Kiran A. Shinde

Placing communitas: Spatiality and ritual performances in Indian religious tourism

Abstract

This paper examines the spatial and temporal contexts that contribute to the fostering of communitas in contemporary South Asian religious travel, with particular attention to the influence of ritual performances and the mediation of social actors engaged in the cultural economy of religious tourism. It is based on the case studies of two sites located in the western Indian state of Maharashtra – Tuljapur and Shirdi. While the first is a site where hereditary lineages of priests perform rituals that are integral to pilgrimage practice, the second is associated with Sai Baba, a 20th century guru, whose spiritual-magical charisma continues to attract millions of visitors and the pilgrimage activity is managed by a centrally administered trust. Hence, they represent a spectrum of pilgrimage sites; at one end are the sites that are managed through social and informal networks (Tuljapur) and at the other are those managed by a public organization (Shirdi). A diverse range of religious functionaries including gurus, priests, and temple managers assist visitors in performing pilgrimage rituals and facilitate arrangements for lodging and boarding in Tuljapur. In Shirdi, these functions are handled by a charitable public trust that administers the shrine, and guides and tour operators and hotels that mediate movement and experience of visitors. The paper highlights how the different spatial modes of engagement with pilgrimage rituals and the mediation by religious specialists through distinct socio-spatial relationships play a significant role in creating the situations for fostering of communitas.

Key words:
religious tourism; communitas; spatial practice; pilgrimage sites; Shirdi; Tuljapur; India

Introduction

Contemporary patterns of travel to sacred sites and pilgrimage sites are increasingly being referred to as *religious tourism*. While much of the earlier work in this area focused on situating religious tourism theoretically between pilgrimage and tourism, practical implications of using this term have dominated recent literature (Rinschede, 1992; Timothy & Olsen, 2006). Scholars have examined the religious tourism industry, its role in economic development, and its impacts on the social, religious and cultural fabric and the physical environment of host destinations (Bywater, 1994; Ron, Selwyn & Graburn, 2009; Shackley, 2001; Shinde, 2007; Vukonić, 2002). Some attention is also drawn to the phenomenology of pilgrimage and the experience of pilgrims in contemporary religious travel (Di Giovine, 2009; Tomasi, 2002). However, most studies of religious tourism have originated in Europe; far fewer studies have been conducted

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in non-Western contexts (Raj & Morpeth, 2007; Shinde, 2008). Moreover, studies in non-Western contexts are largely focused on examining pilgrimage as a traditional practice and that too from anthropological and ethnographical perspectives (Gold, 1998; Morninis, 1984; Parry, 1994; Singh, 2006; van der Veer, 1988). It is apparent that there is a substantial gap in the geographic understanding of the patterns of visitations and the importance of active religious practice and performances in contemporary religious tourism (Nolan & Nolan, 1992; Timothy & Olsen, 2006).

This paper aims to propose a new method of understanding the geography of the place and how it helps in situating *communitas* at pilgrimage sites in India. Instead of considering communitas from an experiential perspective, the focus is on examining socio-spatial and temporal relationships between different social actors including religious specialists (priests, pilgrim guides) and non-religious institutions and how they mediate physical movement of visitors and the pilgrimage rituals in generating situations that may help in fostering of communitas. It is the proposition of this paper that the uniquely site-specific socio-spatial exchanges of any religious center must be assessed for their capacity to animate and/or reinforce levels of unity or division amongst visitors. Using a geographical approach, the paper argues that the phenomenon of communitas must also be understood as arising in the context of authorized mediators ("religious specialists") who play a significant role in creating the conditions for communitas. This significance is brought out by a comparative analysis of two pilgrimage sites, namely, Tuljapur and Shirdi, in the western Indian state of Maharashtra. They represent examples of Hindu destinations that are regularly visited by a large number of visitors. Tuljapur is a seat of a powerful Hindu goddess with its origins in mythological legends. It is a major regional pilgrimage site for performance of ritualistic traditional pilgrimages that are informally administered. Annually, close to a million visitors are estimated in Tuljapur. Shirdi is associated with a modern day saint and guru, Sai Baba, and receives more than eight million visitors every year. The main shrine is administered by a public charitable trust that also plays an important role in managing religious tourism in Shirdi. Analysis of spatiality of pilgrimage performances in these two sites demonstrates how informal social networks and formal management styles mediate different site-specific practices in creating different conditions that either enhance or negate the formation of communitas.

The remainder of the paper is organized in five sections. In the next section, a brief literature review is provided to arrive at a conceptual approach for this study. The third section introduces the two Indian pilgrimage sites whose in-depth case-studies provide the basis for analysis of spatiality of pilgrimage performances. Detailed accounts of visitor flows and pilgrimage rituals in these sites are provided in the fourth section. The material and socio-spatial elements that influence the occurrence of communitas and the salient features of communitas and differences in religious tourism are highlighted in the fifth and concluding section.

Literature review

The concept of communitas was first introduced by Victor Turner in *The Ritual Process* while studying counter-culture and tribal societies, and was later elaborated in the context of pilgrimage (Turner, 1969; Turner & Turner, 1978). Since then, it has been examined and contested by various scholars for different social and cultural situations including pilgrimage (e.g., Bilu, 1988; Deflem, 1991; Eade & Sallnow, 1991). Debates about possibilities of communitas are also found in many scholarly works on Indian pilgrimages (e.g., Gold, 1988; Morinis, 1984). For the purposes of this paper, I begin with some of the basic characteristics of communitas and then explore them in relation to spatial and temporal dimensions of pilgrimage.

