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## The Opportunity for Religious Tourism: In the Perspective of Bangladesh

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### ABSTRACT

Traditionally Bangladeshi people are religious regardless of religious faith. All the main religions (Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Buddhist) enjoy religious freedom in praying, pilgrimage, and celebration regardless of their numbers. Best architectures are displayed at thousands of ancient/new mosques, churches, pagodas, and synagogues scattered around the country. Thousands of people travel to see the Architectural ornamentation of various praying institutions. Spiritual tourism generates millions domestically and millions of foreign currencies for international spiritual travelers. Religious tourism is one of the largest contributors in overall tourism industry. Tourism not only creates jobs in the tertiary sector, but also encourages growth in the primary and secondary sectors of industry. The study shows that in Bangladesh there are tremendous opportunities to grow religious tourism because it has a lot of religious, cultural and archeological heritage, historical heritage, which could be potential destinations for tourism. The report also discusses issues with the growth of religious tourism and recommendations are also provided to motivate religious visitors to visit the country's numerous religious sites and to stimulate economic growth in Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** Religious Tourism, Pilgrimage, Tourism, Spiritual.

**JEL Classification:** Z32, Z30, Z31.

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### 1.0 Introduction

Tourism is the future of Bangladesh. At present it is one of the most growing industries in Bangladesh. Tourism sector has unlimited potential in Bangladesh since the country is blessed with its natural beauty such as beautiful coasts and beaches, hills, offshore islands, forests and jungles, archeological sites and historical and religious places with many heritages listed potential tourist attraction.

Religious travel was embodied in ancient civilizations via a plethora of religious festivals that drew believers to certain religious centers or shrines (Costa, 2014). Religious tourism is an old concept that has lately gotten a lot of coverage from academics and the general public. It has grown in popularity over the last two decades for a variety of reasons, including the enhancement local culture, heritage, customs, and history, providing means for the protection of religious sites, and contribute to the local economy by agitating both foreign and domestic tourism. Religious, heritage, and tourism are closely linked. Traveling to religious or holy locations is a sort of cultural heritage tourism (Shackley, 2002).

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According to World Tourism Organization (2011), religious tourism is focused on the demographics of 60 percent of the world's people who follow a religion. The religious tourism is widely spread every year to include religious conventions, religious cruises and trips to religious tourist attractions and, according to estimates, 300 to 330 million visitors visit the world's major pilgrimage sites each year (Gabor, 2016). The Religious Conference Management Association estimated that over 14.7 million participants attended religious gatherings in 2006 and it was an increase of more than 10 million from 1994 (Walker, 2017, p. 158).

A potential area of Bangladesh's economy is the tourism industry. Tourism has a beneficial impact on the economy of Bangladesh, boosting foreign currency revenues and creating new jobs (Fahim & Dooty, 2014). The contribution of Travel and Tourism to GDP in 2019 was BDT772.7bn (3.0% of GDP) and international visitor spend 0.7% of total exports which was BDT 28.3bn. Travel and Tourism generated 18,58,900 jobs in 2019 (2.9% of total employment) (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2020). Bangladesh is not only blessed with holy places, but also by the fact that it is the hub for pilgrimage centers, religious festivals and other associated religious cultural activity.

88.4% of the population of Bangladesh are Muslims and the remaining 11.6% are the believers of other religious (*Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics 2019.Pdf, 2019*). Therefore, it is not unusual that the capital of Dhaka is known as the city of Mosques and the port city of Chittagong is known as the city of Auliya's. (status of Saint). Even then Bangladesh lives in peace and harmony with all the Hindus, Christians, Buddhists, and other smaller religious communities. For the sake of the local economy and preservation of the area's historic history, religious tourism should be seen as an option. The primary goal of this study is to determine Bangladesh's potential for religious tourism as well as solve the barriers.

This article is divided into seven major sections. The study introduction is presented in section 1. The objectives of the study and the methodology are also provided in this section. The literature review is offered in the second section. Section 3 is devoted to describing the concept and perspective of religious tourism. Tourism activity at religious sites in Bangladesh, such as a) Muslim Pilgrimage Places, b) Pilgrimage Places for the Hindu Community, c) Pilgrimage Places for Christians and d) Pilgrimage Places for Buddhists, has been discussed under section 4. Roadblocks in implementing religious tourism development in Bangladesh are presented in section 5. Section 6 describes the suggestions for the development of religious tourism in Bangladesh. Finally, section 7 concludes the paper with policy implications as well as a reference list.

The following particular objectives are attempted in this article:

- To explore tourism from religious perspective;
- To highlight the major religious tourism products in Bangladesh;
- To identify the constraints of religious tourism development in Bangladesh;
- To provide some recommendations to develop religious tourism in Bangladesh.

