% business and 10% agriculture and others also.

6.2 Pilgrimage : Pillar of National Unity

One of the greatest services the institution of pilgrimage has rendered to India as a whole is that it has impressed upon all people her fundamental unity in the midst of apparent diversity. It is through this institution that the country has been transformed into a vivid and visible reality. As a result, all parts of the country are deemed equally sacred and are objects of equal concern to the devotees. Again there might be different castes in India, but they all follow the inspiration of the same scripts, there might be different dialects, but to all people Sanskrit is the sacred language. Persons might be separated by long distances- some living far away in the Himalayas and some in the extreme south peninsula-, but their hearts pulsate with the same hopes and aspirations; they have the same goods to worship, the same goal to aspire after (Bhattacharya, 1937). In Lake Kechopalri, we find multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-cultural gathering throughout the year. After reaching in the lake area, they feel proud that this sacred place is also a part of Indian Territory. Though it is sacred from Buddhist

philosophy but there is no taboos for visit this lake to other than Buddhists people. Hence, it is considered that it is one of the important symbol for binding national unity like others pilgrimage centre in India because of its syncretistic feature from various perspective like religion, ethnic groups, gender, occupation etc.

The devotions of the pilgrims of the lake area of West Sikkim are primarily based on following subjects :

- To make household peace.
- To give birth new baby.
- To relief from painful long diseases.
- To pass the examination.
- To get job.
- To settle family dispute.
- To save agricultural products from natural disaster.
- To smooth running business.
- To collect the data of research project.
- For pleasure trip etc.

As we can say based on field work source that the visitors of the lake makes a vow through performing puja with the help of the present lama of the lake. The visitors are bringing all sorts of item for puja purpose and they are strictly follows the lama's advice over the lake area. All the visitors are normally directed to follow the Buddhist norms during the prayer in the lake but they are free to make a vow of their own religious faith or style. The lama has no particular fees for performing puja but visitors are usually pays him little amount of rupees or kinds as their own level of capacity.

The Kechopalri Lake is an ethereal and venerated Lake situated amidst dense temperate forest with no floating leaf on its surface. It is rather unbelievable. People of Sikkim believe that Lord Shiva existed in solemn mediation inside the lake. They also believe that the level of lake water increased during the festival which is originated from the Head of Lord Shiva. Bearing these feelings pilgrims pay their visit to this holy lake during festival period from different corners of India in general and Sikkim and neighboring West Bengal in particular. They come here to forget their sufferings and return to home with the blessing of God. People from all religions such as Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Christians and even Muslims etc. have seen during the occasion.

7. Concluding Remarks

It is undoubtedly remarked that the unity has taken into consideration of the DNA of the pluralism or diversity and that has been observed in all the pilgrim centre of India. The so called pilgrimage centres have the correlation with the sociological term "Communitas" that has continuously produced the brotherhood relation and it has very much necessary to save the specialty of India in general and mankind in particular. In the area of Kechopalri lake we find the "we feeling", which is accelerated the seed of being togetherness.

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