According to Turner, communitas is a sensation of human interrelatedness which emerges in the liminal (in-between) period of rituals when participants temporarily feel that they are "equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders" (1969, p. 96). This transitory phase generates a highly emotional or spiritual experience with a heightened sense of solidarity, joy, wellbeing and belonging that may challenge orthodox social and cultural orders. In performing such rituals, people from different social structures may eliminate outward signs of rank and division and transcend their differences in experiencing commonality in that space and for that time they are in contact (Rubenstein, 1992).

Some insights on spatial and temporal factors contributing to achieving communitas are found in Rinschede's (1986) research on Lourdes, where he investigated the religious activities of pilgrims. He categorized pilgrim flows in three ways: large groups organized by national agencies, smaller groups organized by private travel agencies and religious organizations, and individual travelers (the last was the highest proportion). He found a strong relationship between the two major access routes to the shrine and use of space along these for pilgrimage and identified three different areas (with overlapping boundaries) of the pilgrims' activities. The core area was the "religious town" comprising the shrine, the related accommodation facilities, and the devotional articles trade. This was frequented most by large, organized groups. The second area was dominated by contrastingly mobile groups of pilgrims and encompassed greater territory by extending into the business center and municipal recreation areas across most of the town. The third area expanded into the countryside and was loosely defined by excursions by pilgrims who used their private cars and traveled in tourist buses. He concluded that the visitors' goals and the specific activities of the social groups in a given space determined the differences between these places of pilgrimage and general tourism. And by corollary, it can be said that the primary "contact zone" (Pratt, 1991) of pilgrimage activity, i.e., the central core, was the space where a sense of communitas would have been strongest as groups stayed together in such area. This spatiality would have also been reinforced by mediators such as the tour leaders and guides (who mostly come from ecclesiastical backgrounds) as they direct the movement of pilgrims and thus assist in standardizing rituals of pilgrimage in the sacred areas. Similar phenomena of communitas is also observed in some of the journeys undertaken in Hindu pilgrimages (e.g., Gold 1988; Karve, 1962).

In the case of Hindu pilgrimages in India, the sacred complex model is widely used for analyzing pilgrimage activity. This model, first proposed by Vidyarthi (1961), comprises three analytical categories: sacred geography, sacred specialists, and sacred performances. Together these explain the basic structure of pilgrimage as a series of sacred performances that are enacted by visitors with assistance from religious specialists in the territory of the pilgrimage site. In short, a visitor employs services of a priest (religious specialist) to perform religious rituals in the temple; in return, the priest gets a fee or a gift. Depending on the nature and constituents of the gift, different terms such as *dana, dakshina*, and *bhent* are widely used to refer to such social exchange (see Morinis, 1984; Parry, 1994; Raheja, 1998). This is a socio-economic exchange that binds the priests and pilgrims into a patronage relationship with the pilgrim as the guest (client) and priest as the host. Priests in these relationships historically may have belonged to the Brahmin caste and their relationships with pilgrims were enshrined into hereditary systems and maintained through social hierarchies but there may be significant regional variations in the constitution of the priests (for details, see: van der Veer, 1988). *Darshan* — seeing and being seen by the deity — is among the most important activities (see Eck, 1981, p. 63). Scholars have shown how sacred performances and religious specialists help in influencing behavior of both guests and hosts in a pilgrimage site (Parry, 1994; van der Veer, 1988). Mack (2002) using a geographical perspective, explains spatial and temporal realms of pilgrimage activity around the Vijayanagara temple complex in south India. She found that in the layout of the temple district distinctions were made between public and private space and through provisioning activities (lodging, boarding and shopping of religious paraphernalia). The movement of pilgrims was directed along particular routes most of which converged to the temple precinct as the conceptual center of the town. This spatial arrangement was "an integral part of the overall pilgrimage experience" as it created spiritual links to enhance the emotional experience for visitors. It can also be said that communitas will be an experience influenced by such spatiality. In the next section, I will provide a framework for analyzing the effect of spatiality on communitas.

Approach and methodology

This brief review of the literature examines three interrelated concepts relevant and necessary for this study of communitas in pilgrimage and religious tourism. First, a pilgrimage site consists of a sacred core (or precinct) around which pilgrimage activity is concentrated, forming a luminal "contact zone" between priests, pilgrims and patrons where communitas is most likely to be fostered. Second, pilgrims require ritual assistance for performance of pilgrimage rituals which only religious specialists can mediate. The structural features of this mediation are, at present, understudied. While such exchanges give rise to social relationships that form the basis of the cultural economy of pilgrimage, they also define the physical patterns of pilgrims' visits. Thus, the third and final point is that the nature of such socio-spatial relationships will most likely influence the experience of the pilgrims and the conditions that might be necessary for fostering of bonding between pilgrims (communitas).