## 2.0 Methodology

The current examination is a qualitative one. As there is no prior study found on regarding religious tourism in Bangladesh, an exploratory research method has been used for this study. No exact speculation could be made. This research has been conducted mainly based on secondary data. The materials that have been considered are academic paper, journals, newspapers, websites of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC), World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and other academic sources. Theoretical investigation dependent on secondary data and researcher instinct, reflection and judgment were made all through the paper.

## 3.0 Literature review

Studies of religious tourism in Bangladesh are very limited. Uchinlayen and Suchana (2018) represent the target market for religious tourism in Bangladesh especially Muslim and Buddhist religious tourism. They also highlight the economic, social and cultural impact of religious tourism in this country. Moreover, Vukonic (1996) shows that in his book "Tourism and Religion", socio-cultural, economic and anthropological aspects find a new relation between tourism and religion. Rot, Mikinac and Bogdan (2014) in their study tried to focus on basic characteristics of religious tourism in Croatia and also represent various tourist attractive sites and tourism demand.

According to Wright (2008, p.35) "religious travel is poised for a spectacular growth in the near future. With many of the world's largest travel companies entering the field of religious tourism, tens of thousands of travel agents now selling to the religious market, and tourist boards from around the world beginning new, major religious market initiatives, it will not take much time for the global industry to double or triple in size".

Research with a special, but broad spectrum of focus is "Religion and place attachment: A study of sacred places" by Mazumdar et al. (2004). In this paper, the author shows that different types of relation between place, people and religion, to the experience of "sensing" the sacred in the air and water, and to do something for blessed with the help of ritual acts and sanctification and, finally, to "build" the holy in the mind at

home and in venerated places. Religious archaeology plays a vital role in creating and developing religious tourism programs (Neveu, 2010: 331).

A recent study (Fourie et al., 2014) shows that religion considers a powerful weapon to explain tourist behavior and it motivates or constrains for choosing a tourist destination. They also identify clear link between culture and religion and tourists tend to choose destinations that have the same belief as their own country. Author Stausberg Micheal in his book "Religion and Tourism-Crossroads, destination and encounters" has expressed regarding the dynamic interaction between religion and tourism in this modern world. He tries to find out the relation between tourism and religion.

Kurmanaliyeva et al., (2014) points out that religious tourism draws a wide range of people, including those from a variety of religions, who are able to learn about the history, culture, and art of the places they visit. It is thus necessary to identify an area of study interest for visitors and travelers who uncover religious elements in various historical eras and seek an explanation of their significance (Kurmanaliyeva et al., 2014).

#### 4.0 The concept and perspective of religious tourism

There are several forms of tourism based on their purposes and characteristics. According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), "Tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited." (S. Medlik, 2007).

Tourism is a complex phenomenon that covers multiple ranges of issues like economic, environmental, socio-cultural and behavioral consideration. Tourism is motivated by recreational, cultural, and educational causes, as do visits from family and friends, as well as other reasons such as sporting activities, changes in nature, a desire to learn about other areas of the world, (Foster, 1985:3). Furthermore, Hung and Chen (2009) describe the multi-dimensional ideals of religious culture for visitors, the local population, religious heritage, and society as a whole (Figure 1).

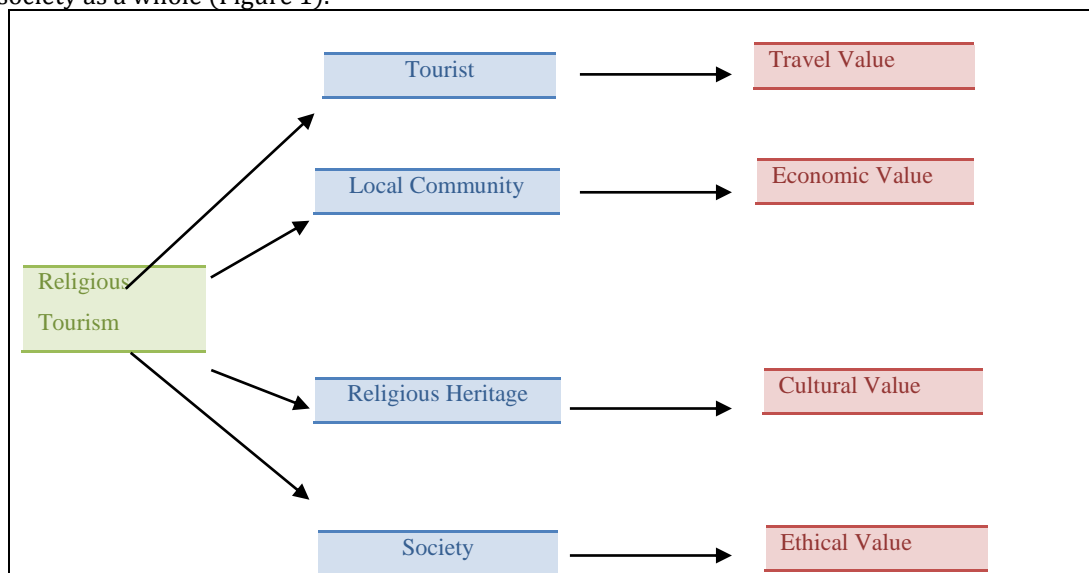


Figure 1. Multi-dimensional values model for the development of religious tourism.

