



The Role of Ritual Tourism in Preserving Hossein's Mourning Culture; Case Study of Masouleh Town

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Received: Aug. 10, 2018; Accepted: Feb. 11, 2019

Extended Abstract

Religious rituals and mourning ceremonies are amongst the most important resources of reaching identity intellectual roots and the lifestyle by the individuals who collectively exercise and continue them in a certain region. Hosseini mourning ritual ceremony, in Masouleh Residential Estate, is the performance of traditional rites that put on their symbolic guise on the body of the Muslims' lamentations after the entry of Islam into this region and updated the traditional ritual style for expressing sympathy with Imam Hussein (PBUH) and his companions. This cultural phenomenon that has been registered as a spiritual heritage needs to be seen so that its practical manifestations can be preserved and guarded hence not lost. Ritual tourism with its dramatic feature, repetition and redisplay of the course of event narrates the ritual actions and reactions before the eyes of the tourists and acts as a powerful medium for preserving the unique and lean characteristics of the regions. The present study is a descriptive and survey research that has been conducted through taking advantage of such means as interview and questionnaire based on convenience and snow ball methods amongst 340 domestic and foreign tourists of Hosseini mourning rites in Masouleh residential estate in 2018. The results of the investigations and analyses of the tourists' ideas and outputs based on SPSS and Excel are expressive of the considerable role of ritual tourism in the preservation and guarding of the traditional rites and the necessity for equipping the region's tourism infrastructures. In line with purposive guidance of the tourists and benefiting from the ritual tourism, the holding of specialized and well-planned tours is amongst the primary suggestions of the present study.

Keywords: rite, ritual performance, ritual tourism, Hossein's mourning, Masouleh town

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INTRODUCTION

The historical Masuleh Residential Estate is enumerated amongst the persistent heritages of Iran and the world's tourism and it attracts many tourists from various regions in Iran and the world to itself during all days of the year for its unique architectural and cultural properties. However, the present study approaches this region from the bright lenses of exercising traditional Hosseini mourning rites and the tourism attractions of this large religious event. The study performs detailed investigation and research on the practicing of traditional mourning and religious rites in the historical residential estate of Masuleh and explores the trans-temporal and trans-spatial effects of these rituals in two time cross-sections, i.e. before Muharram (overture rituals) and during the first ten days of Muharram and afterwards, from the perspective of ritual tourism. The study tries finding answers to the following questions: can the ritual tourism preserve and revitalize the traditional culture of Hosseini mourning in the historical residential estate of Masuleh? And, are there appropriate tourism infrastructures for the development of ritual tourism in the studied region?

PURPOSE

Based on the ideas proposed by the sociologists, humanists and researchers of tourism area, the function of the rituals and ceremonies in corroborating the solidarity spirit and reproduction of coherence and unity amongst the studied society members and taking advantage of a cultural event for the preservation and guarding of the traditional rituals have been taken into account in this article. Ritual tourism serves a dual function in this study. On the one hand, it contributes to the retention of a traditional rite and prevention of its abandonment by the future generations and, on the other hand, it would be followed by economic income production and sustainable development of the studied region.

METHODOLOGY

The present study makes use of a descriptive-analytical research. The information has been gathered based on library research for the investigation of the theoretical foundations and expanding the field knowledge and method based on questionnaire distribution amongst the participants of the ritual ceremonies. According to the fact that the researcher's approach is limited to the specific aspect of ritual tourism, use has been made of convenience and snow ball sampling method for selecting from amongst the 340 participants of the tour programs specific to the ritual tourism. The information collection from the tourists was continued till reaching the statistical volume saturation. The questions existent in the questionnaire were classified in respect to the study subject and, before being administered to the main study sample, its validity and credibility was verified and confirmed by the

professors and experts. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient and values equal to 0.85 and 0.77 were respectively obtained for the variables "the capability of Hosseini mourning rites' tourism attractions" and "holding systematic specialized ritual tourism trips". Moreover, in this study, other instruments like interview with local society and tourists as well as observation were utilized for depicting the rituals. In order to offer various tests and establish meaningful relationships between the variables, use was made of such software packages as SPSS19 and Excell2010.

RESULT

Since years ago, the people from Masuleh have been busy exercising ceremonial rituals that put on their symbolic guise on the body of the Muslims' lamentations in a historical ground and after the entry of Islam into this region and updated their ritual method for expressing sympathy with Imam Hussein (PBUH) and his assistants. These rituals that are spread over a period of time from Qorban Feast till the first ten days of Muharram Al-Haram are as explained in the table below:

Table 1. Hosseini mourning rituals in the historical residential estate of Masuleh

| Title of ritual | Holding date | Holding time | Holding place |
|----------------------------|--|---------------------|--|
| Muharram's overture | 11th of Dhu Al-Hijjah (Qorban Holiday) | Noon | The precinct of Awn Ibn Ali (PBUH) Mosque |
| Commencement of mourning | Arrival of Muharram Al-Haram | Night | Four neighborhoods in Masuleh |
| Tub placement | 5th of Muharram Al-Haram | Day | Starting from Maleki house and Kesheh Sar Mosque towards the rest of neighborhoods |
| Making ensigns and pennons | 6th of Muharram Al-Haram | Before the sunset | Awn Ibn Ali (PBUH) Mosque |
| Farewell | 8th of Muharram Al-Haram | Afternoon | Awn Ibn Ali (PBUH) |
| Hosseini Tasou'a | 9th of Muharram Al-Haram | Morning | His Highness Abu Al-Fazl (PBUH) Mosque |
| Hosseini Ashoura | 10th of Muharram Al-Haram | 2 AM till afternoon | The entire Masuleh |
| Passion play | 10th and 12th of Muharram Al-Haram | Afternoon | Masuleh's bazar |
| Muharram's overture | 11th of Dhu Al-Hijjah (Qorban Holiday) | Noon | The precinct of Awn Ibn Ali (PBUH) Mosque |

DISCUSSION

Diversification of the tourism destinations' attractions, especially in well-known regions frequently visited by the tourists, is an important factor in preserving and survival of the destinations and the sustainable development of the tourism in them. Ritual tourism is an alternative tourism form that can be considered as one of the





priorities of tourism development in many of the communities if it pays sufficient attention to the principles of sustainability. On the other hand, the rituals and ceremonies are served as powerful instruments for exploring the nested layers of the social plays and dramas and creation of a “holy time” in every society and giving value to the places.

CONCLUSION

In alternative tourism, attentions are directed at such a characteristic as being accompanied by less side effects and accountability of the tourists entering a region. Guiding the tourists towards presence in programmed and purposeful tours and providing them with the tourism packages of Hosseini mourning rites and events in Masuleh are the best form of region’s taking advantage of the tourists and this can be actualized via creating chances for advertising Hosseini mourning rites in Masuleh within the format of multimedia programs from internet websites, radio and television, virtual and social networks and so on for the presence of the ritual tourists.

NOVELTY

The distinctive feature of the present study from the prior researches lies in its approach to ritual tourism from the perspective of the preservative and revitalizing role of the ancient traditions of Hosseini mourning in the well-known, historical, natural and social region of Masuleh residential estate and the issue had not been dealt with up to now from the view angle of ritual tourism that is a very important factor in diversification of alternative tourism.

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Vol. 12
No. 2
Summer 2019