Using these three premises, I examine spatiality and communitas in religious tourism in two pilgrimage sites in India: Tuljapur and Shirdi. In the sense of Hindu pilgrimages, both these sites are "*tirtha*"- a place where transcendence from the material world (earth) to the other world of divinity (heaven) is possible by worshipping the deities of the place (for more detailed explanation of the term see Eck, 1982; Singh, 2006; Veer 1988). The comparative analysis of these sites is significant at many levels, including the nature of pilgrimage economy and social relationships, the diversity in the role of the mediators, and distinctions in the socio-economic background of pilgrims visiting these sites. Tuljapur represents a ritualistic format of pilgrimage practice while Shirdi is associated with the shrine of Sai Baba, a 20th century guru, who rejected communal distinctions and transcended any overt religion affiliation. Tuljapur is a regional site, visited mainly by Maharashtrian Hindus, for performing rituals, birth and marriage rites, with a great number of religious specialists. Shirdi is a pan-Indian site that attracts visitors from all over the country. The main shrine and associated religious tourism activities are managed by a public charitable trust. Thus, they reflect the two dominant ways observed in the management of Indian pilgrimage sites and are comparable. These two sites are indicated on Map 1. Detailed case studies were conducted in these sites in 2009-10 (14th December- 28th December 2009 in Shirdi and 5th January 2010 to 20th January 2010 in Tuljapur). Besides the participant observation method, 25 representatives of key groups of social actors, including religious specialists, temple managers, trusts, tour agencies and government agencies, were interviewed during fieldwork in these sites.

Map 1
LOCATION OF TWO STUDY SITES
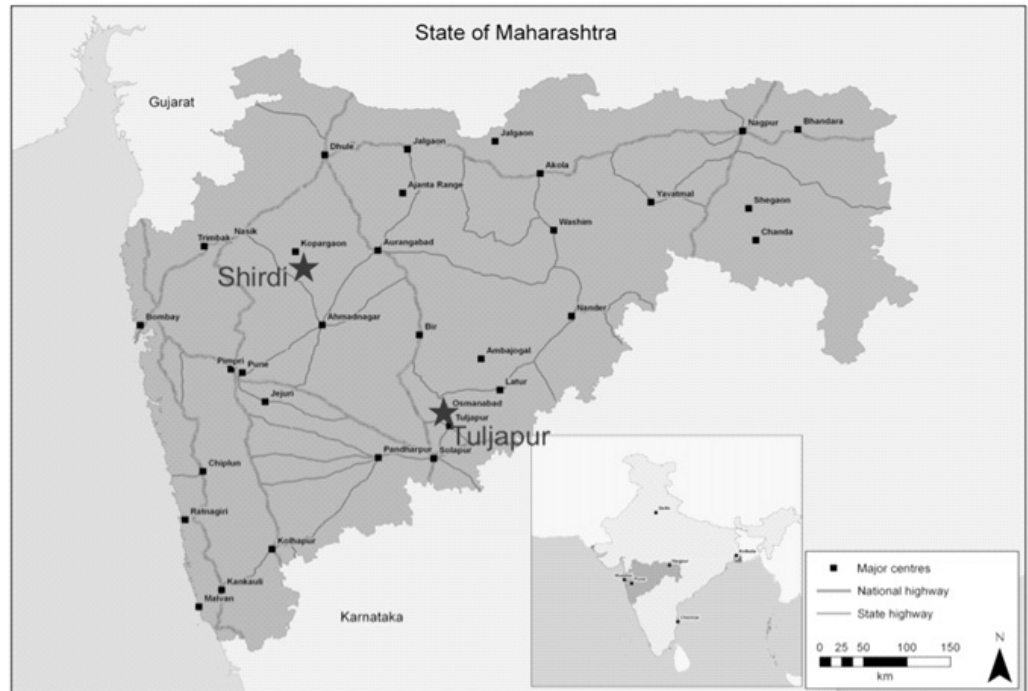
Source: Drawn by author based on data from DIVA-GIS http://www.diva-gis.org/gData (data in public domain)

The two towns

TULJAPUR

The temple in Tuljapur is dedicated to the deity known by the name of Tulja Devi and represents a regional variation of the goddess of power (*shakti*) (for details on mythology of Tuljapur refer to Nahane, 1990; Rocher, 1997). Like most Hindu traditional pilgrimage sites, Tuljapur's remote past is shrouded in mythological legends and religious scriptures (Singh, 2006). According to available historical records, the emergence and growth of formal and organized pilgrimage activities in Tuljapur coincided with the establishment of the Maratha kingdom in the region in the 17th - 18th century (Rocher, 1997). Shivaji was one of the earliest Maratha kings who visited Tuljapur to seek blessings of the goddess in fulfilling his dream of building a Hindu kingdom. Since then, most Maratha kings, their courtiers, and the population from the region patronized pilgrimage to Tuljapur. This is evident from the registers (*vritant-patrika*) kept by the priestly class in which these visits were recorded.

Present-day Tuljapur is administered as a municipality and has a geographical area measuring 416.44 ha. Based on the 2001 census, it accommodates a resident population of 31,714. However, it continues to serve as a vital pilgrimage site: the temple has limited accessibility as it is situated atop a hill, it is still located in the rural hinterland (Solapur, the nearest sizable urban center, is located about 44 km away), and visitor flows are related to the agricultural cycle. Here the goddess is seen as a manifestation of nature (and is often solicited in case of natural disasters) and a deity who maintains the livelihoods of people and fulfills their requests and vows. As such, her devotees are inclined to please her by making offerings of sacrificial animals, such as goats. In offering worship, they utilize the services of religious specialists. Thus, the mediation of rituals between devotees and the goddess is managed informally by religious specialists, forming the basis of Tuljapur's pilgrimage economy.