Source: Huang, & Chen. (2009). Study on the multiple value and development of religious tourism. *Religious Studies*, (1), 143-147.

Religion is a crucial culture issue to review as a result of its own in every of the foremost widespread and prestigious social establishments and features an important influence on people's attitudes, values and behaviors at the extent of each the individual and society. Moreover, religiousism is thought collectively of the foremost necessary cultural forces and key influences on behavior. Religious tourism is one of the oldest types of tourism where people travel exclusively and strongly for religious reasons. According to George (2014, p. 229):

Religious tourism is one of the oldest form of tourism recorded in history. People have been travelling for religious reasons for thousands of years. Indeed, pilgrimage journeys were long embedded in religious practices before they came to be viewed as tourist travel. It is a unique type of tourism as it is usually driven by a sense of obligation rather than one of leisure or pleasure. Religious tourism (also referred to as "faith tourism") refers to travel that is undertaken solely or predominantly for pilgrimage, missionary or leisure (fellowship) purposes.

*Religion and tourism have a close connection. Religions sometimes encourage travel and serves as a source of various types of tourist attractions. Religious tourism is described by Sharpley et al. (2005, p.161) as "travel inspired by faith or religious purposes."*

The president of the World Religious Travel Association (WRTA), Wright (2009, p. 18), says that three forms of religious tourism currently exist:

- a) Travel to a religious destination (*Religious pilgrimage*)
- b) Travel to a religious gathering (*Religious meetings, events, conventions*)
- c) Travel for leisure purposes by a religious group (*Cruise, sightseeing, group touring, entertainment, adventure, safari, visits to attractions etc.*)

The concept of pilgrimage tourism, whether religious or spiritual, can be divided into two main types: Pilgrimage, which involves visiting places of importance to religion, and viewing or conducting a search for sacred or noteworthy artefacts, and leisure, in which one enjoys the beauty of sacred or interesting places. Religious tourism is also appearing in studies as a cultural heritage tourism. Religious tourism, in its broadest sense, refers to travel with the primary objective of engaging in religious practices or the objects they generate, such as art, history, culture, customs and tradition and architecture that are well known by that religion and have religious significance.

There is an inseparable relationship between religion and tourism. Humanity's earliest source of tourism began with faith-based trips. Until quite recently, a destination was a part of the cultural environment as well as it was an important in the development of local economies. Millions of pilgrims, aid staff, and social activists have visited such as Mecca in Saudi Arabia, Fatima in Portugal, and Lourdes in France, helping both financially and spiritually. The book name "Tourism and Hospitality Management" edited by Lucius Walker (2017, p. 156) identified several dimensions of religious tourism, these are:

- Pilgrimages
- Missionary travel
- Leisure (fellowship) vacations
- Faith-based cruising
- Crusades, conventions and rallies
- Retreats
- Monastery visits and guest-stays
- Faith-based camps
- Religious tourist attractions

Religious pilgrimages have always been a major source of inspiration for people who want to travel. Globally, major religions have shown a strong correlation between tourism and the dissemination of their faith. Most tourism is directly influenced by economic uncertainty, but religious tourism is less impacted by these issues because the motivation for traveling is extremely high and plays a particularly important position in their lives, so money does not play a dominant role in preventing travel to a destination. Religious visitors are able to travel to holy cities and holy places all around the world. Mecca, Madinah, Karbala, Jerusalem, and Varanasi are the most well-known holy cities. Kaaba, Imam Husain Rauza, Karbala, the Nativity church, the Western Wall, and the Pushkar Brahma Temple are the most renowned holy places.

Tourism, governments, and companies are key stakeholders (Figure 2). Preserving traditional culture for a more genuine visit is the main desire of religious tourists. Nevertheless, religious travelers want decent lodging, food, and entertainment. So, businessmen create different items and services to both satisfy visitors and generate money. Governments must oversee enterprises and provide feedback to visitors.

