

Pilgrimage Sites as Epicentres for Religious Confluence in South Asia

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Abstract: One of the oldest cultural heritages of South Asia is religious tourism undertaken by the common folk to visit pilgrimage sites, often involving many sites in one trip. These shrines belonging to different religious traditions turn out to be excellent sites to study inter-religious harmony. Pilgrimage destinations generate occasions for people of one faith to perform the rituals of another faith. Religious rituals performed by the common people (the Hindus, Christians, Muslims and all alike) in shrines like Basilica of Our Lady of Good Health at Velankanni, Shahul Hamid Dargah at Nagore and Nellukadai Mariamman Temple in Nagapattanam indicate that popular rituals produce the collapse of religious borders. This paper will demonstrate that the rituals performed at these sacred sites enable people to exercise their agency in exploring sameness, solidarity and unity with people of other religions rather than enacting their consciousness on the dimensions of otherness, difference and diversity that exist between people of different religious traditions. Further it would argue that these religious shrines stand out as living monuments of religious pluralism, one of the important characteristics of cultural heritage of South Asia which in recent years has witnessed communal violence and inter-religious conflicts.