The main temple of Tulja Bhavani (another name of Tulja Devi) is associated with elaborate rituals and restrictions that were rooted in, and appropriated for, rural life. The proper performance of rituals is complex and time consuming. Broadly, three types of services are noted:

- Daily services at the temple in which the goddess is bathed, clothed, fed four meals a day, entertained with devotional music, and put to bed at night.

- Special services offered during festivals which focus on life-cycle rituals for the deity, including her birthday, marriage, and ritual bathing. During these festivals, the image of the goddess is put in a palanquin and taken around the town in a celebratory procession. Similar services, but without the procession, are also organized for days during a lunar month (and even within a week) when devotees believe the worship of the goddess is particularly beneficial.

- Discretionary services for pilgrims who visit the goddess and bring sacred food offerings.

In the following paragraphs, I focus on the third category where the devotees play the most active role. Typically, devotees stay for 2.5 - 3 days in order to complete the food

offerings. The ritual offering of consecrated food is of three types: simple curd-rice, savory and sweet, each offered on a different day by a pilgrim during the visit. The cooked meal (*prasad*) is carried into the sanctum where the goddess partakes of it by looking at it. Through this very act of eating with the eyes, the goddess consecrates the food (Rosel, 1983). Religious specialists also devised a special form of offering that follows a hierarchical pattern: bathing the deity in milk, in *ghee* (clarified butter), and in porridge made from sweet condensed milk (the Marathi term is *basundi*). This hierarchy is related to the devotees' belief that the blessings they receive are in proportion to the offering made to the goddess. Thus the temple works around what Rosel has called the "principle of maintenance of the whole structure: a set of interrelations, which regulate the economic, social and ritual activities" (1983, p. 45).

There is a high degree of differentiation of ritual services on offer by religious specialists. Although most of them are not Brahmins, they perform the functions of priests and are colloquially known as *pujari,* as is common in Maharashtra. The daily routine at the temple includes five occasions for offering the *abhishek* (special worship that is undertaken as a part of the fulfillment of a vow). Two sets of pujaris take charge of worship rituals and the opportunity to perform this service rotates between the families who have inherited the right to do so. Sixteen such family lineages exist and are called *Bhopes*. These pujaris of the temple supported people who provided a range of ancillary services in the temple including cleaning, maintenance, lighting of lamps, carrying the sacred umbrella during the processions etc. This service class used to get shares from the donations visitors made in the temple. However, with the expansion of families, hereditary rights became entangled and complicated with disagreements over who would serve and when and this led to several court cases. The protracted litigations over rights and income from temple led to the intervention of the government. In 1962, a trust was established to administer the temple and an acceptable compromise was worked out where one-third of the income from the donation boxes in the temple was to be given to the sixteen traditional hegemonic lineages of Bhopes associated with the temple. These Bhope pujaris, through their association of 400 members, continue to look after the worship rituals and resist any interference from the trust in this regard. The mandate of the trust is limited to the management of the temple properties and pilgrim flows within the temple premises.

The other set of pujaris performs all other supporting functions that include bringing devotees to the temple, providing accommodation to them, assisting in preparing food offerings, ascertaining that the devotee has performed all necessary rituals during their visit and finally, charging a fee for services. These rights of service continue to be hereditary; the clientele is passed down through the generations, and is reinforced and maintained through established social networks. This means visitors from a certain region (community, village, or district) only contract the services of a particular family of pujari. Thus, each pujari family has ownership to a certain fixed patronage. Close to 3,000 such families presently operate in Tuljapur. All together, the pujari community constitutes about 70 percent of the local residents and a large proportion of them also

engage in other supporting businesses that include farming and owning shops that sell religious paraphernalia necessary for pilgrimage rituals and performances.

At present, daily visitation ranges around 10,000-15,000 people (estimates were arrived at by triangulating data obtained from interviewees and the government reports collected during the fieldwork in 2010). The ritualistic performances central to the pilgrimage economy generally follow a standard pattern detailed as follows. Pilgrims come to Tuljapur with the knowledge of their hereditary pujari (traditionally filled by men) and seek him out. Alternatively, they might have been given the contact information of a pujari from their community. Many pujaris have also set up networks where their younger family members scout for incoming pilgrims at the bus station, along the routes, and in hotels and dharmshalas (pilgrim-inns). They also try to connect with first-time visitors by establishing some social links with the visitors' place of origin and persuade them to accept their services. Once the pujari-devotee contact is confirmed, the visitors go to the pujari's house (or the accommodation in a dharamshala or a lodge that the pujari organizes), leave their belongings, and authorize the pujari to prepare the different types of food offering that the pilgrim would have promised to offer to Tulja devis. While the pujari's family (mainly the women of the pujari household) cooks this food, the pujari takes the devotee (and his/her family) to the temple. On the way, the devotee picks up a plate of other offerings that include a piece of cloth as a gift for the goddess, a coconut, a bowl of puffed rice, a flower garland, and some sweetmeat from a shop, typically on a commission basis with the shopkeeper. The pujari leaves the visitor to queue within the temple precinct and returns with the food offerings to the temple. Once the visit is complete, the devotee pays the pujari for all his ritual assistance. While this is the standard procedure, variants may occasionally include an additional ritual performance that takes place in the pujari's house but conducted by another kind of specialists. For example, a newly wed couple that come to seek the blessing of the goddess may engage these performers to perform a nightlong singing marathon of the goddess's eulogies.