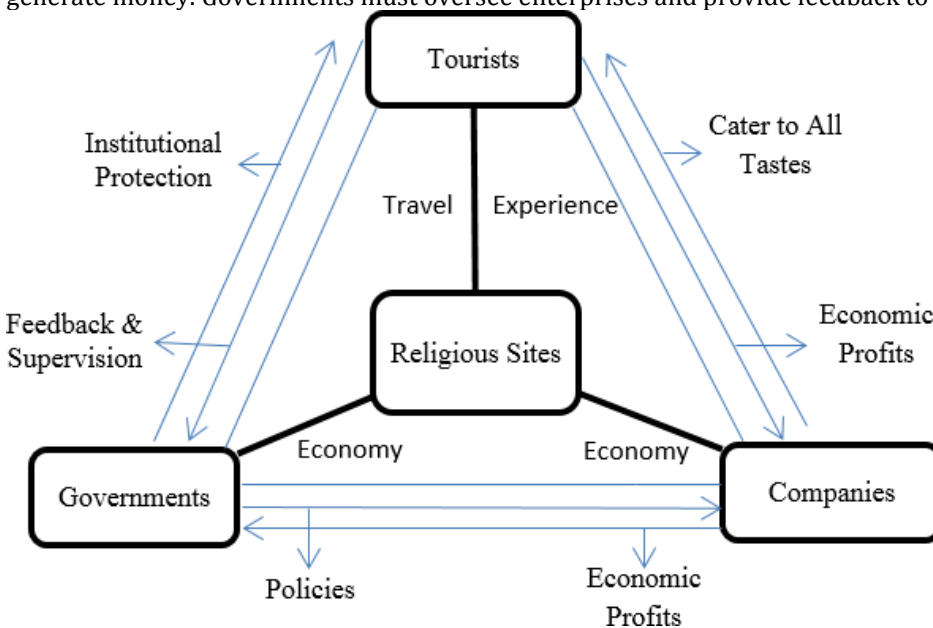


Figure 2. Interaction between religious stakeholders forms a triangle.

Source: Gao. (2010). Preliminary Study on Stakeholders and Coordination Mechanism of Religious Tourism in China. *Guangxi Ethnic Studies*, (3), 184-190.

## 5.0 Tourism activity at religious sites in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a Muslim majority nation and it organizes the Bishwa Ijtema which the largest congregation of Muslims after the Holy Pilgrimage to Makkah. This annual event alone attracts a huge number of tourists from Muslim world and constitutes 3.4% of the total tourist inflow into Bangladesh. Other religions in Bangladesh include Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity, while minority groups practice forms of animism and follow tribal belief systems.

India, Malaysia and Indonesia are the top three pilgrimage tourist generating countries for Bangladesh (see Table: 1). The country-wise number of foreign pilgrimage tourists arrived in Bangladesh from 2009 to 2013 are given in Table 1.

Table 1.

*Tourists arrival in Bangladesh for pilgrimage purpose (15 top pilgrimage tourist generating countries for Bangladesh).*

Nationality	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013*	Total by Country
Afghanistan	24	05	66	47	26	168
Australia	45	62	17	56	08	188
Bahrain	20	25	15	33	13	106
China	80	68	130	164	329	771
England	124	94	160	140	152	670
India	533	456	576	2301	522	4388
Indonesia	848	740	1156	710	583	4037
Iran	64	132	79	73	24	372
Iraq	18	42	42	26	26	154
Jordan	242	164	287	276	119	1088
Malaysia	931	27	1649	819	768	4194
Russia	37	18	73	83	75	286
Saudi Arabia	248	239	271	349	356	1463
South Africa	302	245	355	239	-	1141
Thailand	396	65	458	435	217	1571

Data of 2013 is from January- June (06 months)

Source: Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation. Available from <https://www.daily-sun.com/printversion/details/385396/2019/04/16/Islamic-heritage-tourism-in-Bangladesh-part2> (accessed 18th February, 2020).

In 2009, the total number of foreign pilgrimage tourists was 10,174 which is increased in the upcoming years. The number of pilgrimage tourists in 2011 was 12,529 which is 25.49% higher than previous year and in 2012 it was 14,303 which is 14.15% higher than previous year. The year-wise number of foreign pilgrimage tourists arrived in Bangladesh from 2009 to 2013 are given in Table 2.

Table 2.

*Pilgrimage tourist arrival in Bangladesh.*

2009	2010	2011	2012	2013*
10,174	9,984	12,529	14,303	8,203

First 06 months of the year 2013

Source: Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation. Available from <https://www.daily-sun.com/printversion/details/385396/2019/04/16/Islamic-heritage-tourism-in-Bangladesh-part2> (accessed 18th February, 2020).

Some important religious sightseeing tourism attractions are listed in Table 3.

Table 3.

