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Review of : Religious Journeys in India: Pilgrims, Tourists and Travelers, by A.M. Pinkney & J. Whalen-Bridge

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Review of : *Religious Journeys in India: Pilgrims, Tourists and Travelers*

Pinkney, A.M. & Whalen-Bridge, J. (Eds.) (2018) *Religious Journeys in India: Pilgrims, Tourists and Travelers*, Sunny Press, New York USA; ISBN: 978-1-4384-6603-3, 338 pages, ISBN13: 978-1-4384-6603-3; \$90.00 US (Hardcover); \$26.95 US (Softcover).

The book, *Religious Journeys in India: Pilgrims, Tourists and Travelers*, gives an off-beat account of religious journeys in India which is not so evident either from the title or the book cover that depicts a common holy site; India still is a traditional society that for centuries has a myriad of religious practices flourishing simultaneously, of which religious journeys are an integral part. The book presents a scholastic record of religious journeys and pilgrimages that are off the beaten path, though equally if not more popular to the rather established and celebrated religious places to which the devout usually throng.

Divided into three sections, the book carries eleven chapters written by experienced scholars from across the world. The authors are non-residents and most are even of non-Indian origin, positing an outsider view that adds an objectivity to the comments and critique of the travels they describe. The first section very interestingly includes three chapters wherein chapter 1 describes the significance of an unconventional kind of Islamic pilgrimage that is more inclusive and attracts non-Muslims too, to these Sufi Shrines. Unlike visiting Mecca for *Hajj*, these are sites that heal and provide solace to the faithful closer to home and at an affordable cost. Chapter 2 focuses on Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India and their Thai visitors and has as its most notable feature the experiential description of the sites. Chapter 3, on 'augmenting pilgrimage', is an interesting account of the abode of one Gajanan Maharaj, a disciple of *Shirdi Sai* a twentieth century saint who has a very large following in the sub-continent. The concept is rather intriguing but certainly provides an understanding of a religious tourism product hitherto marginalised.

The second section under the heading *Pilgrimage as Paradox* features four chapters that build up compelling cases of an allegory of pilgrimage aptly dubbed 'anti-pilgrimage'. In Chapter 4, *Appropriating Ayodhya on Valour Day*, the erstwhile capital city of King Ram, who is the incarnation of Vishnu, one of the

Hindu trinity of Gods Brhama, Vishnu and Mahesh, the author recounts a recent controversial incident at Ayodhya, as the rallying point for reclaiming a significant Hindu pilgrimage site. Chapter 5 with the title *Bihar as Christian Anti-Pilgrimage Site*, describes the state of Bihar as the 'graveyard of Cristian Missions' in an intriguing narrative. Chapter 6 points out the commodification of religiosity and spirituality at *Rishikesh*, the Indian holy city located in the Himalayas. Chapter 7 describes the allure of Dharmasala, a city located in the North Indian state of Himanchal Pradesh, where His Holiness the Dalai Lama now lives, after leaving Tibet and taking refuge in India since 1959, acting as a proxy-pilgrimage to a substitute-Tibet.

Lastly, the third section of the book is designated as *Reversals and Revisions* and includes four chapters. Most interesting of these four chapters is Chapter 10 that collates the concept of 'reverse-pilgrimage' in regards to the performing art of a devotional Manipuri dance form. This art-form is contemplated as the object of pilgrimage that journeys across the country and visits the pilgrims as opposed to devotees visiting the pilgrimage site. Chapter 8 illustrates, in some details, the significance of the Islamic ritual of '*Ziyarat*' which the authors believe as akin to a 'Little Hajj' performed in south India. In Chapter 9 *Historical Gurudwaras*, the authors question the practice of pilgrimage in Sikhism, simultaneously highlighting the significance of some very prominent sites of Sikh worship. Finally, a long discourse on American Women Missionaries visiting Southern India to sites of Christian faith and heritage is deliberated in Chapter 11.

The book presents an alternative dimension and contrast of religious journeys that focus on motive more than mission; purpose more than place; and spirit more than spirituality. Another notable aspect of the chapters is how the authors connect socio-political aspects with religiosity of the times they describe. The editors must be commended for attempting such a

project that chronicles some absorbing religious journeys of India that are neither usual nor are included in any tourist-itineraries. It is also notable that a bouquet of many pilgrimage sites has been deftly accommodated in one volume, celebrating the diversity of Indian cultural and religious heritage. It must also however be mentioned that the essays are not very easy to read and tend to slip into long and demanding details which could have been avoided by a crisper editing. The print and picture quality too could be better though it is overall, a very interesting book.

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