This standard pattern of visitation corresponds with the statistical data collected by Nahane (1990) in a survey of 114 visitors that he conducted while proposing a Development Plan for Tuljapur. Nahane found that about 80% stayed for more than two days; and were almost equally distributed between dharmshalas and private houses while small percentage went to lodges. Accommodation provided by pujaris in their houses predominantly features in the religious landscape. The pujari's help in preparing and organizing the food offerings to the goddess is one of the most important reasons that clients continue to favor this arrangement since only authorized pujaris are allowed to take the food offerings in the temple. Most pujari families residing in around the temple and the core area of the town are involved in this kind of clientele system. An elderly pujari from one of the traditional lineages summed up such an important role in an interview I conducted; he told me that he receives about 1,500-2,000 families every year at an average of 2-3 families per day, and when this number increases during monthly peaks of the full moon day and the nine-day festival, he has

to rent more rooms from other lodges and dharmshalas. He also lends money to pilgrims if they need it during their visit which he may collect later when he visits their village. Pujaris often visits their clients to propagate eulogies of the Goddess and to invigorate their hereditary relationships to their clientele from certain villages, kinships and castes- this is a common system and practiced throughout Indian subcontinent (van der Veer, 1988).

Three decades ago, Nahane documented the presence of only nine hotels in Tuljapur. During my fieldwork in 2009, I noted 30 hotels. This means that although there is some change in the nature of lodging and boarding, the preference for independent accommodation has not increased significantly. The seasonality and the fact that visitors have to pay the pujaris for ritual assistance are crucial factors that affect the hotel business. The charge for using hotels is much higher than the facilities in dharmshalas and lodges, most of which are extensions of family homes. In addition, there are about 300 shops selling religious paraphernalia along the major route that constitute an integral part of this religious landscape.

The annual peaks occur during festivals and are estimated at about 500,000-600,000 devotees (recorded during *navratra*), a nine-day festival when the Goddess, especially in the form of Durga, the ten-armed goddess who vanquished the buffalo-demon Mahishasura, is worshipped. This festival is celebrated all over India with certain regional variations. During festivals large groups of devotees arrive from different parts of the state and country and stay for at least 4-5 days to celebrate the common religious culture associated with worship of the goddess (communal singing, feasts, cultural performances) often under the guidance of their gurus and pujaris and with local devotees. At this time, all open spaces in the town are transformed into large temporary resting places for pilgrims. However, some seasonality in visitor flows can still be observed: one is related to the agricultural cycle, but this is being supplanted with the increase in visitors from urban centers. The other is related to "the marriage season" – the months of May-June and December held to be auspicious for matrimony.

Besides these dominant forms of movements, a large number of devotees continue to follow the traditional practice of walking from their homes and climbing the hill to come for the darshan of the goddess. Several groups of devotees (ranging from 50-300) often make this one-day journey from the nearby villages (and towns) to Tulajpur in a procession. However, they may or may not engage in the elaborate ritualistic aspects of the visit; they may simply take *darshan* of the goddess, make an offering, and pay a visit to their hereditary pujari.

In summary, in Tuljapur's religious specialists and devotees define the sacred space and the contact zone (the hill, the route, the temple) through their socio-cultural networks, social relationships and mediation in everyday practices. It is evident that pilgrims stay longer and engage in rites of passages with extended families and friends in whose presence such performances are considered as socially and religiously sanctioned. The

pilgrimage economy is based on "the concept of providing for the God and a sacred routine focusing on conspicuous consumption" (Rösel, 1983, p. 51). Most ritualized performance follows a certain route over space and time and is mediated by pujaris as "the chief agents for the ever-increasing flow of pilgrims" (1983, p. 49). While this flow may be concentrated in the center around the temple district, it also extends into the peripheral areas where pujaris have begun to construct new lodges and guesthouses. Such spatial-temporal opportunities are likely to provide wide and varied conditions for the fostering of communitas. Within foot pilgrimages, communitas may arise as the groups of devotees share common knowledge about the region, its customs and beliefs, religious culture and the motivation to visit the goddess. Moreover, they interact for a longer duration and over longer distances, thereby reinforcing their solidarity (such walks are generally undertaken on auspicious days that occur every month such as the full-moon day etc. or the specific days of the week devoted to the goddess). The high frequency and repeat visitation further aids in formation of communitas between regular visitors. The situation, however, is considerably different in Shirdi as illustrated in the following section.

SHIRDI

Shirdi is a pilgrimage center associated with Sai Baba, a 20th century guru. Located in the Ahmadnagar district (in the western part of Maharashtra), it is nestled within a circuit formed by three major urban centers: Mumbai (300 kms), Pune (180 kms), and Nashik (100 kms). At present Shirdi receives more than eight million pilgrims annually. Its native resident population in 2001 was 26,176. The town of Shirdi is administered by a municipal council and is spread over a geographical area of 1298 ha.

The popularity of Sai Baba in contemporary religious travel is attributed to several factors; he lived a life of *faqir* (a type of Muslim mendicant) removed from any religious affiliation, and it is believed that he continues to perform miracles for his devotees. He therefore is considered a guru who can "be revered along with other household deities" (Srinivas, 1999, p. 252). While alive, he propagated the message of devotion and patience as paths to spiritual enlightenment. He did not reject the sacrificial offerings presented to him but redistributed them amongst his devotees.