*Religious sightseeing tourism attractions in Bangladesh.*

Muslim religious sightseeing products	Buddhist religious sightseeing products	Hindu religious sightseeing products	Christianity religious sightseeing products
Sixty Dome Mosque (Local name Shait Gambuj Masjid) of Bagerhat district.	Somapura (Paharpur Monastery) of Naogaon.	Kantaji Temple of Dinajpur.	Armenian Church of Dhaka.
Baitul Mukarram Nation Mosque of capital city- Dhaka.	Shalban Vihara in Cumilla.	Puthia Temple Complex, Rajshahi.	Holy Rosary Church of Dhaka.



Shah Niamat Ullah Mosque of Shibganj Upazila, Chapainawabganj.	Jagaddala Mahavihara in Naogaon.	Dhakeshwari Temple of Dhaka.
Baitur Rauf Mosque of Dhaka.	Halud vihara in Naogaon, Rajshahi.	Joy Kali Temple, Dhaka.
shrine of Shah Mostafa (Rah.) in Moulvibazar.	Agrapuri Vihara in Naogaon, Rajshahi.	Boro Kali Bari Temple, Mymensingh.
shrine of Shah <b>Mostafa (Rah.) in Moulvibazar.</b>	Vasu Vihara in Bogra.	Sri Chaitanya Mandir in Sylhet.
Shrine of Shah Mokhdum (Rah.) in Rajshahi	Sitakot Vihara in Nawabganj	Sri Sri Lokenath Brahmachari Ashram
Shrine of Khan Jahan Ali (Rah.) in Bagherhat.	Bhitagarh in Panchagarh .	Kaliya jue Temple, Dinajpur.
Choto Sona Mosque (Small Golden Mosque) of Chapainawabganj.	Pandit Vihara in Chittagong.	
Kakrail Mosque, Ramna, Dhaka.	Bikrampur Vihara in Bikrampur.	
Shah Ali Baghdadi Mazar, Dhaka.		
Star Mosque, Dhaka.		
Khan Mohammad Mridha Mosque, Dkaka.		
Hazrat Bacha Shah (RA) Jame Masjid of Rangunia Upazila, Chittagong.		
Bagha Shahi Mosque, Rajshahi.		
Azimpur Dayera Sharif Mosque, Dhaka.		
Sath Gombuj Mosque, Dhaka.		

Source: Author own

### 5.1 Muslims Pilgrimage Places (Secondary)

Hajj is the only primary pilgrimage destination for Muslims around the world and is required to travel to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. It is called the fourth pillar of Islam and it has been made obligatory for every Muslim if you can afford and if you are healthy.

The author believes that following venue can be classified as the secondary pilgrimage places. Muslim pilgrimage places are: 1. Biswa Ijtema (Dhaka); 2. Hazrat Shah Jalal Yemeini Mazar (Sylhet); 3. Hazrat Shah Khwaza Sarfuddin Chisti Mazar (Dhaka); 4. Shrine of Bayazid Bostami Mazar (Chittagong); and all these pilgrimage places are the secondary pilgrimage places of the Muslims. Traditionally Muslims are religious, hence the pilgrimage places in Bangladesh draw a significant number of people daily all the year round. Except for "Biswa Ijtema", the Islamic waz mehfil is organized on annual basis in Winter (sometime in February).

i. "Biswa Ijtema" Pilgrimage Tourism in Bangladesh: Bishwa Ijtema - is the second largest Islamic congregation in the world after the annual congregation of Hajj in Mecca. The Bishwa Ijtema (world congregation) is an annual gathering of Muslims in Tongi, by the banks of the stream Turag, within the outskirts of national capital, Bangladesh. Over 2 million individuals from over a hundred thirty countries have taken half within the second-largest Muslim gathering within the world. The Ijtema could be a prayer service covering 3 days, throughout that attending devotees perform daily prayers whereas being attentive to scholars reciting and explaining verses from the Quran. It culminates within the Akheri Munjat, or the last Supplication (Final Prayer).

ii. Shrine of Hazrat Shah Jalal (Rah.) and Shah Poran (Rah.): The shrine of Saint Hazrat Shash Jalal is one of the major islamic tourism products in Bangladesh. It is one of the historical places of interest in Sylhet. Thousands of foreign and domestic tourists visit this famous shrine every year besides unnumbered devotees of each caste and creed, who create the journey from faraway places. Hazrat Shash Jalal is attributable with the assistance extended to the Muslim army that conquered Sylhet in 1303 A.D. Different types of accommodations and tourists' facilities are built up based on this shrine.