In Shirdi, the organized form of pilgrimage began in 1908. Shirdi's location amidst a rapidly urbanizing region played an important role in popularizing Sai Baba's shrine; many government officers and businessmen from nearby urban centers (mainly Mumbai and Pune) sought Sai Baba's divine help and upon fruition of their requests, became devotees and contributed to the spread of his cult beyond Shirdi (Srinivas, 1999). To give a structure to this community devotion, one of the followers "drew up a ritual for the worship of Baba that followed the lines of the worship at Pandharpur [another important place for devotional pilgrimages dedicated to Vishnu in Maharashtra] and a priest was appointed to carry on congregational worship" (Srinivas, 1999, p. 248). However, in distinct contrast to historical centers of pilgrimage, no distinctive priestly class or religious specialists emerged in this kind of devotional worship. After

Sai Baba's death in 1918, a trust by the name of Sai Sansthan was formed by the order of the District Court in 1922 to manage the endowments and income that were donated in his name. This trust continues to act as an intermediary between visitors and their object of devotion, the saint and his temple.

The public trust, renamed as Sri Sai Sansthan Trust (SSST) is responsible for temple administration and also functions as visitors' intermediary, providing ritual assistance and lodging and boarding. The temple management department in the trust draws up the rituals to be performed daily, weekly, and on special occasions, including festivals, and appoints priests to perform rituals in the temple. The trust encourages devotees to spend time meditating in the temple precinct, especially in places such as the *masjid* (the dilapidated mosque where Sai baba used to live) and the *chaavadi* (the clerical office of the village where Sai Baba occasionally slept), thereby emulating the routine followed by Sai Baba. Although darshan of Sai Baba's icon in the temple is the main purpose for visitors, they also endeavor to eat a meal (prasad) distributed by the trust and shop for Sai Baba souvenirs such as photo-frames, miniature idols, lockets, etc, (Rigopoulos, 1993).

According to estimates provided by the SSST, the number of visitors in Shirdi ranges from 30-35,000 daily to about 75-80,000 on weekends; about 22,500 are served meals everyday. The annual peaks of about 300,000 per day are reached during the three main festivals (these estimates are based on triangulation of data from SSST annual reports, dining hall, and interviews with officials from SSST). A large number of visitors attend the weekly procession (on Thursday nights) of a palanquin carrying the impression of Baba's sandals. This is an enactment of Sai Baba's ritual of walking through the village at least once every week when he was alive and this activity is considered an integral part of the town's pilgrim flow. Sandals are not an enactment of Sai Baba's ritual of walking but of Sai Baba *tout court*. In addition, in recent years there has been an increase in processional foot pilgrimages called *palkhis* to Shirdi. About 100-125 such processions come every year from metropolitan cities and regional towns, each involving an average of approximately a thousand members.

The movement of visitors is focused on the temple premises and in its surrounding area, which in Mack's terms, constitutes the temple district where there is a concentration of shops selling religious paraphernalia and where most visitors buy offerings for the deity including rose garlands. Visitors enter the temple through one main entrance that is located on the highway and start queuing at the "Queue" complex that leads into the main temple. Depending on the day and the time they have arrived in the queue, the waiting period for the darshan can take up to 4-8 hours. After darshan, they go to the dining hall (*prasadalya*), and essentially completing the visit. On the way back, they buy religious trinkets and souvenirs. Yet, there are three variations in the patterns of visitor flows.

Day-trippers: Those who come on a day-trip often arrive early in the morning, either by a private vehicle or by bus. At the bus stand or in the parking lot several agents hunting for clients meet them. They promise to bring the visitor to a hotel and a shop, and lead them to the front of the temple gates so that they can take on early darshan and leave quickly. These agents receive commissions from hoteliers and shopkeepers. Often, visitors are required to rent a room in multiples of 4 hours, that is, if arrived in the early morning, they will book a room from 7.00 am- 11.00 am. This is good enough for their family for a quick bath, get ready, and queue for darshan. By the afternoon he would have taken the darshan and would be free to go to the SSST's dining hall to have *prasad* (consecrated food) and leave by the evening. The largest proportion of visitors belongs to this category.

Overnight visitors: Devotees who come from far distances first seek the facility provided by the SSST. They arrive straight at the reservation center near the temple; make a booking and then head to the temple or their accommodation depending on what time they arrive. They would generally stay for 1 or maximum of 2 nights depending on the availability of transport such as trains. Often, they aim at getting to the first prayers that are offered at 5.00 a.m. in the morning. After the darshan, they may spend some time in meditation and reading scriptures about Sai Baba (such as the *Shri Sai Satcarita*, the Saint's biography, that has been translated into more than ten languages) in one of the halls in the temple, shop for souvenirs and then head back to their accommodation. Additionally, they may take part in the evening procession.

Overnight visitors at hotels: The third pattern is that of those who choose to stay at hotels located along the highway. They go to the hotel first and then either walk or hire a local conveyance to reach the temple and then follow a similar routine as described above. Many of these hotels have entered into agreements with bus companies from other states such as Andhra Pradesh Tourism and Karnataka Tourism, to organize integrated travel and accommodation packages.

In terms of social relationships, it is apparent that in the absence of a traditional religious functionary class, the SSST and the network of hotels, shopkeepers and their agents perform the role of intermediaries. These interactions are primarily, as one hotelier summed up, "commercial relation with visitors where visitors are customers." Consequently, two contact sites become critically important for creating the conditions for an experience of communitas: visitors' accommodation and the shops which are mostly concentrated around the temple precinct and along the route to the temple. Numbering around 1,500-2,000, these commercial establishments can be categorized into four types– hotels; novelties and religious trinkets (most of them related to Sai Baba such as laminated photos, lockets, picture frames, VCDs, audio CDs, images, idols etc); shops selling material necessary for worship in temple including garlands, sweetmeat, coconut, etc; and restaurants (numbers range from 150 to 200 and many are temporary structures only). More than 50% of the hotels are concentrated around this area.

A large proportion of visitors use the accommodation facilities provided by the SSST, which is distributed across 16 buildings in three locations (these 812 rooms and 425 lockers accommodate about 7,000 people). The SSST operates a free bus service between these places, the temple precinct and the dining hall. It has also planned two more campuses with a combined capacity to accommodate another 15,000 visitors. Outside the core area, hotels are located along the state highway and towards the southern part of Shirdi. In total, there are about 500 hotels that provide accommodation for close to 7000 rooms (including 150 owner-occupied guesthouses and 200 that only have a lodging facility). However, only 185 are authorized and registered with the local municipality. As commercial activity, hotels occupy the largest land use with at least 40 percent devoted to them. In recent years, 12 new charitable trusts have built their accommodation facilities in Shirdi. Although these trusts incorporate Sai Baba's name, they have been established by devotees from outside of Shirdi to provide accommodation to their communities of member-patrons. They organize their own festivals and cultural performances in which they combine practices observed at their home-towns, *vis-à-vis* the standard pattern of worship in Shirdi described above.

Shirdi is an exemplar of a religious tourism destination where a contemporary pattern of religious travel is most evident. The pan-Indian nature of Sai Baba's following, the magnitude of visitor influx, the kind of clientele coming from a predominantly urban middle class (with disposable income for travel) and the mediation of visitor experience by the SSST generates individualized social behavior amongst visitors and between guests and the local community. Because darshan is the main purpose, it is in the temple complex alone where devotes will remain in contact with each other as commonly engaged in religious activity. The spatial arrangement in such that people are together mainly in spaces such as the "Queue" complex and the dining hall and it is in these places while waiting in long queues or sitting, they often burst into communal singing of devotional songs and hymns. In most other areas, they are in isolated commercial exchanges with the host community (shopkeepers, hotels and even the SSST as it provides services) and the opportunities for sharing and connecting with others outside their groups is naturally curtailed.

In terms of time spent on site, Shirdi's visitors aim to take a quick darshan and depart. Most arrive in motorized transport and bring vehicles as close to the temple as possible, walk the least distance and return immediately after darshan. In this format, there are again fewer possibilities of communitas. However, there are instances where communitas may happen and these relate to the groups that come as collectives from their hometowns and remain bound by existing social structures (same neighborhood, same traders association, same bank etc.). The recent proliferation of ashrams and foot pilgrimages can be seen as a potentially fertile ground for communitas. Also, the high frequency and nature of repeat visits may reinforce the possibility for communitas in larger groups travelling long distances in the journey to Shirdi and it may continue to be observed upon returning home to the Sai Baba temples in their native places.

In summary, the town of Shirdi is subjected to a constant and heavy influx of visitors that vastly outnumbers the native resident population. The economics of tourism infrastructure and potential opportunities dominate, resulting in a situation where interactions of a commercial nature take over social interactions.

Discussion

The phenomenon of communitas may be experienced by an individual in collective ritual performances during pilgrimage (Rubenstein, 1992; Turner & Turner, 1978). This study of pilgrimage at Tuljapur and Shirdi shows how the cultural economies of traditional ritualistic pilgrimages and contemporary religious travel are distinct in these two places in their socio-spatial and temporal aspects, and that these differences therefore contribute to differing conditions for the phenomenon of communitas. The following paragraphs illustrate how the mediation by religious and non-religious actors in the two pilgrimage sites influence the participants' ability to achieve heightened level of joy and experience and a sense of camaraderie in social bonding.

In Tuljapur, where religious rituals dominate in pilgrimage activity, the whole town is an amorphous religious landscape that reflects a much wider area of religious activity of pujaris and devotees through ritualized performances. The competence of pujaris stems from their genealogies, hereditary clientele systems and social networks through which they attract devotees. Moreover, their ability to perform ritual services for and with devotees generates cohesive spatial practices, which then leads to more opportunities for communitas to be fostered. During one of the interviews, an elderly pujari explains:

> Our clients (*yajmans*) come from varied social classes, rich and poor, farmers, merchants, high-ranking bureaucrats and occasionally, ministers. But when they come here to offer their worship to the devi, they all stay with us. They mix and interact, enga-ge in the rituals performed by each other in the service of the devi, participate in *bhajan-kirtan, jagran-gondhal* [religious and cultural performances], and share the Prasad. They hardly fuss about who they are, they know, all of them are devotees and have co-me to the feet of the devi and that we can help them in proper darshan and blessings from the devi.

Similar sentiments were echoed by a few other pujaris while emphasizing the social bonding that takes place between their families and families of their guests. The quality of service offered and the experience mediated by pujaris become the high point of the pilgrimage to Tuljapur.