The shrine of Shah Paran is located at Khadim Nagar in Dakshinargh Pargana, about 7 km away from Sylhet. Hazrat Shah Paran was the nephew of Hazrat Shash Jalal. He came with Hazrat Shash Jalal with the spread of Islam in this region. Every day hundreds of visitors visit this famous shrine.

iii. Shrine of Sultan Bayazid Bostami: Bayazid Bostami was a famous saint from Iran. Its shrine is located on the hillock at Nasirabad, near Chattogram cantonment. There is a large pond beside the shrine with a good number of sea turtles that are known as Bostami Turtle (locally called mazari) and a large number of gazaris (gazar fish) which are additional attraction to the visitors. Tradition claims that these turtles are the descendants of the evil spirits who were transformed into this shape as a punishment because they incurred the wrath of the legendary saint.

iv. Hazrat Shah Khwaza Sarfuddin Chisti Mazar (Dhaka): Hazrat Khawaja Sharfuddin Chisti (R.A) was born in 1230 A.D. in Ajmeer Sharif, Rajasthan, India. The shrine is located on the Supreme Court of Bangladesh and locally named "High Court Mazar". Hazrat Sharfuddin Chisti (R.A.) began to spread (the word of) Islam from his shelter starting from 1306. His dedication, kindness, compassion, and character paved the way for the message of Islam to be spread to thousands of people in the vicinity and converted into Muslims and ultimately turned into a Muslim majority area what is now known as the Capital of Bangladesh.

## 5.2 Pilgrimage Places for Hindu Community

i. Chandranath Hindu Temple: Chandranath hill temple at Sitakunda Bazar is the most popular pilgrimage place for the Hindu pilgrims. It is located by the seaside land washed by the Bay of Bengal. Chandranath Hill is located 4 km east of Sitakunda Bazar. The temple is well-known for the Hindu community which is known all over the sub-continent for centuries. It is one of the oldest cultural and religious fairs in the Indian-Sub-continent held around a thousand-years-old Shiva temple that stands 350 meters high at the top of the Chattogram. Every year, millions of Hindu pilgrims, devotees, tourists, and representatives converge to Sitakunda to worship Lord Shiva on Chaturdashi tithi in the Bengali month of Falgun, which corresponds to the first week of March in the English Calendar.

ii. Sugandha Shaktipeeth, Shikarpur, Barisal: Shakti Peethas are the mother Goddess Sunanda's shrines or sacred places. It is located 10 miles north of Barisal in the village of Shiharpur. Each temple includes shrines to Shakti and Kalabhairava, and each temple is usually synonymous with different names for Shakti and Kalabhairava. These locations have developed into well-known pilgrimage sites known as Pithas or Skahti Pitas and are spread across the Indian Subcontinent. Sati was Shiva's first wife as Parvati's first incarnation.

iii. Bhabanipur, Sherpur Upazila, Bogra: Bhabanipur is a holy site in Sherpur Upazila district of Bogra, situated along the Karatoya river. It is one of the Shakti Peethas of the Indian Subcontinent. Shakti Peethas are the Mother Goddess's sacred abodes. The Shakti of the Bhabanipur Shrines is referred to as "Aparna," while Bhairava is referred to as "Vaman". As a Shakti Peeth, Bhabanipur is a historically significant place of pilgrimage for Hindus. Regardless of sectarian disparities, devotees flock from all over the world and abroad. Being a pilgrimage place, the temple area is quite big to accommodate the large crowd. Beside the Main Temple, the compound has a cluster of smaller temples such as: Belbaran Tala, 4 Shiva temple, Patal Bhairava Shiva temple and Nat Mandir (used for the performance of singing and dancing, these performances are considered as part of prayer to please God. Bhabanipur is also celebrated with different festivals during the year. In the Bengali month of Chaitra/Baishakh, they celebrate Maghi Purnima; in autumn it is Durgotshov and Dipannita Shyama Puja and Nabanna in the month of Aghrahoyon.

iv. Adinath Temple, Moheshkhali, Cox's Bazar: Adinath Temple, located on the apex of Mainak hill on Moheshkhali Island off the seaside of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, is devoted to the Hindu God, Shiva, who is worshipped as Adinath. The temple is famous for Adinath Fair, an annual religious festival for Hindu community. The fair takes place for thirteen days at the foot of a hill to worship Lord Shiva at the famous Adinath temple at the top of Mainak Hill. During the fair, thousands of devotees from Bangladesh and other South Asian countries gather at the temple ground. It is said that before visiting any of the holy place or pilgrimage, the Hindu devotees should first visit Adinath Temple as per Hindu myth.

v. Jeshoreshwari Kali Temple, Shyamnagar, Satkhira: The name "Jeshoreswari" means "Goddess of Jessore" hence the name Jeshoreswari Kali Temple. It is an extremely popular temple and is visited by pilgrims from all over the world irrespective of sectarian's differences. It is believed to have created by Anari who a Brahman was, he originally designed a 100-door temple, but the time was unknown. The temple is in Ishwaripur, a village in Shyamanagar Upazilla of Satkhira. Every year on the day of Kali Puja, the present caretakers of the temple conduct a ceremony followed by a festival mela in the temple complex.

## 5.3 Pilgrimage Places for Christian

In Bangladesh, the first Christian church was completed in Ihwarpur of Satkhira in 1599, but Bangladesh did not have a holy site for the Christians; hence the pilgrimage did not materialize there. In Bangladesh there are two Catholic archdioceses and 6 Catholic dioceses which save the religious purposes for about 400,000 Catholics. Christianity did not make pilgrimage compulsory, yet some Christians undertake journey to the holy sites to deepen the connection with God.

#### 5.4 Pilgrimage Places for Buddhists (Secondary)

Bandarban Golden Temple is one second category pilgrimage place for Buddhist community. It is located at Bandarban district in Bangladesh. It is called the "Budda Dhatu Jadi Temple" although it is recently constructed (between 1995 and 2000) it has become a popular pilgrimage place. The structure and the view of the Golden temple which is formally known as Buddah Datu Jadi really fascinates Buddhist religious people as well as tourist. Set a top a 60-meter hill, this temple exhibits unique Arakanese architecture with the design representing Buddhist culture and heritage. The Buddha Dhatu Jadi is a Theravada Buddhist Temple and is popularly known as Bandarban Golden Temple.

### 6.0 Roadblocks in implementing of religious tourism development in Bangladesh

The tourism industry is not growing as quickly as it could because of the sector's ingrained restrictions. According to a senior officer of the Bangladesh Pajatan Corporation (BPC), the Bangladesh government allocated Tk.650.00 million to the Board during 2011-2012 for the promotion of the tourism sector and branding of Bangladesh (Ahmad, 2013). However, a large portion of this allowance has not been used. As a result, the nation remains dormant, while several other countries make every attempt to encourage tourism and earn foreign currency revenues. While Bangladesh has secured its position on the tourism map and there are a lot of lucrative religious tourism products, this sector is not a roaring success. There are several roadblocks to implementing religious tourism development in Bangladesh. These are given below:

First, master plan based on religious tourism: Right now, there are no master plan based on religious tourism. Government must introduce a religious tourism base master plan.

Second, lack of proper tourism infrastructure: Bangladesh ranks 109th globally in terms of tourist infrastructure, behind all Asian countries except Nepal. However, Bangladesh's most significant drawback is its tourist service infrastructure, which ranks 133rd out of 140 countries and is placed last among Asian countries (World Economic Forum, 2019). The situation of the transportation sector stands out among other infrastructural shortcomings. Road traffic incidents are also frequent in Bangladesh. In a total of 4,891 road incidents in Bangladesh in 2020, 6,686 people were killed and 8,600 were wounded (Antara, N. F., 2021). The inadequate infrastructure of the country has been a big reason for foreign tourists to avoid the country.

Third, lack of serious publicity for religious events: Around the year, lots of religious events are observed all over the country. But due to the lack of proper publicity of the events, visitors remain unaware of the occasions. So, tourists cannot participate in the religious events.

Fourth, problem of carrying capacity: There is a lack of modern transport facilities in every sector. The government must act to increase the carrying capacity. For example, every year during "Eid Holiday" and "Biswa Ejtema" every mode of transport goes in to the braking point. Rail network, Road network, River network are dangerously over full causing many deaths and also the connection of transport to various tourist spots by road, rail, air and water is not efficient. Government must act immediately to rectify these acute problems.

Fifth, lack of international and national promotional and marketing activities of religious heritages: The majority of tourism-dominated nations follow new and effective marketing techniques to grow their tourism industry. They also concentrate their tourism positions through market-oriented approaches on the visitors. Religious tourism could not concentrate strongly to the international and national visitors due to incorrect marketing policy.

Sixth, lack of consciousness among mass people about religious tourism: Among the people of this country, adequate tourism knowledge is lacking. So, religious tourism is still a new concept for our people.

Finally, proper waste management is an important job to religious sites management authority. Plastic waste like one time plate, cup or packet creates serious environment degradation problem to the holy religious sites.

### 7.0 Suggestions for the development of religious tourism in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has plenty of religious centers spread out across the country. Therefore, the necessity to generate either specific or general products is not a main concern. To the enthusiastic faith and cultural observer, religious tourism in Bangladesh can provide a unique experience. It is mandatory to show professionalism for the development of the religious tourism sector.

But for sweet fruit, the seeds will have to be sown and the saplings will need to be nurtured. It is enormous potential for the development of this sector because of the supply of the religious tourism sites throughout the country. It is important to identify the core shortage, requirement of facilitating products and should overcome the problems that are faced by the pilgrims and tourists subsequently. And it is essential for paving the way to get attention for the development of this niche sector in Bangladesh. If these issues were searched efficaciously, religious tourism can be the supreme industry for domestic as well as inbound tourists. The following measures need to be implemented of a prospective phase in the development of religious tourism in the country.