In comparison, Shirdi represents contemporary religious travel. Here, darshan is a religious act but it is not accompanied with any elaborate ritual performances that are typical of traditional pilgrimages. While there are no real individual intermediaries that can mediate and personalize the visitor experience, such an experience is further restrained by both spatial and temporal factors. The space provided in the "Queue" complex and the time devotees spend therein becomes the only contact zone amongst

visitors. Opportunities for the formation of groups are limited as devotees have to wait in single file. The waiting time is often overwhelming and the initial enthusiasm is more likely to wane and give rise to impatience as devotees are mainly focused on the final act of darshan and timely departure from the site. There are occasional exchanges of words and heated arguments when devotees try to break the queue and also seeing that the SSST often provides preferential treatment through its special darshan facility for socially influential people, such as politicians, officials of the trust, and their social contacts. Devotees, who come in groups, generally reassemble outside the temple after darshan. But here too, opportunities for real communitas are fewer. Visitors coming from different socio-economic and cultural and linguistic backgrounds prefer to consume services offered by their brethren and this reinforces community differences rather than mitigating it. These differences are becoming more prominent as one newspaper recently reported:

> According to unofficial statistics, the population of people from Andhra is less than 10 per cent of the 26,000-strong Shirdi population…[but] Telugu is spoken more than Marathi and Andhra cuisine is gradually replacing the once popular Maharashtrian delicacies.. .Migrants from Andhra Pradesh today own most of the town's hotels, lodges and other business (Deshpande, 2005).

It is evident that even outside the temple visitors' interactions are primarily commercial exchanges that are tailored to capitalize on difference. Moreover, the retaining of authority by the trust to conduct religious activities and to control the pilgrimage economy leaves limited scope for engagement for locals as hosts and also for visitors as performers. Clearly in Shirdi, the heterogeneity of visitors and the absence of strong social relationships between guests and hosts contribute to reinforcing their differences rather than fostering a sense of togetherness amongst visitors.

Thus, communitas in contemporary religious travel is better explained as a phenomenon occurring along a spatial and temporal scale in which the mediation of pilgrimage activity by social actors is consequential in developing a contact zone (Pratt, 1991) where communitas may be achieved. While religious specialists aim to retain clients for long and pursue them for active engagement in rituals, the public trust is more inclined with organizing darshan and supporting facilities. Based on my preliminary observations, I would suggest that the concentrated and unidirectional spatial activity around the temples (sacred core) limits the opportunities for occurrence of communitas to the core areas. In comparison, the more the religious activity is dispersed over a larger area/space, the greater the likelihood that communitas is fostered. However, a detailed ethnographic work on the phenomenology of these different models would be required to investigate whether this hypothesis is borne out by devotees' testimony itself. A variation of this is the walking routes where devotees often travel collectively. In a temporal scale, the longer the duration of contact, the higher the possibility of communitas. However, if this contact extends beyond the particular event or visit in pilgrimage site, it may result in long term social bonding, i.e. devotees may continue to be bound in camaraderie at home or in visiting other pilgrimage sites together.

Conclusion

As has been discussed in many scholarly papers, when people come together in a pilgrimage site, communitas may often occur among people from varying social backgrounds. However, as this paper has demonstrated, in South Asian pilgrimages, mediation of visitor experiences by authorized mediators ("hosts") is necessary to create the physical and social conditions for communitas to occur. It has also been shown that depending on the nature of mediation, different situations generate different possibilities for the fostering of communitas. Although I considered two examples, that of Tuljapur (an informally managed site through social network of religious specialists) and Shirdi (a site associated with a charismatic saint and managed by a public trust), between them they cover a range of pilgrimage sites where similar findings about communitas may be generally applicable. A diverse range of religious functionaries including gurus, priests, and temple managers assist visitors in performing pilgrimage rituals and facilitate arrangements for lodging and boarding in Tuljapur. In Shirdi, these functions are handled by a charitable public trust that administers the shrine, and guides and tour operators and hotels that mediate movement and experience of visitors. The latter is also relevant for pilgrimages in Western societies. For instance, Di Giovine (2009) has found similar kinds of religious tourism activity in case of Padre Pio in southern Italy. Broadly, this paper has illustrated how spatiality, temporality and community composition of pilgrimage performances and rituals generate different intensities of unity and differences amongst visitors and between visitors and hosts. In so doing, it contributes to the literature on communitas and the situations in which it is fostered in contemporary religious tourism, a phenomenon that has received little attention so far.

Using a geographical perspective, this paper has drawn attention to two analytical categories, spatiality and temporality, in "situating" communitas. It has also shown the significance of the comparative model of informal versus formal management of a temple's sacred complex and its potential to shape pilgrims' experience. However, analysis of the experiential dimension of communitas, given these new parameters, requires an in-depth study focused on the phenomenological experience of devotees. For that matter, a concrete definition of communitas in a rapidly changing environment of religious tourism has to be rethought. Further and detailed probing of behavior and experience through interviews of devotees would allow for more insights to be made regarding the conceptual exploration of the phenomenon of communitas along temporal and spatial lines. Finally, additional research would allow us to gain more insights into the dynamics of social relationships between religious and non-religious actors and visitors given that global forces continue to generate more religious tourism and bring more non-traditional and non-religious actors (tourism infrastructure of hotels, tour agencies, etc) to pilgrimage sites.

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