First, developing religious tourism routes through a hub and spoke model: It is the first step to create nodes near religious centers, where basic infrastructure and facilities are present and day visits are planned from there. For example, Chattogram in south-east region in Bangladesh can be made a node for excursions to Shitakunda, Rangamati and Bandarban. With a massive influx of crowd in famous spots, a hub and spoke model can make sure for the tourist to visit all nearby tourist spots.

Second, Holistic tourism experience is providing for the tourists: A holistic tourism experience can influence the tourists who are not paying attention to religious destinations. So, a holistic package is needed around the religious destination. Tourist may not find it worthwhile only for a pilgrimage purpose. A new mechanism has been introduced that pilgrimage can be made not only for religious purpose but it can also be used as an alternative or optional tourism purpose. For example, Dhaka is marketed as both a religious and city tourism destination and Sylhet is also promoted as both a religious and a natural tourism destination.

Third, the government should define the key target audiences; then determine their preferences in history, archaeology, music, heritage, cuisine, and shopping. Create reasonable flights and promote travel documents, including easy visa processing, for prospective travelers from key markets such as the United States, Europe, Australia, Japan, and China (Ahmad, 2013).

Fourth, special training is needed for the marketing of religious tourist sites because a large number of visitors are attracted to these sites due to the ancient culture-based study, evolution of practices and research. However, blind faith alone cannot be the attraction of this site. They are also capable of attracting non-religious strata of the population. In this instance innovation may combine the informational, cultural, and philosophical inputs in the ceremonial component of religious voyages (Strategic Initiatives & Government Advisory (SIGA) Team 2012). Classical dance, traditional music and theatrical arts should be extended to religious temples to attract more tourists.

Fifth, Integrated Infrastructure Development for Religious Tourism expansion: Integrated development of infrastructure for the advancement of religious tourism can be initiated through the identification of circuits. Government intends to undertake the duty to develop the entire circuits of religious tourism which are already in a given region/area.

Sixth, increased emphasis on environmental impact and environmental balance: Proper checks and balances are needed to reduce the negative impact of tourism on the environment. It can be set in fine form. Pilgrimage tourism can provide a source of livelihood for the tourism industry by preparing and training local people in the broad and current conditions for available geography. Thus, it may be one of the best model approaches to managing a balanced environment.

Finally, monitoring of religious trusts: Financial status and control of religious trusts need to be reviewed as it will ease global concerns about money laundering and terrorist financing activities.

## 8.0 Conclusion

Religion has been a way of life and is an integral part of the Bangladeshi tradition for all the major religions and the pull of religious tourism is becoming stronger through optimum utilization of pilgrimage centers, mosques, temples, pagodas, churches religious festivals-events, the multifarious rituals as tourism products. Bangladesh, with its rich history and heritage, has always been a hub for different religious activities and preachers and saints from nearly all the major religions had made their base in this country at some point of time; therefore, Bangladesh has immense potential if proper management practice is employed to promote these noble acts and cash in millions of dollars. Spiritual journey is an important consideration for most people to achieve tranquility of mind and enrich their souls and is viewed as promoting quality of life. Spiritual connection offers rewards from a higher divine power, influences their lives regardless of their religious belief. It seems that spiritual growth is an important consideration for all ages and religious orientation. Time has come for the experts of travel planners to be very well-equipped to cater that spiritual needs. Religious Tourism, Spiritual Tourism, Sacred Tourism, or Faith Tourism are a type of tourism with two main elements: 1. Pilgrimage, meaning travel for religious or spiritual purposes and 2. Leisure travel at religious sights, the viewing of religious institutions, monuments, architecture, and artefacts designed to enhance the sociological, architectural, and historical knowledge with minimal or no spirituality. The moderate religious people and the educated groups are becoming more inclined towards leisure travel at religious. Both groups are important, and the travel management should develop dedicated services for both services. To accommodate the wishes of those who seek to use the sites as places of worship as well as leisure sightseeing but do not wish to do pilgrimage and the tourism providers must cater their services prudently so that everyone gets the best outcome, whether pilgrimage or sightseeing. Pilgrimage is the constant element of the tourism industry that is progressively rising and increasing tourism, which is never affected by any economic barrier or economic depression, or another natural calamity as it is done for the satisfaction of God (Allah) and benefit of mankind. Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in bringing peace by their effort to bring all the religious communities to celebrate their cultural and religious freedom regardless of their numbers. This tradition of mutual co-existent with dignity must continue for the development of the country's religious tourism.

Further study on promotional marketing and identifying specific needs and wants for religious tourists in Bangladesh are urgently required in order to develop religious tourism sustainably in the area. In addition to this, further study on how to motivate pilgrims to discover the other religious holy places in the country is needed.

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