

The Syncretism of *Mazar Pahad* in Great Andaman

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ABSTRACT

The Andaman Islands are known to outside world as the abode of surviving Negrito population with their distinct hunting and gathering mode of living. Slowly their population was dwindled due to man-made and natural causes and are restricted to demarcated areas. At the same time it is also popularly known as the melting pot of diverse ethnic as well as cultural backgrounds. In post Independent India, many other ethnic populations immigrated at these islands due to various reasons and living together. The contact of multi cultures reflects pan Indian identity and it is exhibited in socio-cultural performances of Port Blair city which is a capital for Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Here the diverse cultural traditions overlap and fuse together as a result of day to day contact and close inter personnel relations in a geographically isolated territory. This is a unique situation, which can be understood not by comparison rather by micro level study on the nature of syncretism that prevails in these Islands.

With this backdrop, the present study made an effort to understand the functioning of Hindu-Muslim syncretism which represents the characteristic feature of Andaman where ethnic communities observe and follow diverse traditions. Besides this, an attempt is also made to highlight the formation of a syncretic centre, observation of mixed sacred performances and its psychological impact on the surrounding as well as visiting population that underlies the mutual coexistence of diverse traditions.

INTRODUCTION

Religious faith is a matter of belief that combines the people of different regions to lead an orderly social life. Of course diversity of beliefs and practices may exist in a particular given territory, but it does not restrain the people from practicing traits of other religious faiths. As a result of this amalgamation, both religious syncretism and conflicts are taking place very often through out the world. In the present context of development of civilizations, the rate of synthesis, assimilation or adjustment is higher in the case of groups that are territorially close rather than alien cultures. This stage of coming together of civilizations make popular of the syncretic religious faiths especially in developing countries like India. Furthermore it is catalytic in building national character with the composite culture

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that developed as a result of mutual co-existence of diversity. As such, the word 'syncretism' got significance in understanding the social realities in the belief pattern of the toiling masses; in turn those realities permit a peaceful social coexistence among discrete entities. Though this process may be an unconscious, but it has highly philosophical as well as popular expressions.

Thus the concept of syncretism has become significant in the present scenario of globalization and has different connotations in terms of the context. From the meaning of it, one cannot limit the syncretism merely to a word, as it encompass social phenomenon. Though the word syncretism got momentum in recent past, it is widely prevalent before the rise of Christianity in the world. The factors like trade, invasion, migration, inter marriages, missionary activity of the mystics and mendicants, positive role of the state, drive for independence etc., motivate the local people towards the reverence of dominant group or mutual exchange of their cultural traits.

Conceptual framework

It is so that this phenomenon varies according to socio-political and geographical factors. As such it is imminent to review the conceptual definitions that are derived from the empirical studies to derive the suitable framework of the phenomena of the present study *Mazar* in Great Andaman, since this sacred place is worshipped by the cross section of people from Andaman Islands not limiting the caste, creed and religious boundaries.

The scientific study of religious beliefs and practices are being carried out by anthropologist since from the beginning of the discipline. It is Emile Durkheim (1915) who did the first systematic study of religion through encyclopaedic treatise of pre-modern religions. The subsequent works on religion is based on functionalist approach and failed to address the issues of modern religion. One of the causalities of this approach is the study of syncretism.

The word syncretism has been derived from Greek words 'syn' means 'with' and 'krasis' means 'mixture' which combined to form 'synkrasis' a mixing together (quoted in Shaw and Stewart 1994). Later on it became syncretism means fusing or binding of elements. But from social science point of view, it is defined as phenomena rather than a synthesis. In *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, James Moffatt (1921) described syncretism as "*unconscious, wide-spread tendency, due to or fostered by some readjustment of political relationships or by some clash of civilizations*". It is possible by a new philosophical synthesis as well as by a political rearrangement, but the ultimate goal is the unification of deities. This statement reveals that any particular form of religion is no longer continued to remain same, but there is a possibility of integration of superior cultural features without changing the original principles of the particular religion in question. Cutting across the political boundaries, Asad (1983) compared syncretism with 'natural religion', which according to him is "*...a belief in and worship of a supreme power which is found among all human beings*". But it is too broad and very general in nature.

The Dictionary of Sociology (1944) termed syncretism as "*the process of amalgamation of conflicting, or at least different, parties or principles of cultures. More specifically assimilation...*" In this definition assimilation is taken as an important parameter in understanding the syncretism. However this does not explain the matrix of economic and

political aspects involved in it. The canvas of syncretism widens perceptively if these parameters are taken into consideration. Syncretism refers to the mutual acceptance of elements of two religions – textual or other (Roy Burman, 2002). The ‘other’ in the sense that socio or political processes accompanied with it.

From these definitions, syncretism is projected as fusion or blending of religious beliefs and practices either through the identification of gods, taking over of observances or selection and reinterpretation of traits of one culture by another. Obviously it can only happen if the two cultures are in regular and day-to-day contact. This contact is being facilitated by popular sacred places of Hindu, Muslim and Christian and others. Beside this popularity, the factors like associated beliefs, migration, acculturation, geographical isolation, assimilation and so on facilitate the mutual acceptance or respect of each other’s religious traits. The case studies on syncretic shrines in India undertaken by scholars reveals that day to day interaction between the different religious people are catalytic in the maintenance of syncretism (Roy Burman, 2002 and Das, 2003.).

Whereas in the case of *Mazar*, it is combination of several factors underlying in maintaining the syncretism in Island situation and is unique. It is the disciplined and pious life of a prisoner led to the formation of syncretic religious pilgrim centre in this archipelago. Before going into the details of this syncretic shrine, it is pertinent to understand settlement pattern of the island, as it manifesting the characteristics of pluralistic society. Altogether there are four tribal communities namely Great Andamanese, Jarawa, Onge, and Sentinelese are considered as autochthones of this archipelago and their origin is still not confirmed scientifically. Apart from them, many people were coming and settling Andaman Island for various reasons in pre and post Independent era. The most important of outsiders who first settled on this island were the British to control over the sea routes to Bengal or Malaya from their base in Madras.

The plan of settlement of the island came to materialised after the so-called Sepoy Mutiny was crushed by the British in 1857. They felt the need of a place where they could safely incarcerate the large number of freedom fighters that fell in their hands after the first war of independence of India. It would not have been prudent at all to keep them in ordinary prisons on the mainland where they would have received sympathy from their jailors and wardens. Andaman appeared to be an ideal place for this purpose as it is separated from the mainland by the sea. Thus people from mainland India irrespective of caste, creed, community, religion or social status were incarcerated to this island and released to stay on this island after serving their sentence.

During this period, the British transported two other groups from the mainland viz. the Moplas and the Bhandus. The Moplas came from present day Kerala and the Bhandus from present day Uttar Pradesh. At the time of transportation the Moplas were Muslims and the Bhandus Hindu. Beside them, who were thus transported to this place belonged to various religions, class, caste, creed, and linguistic group and belonged to all age groups. But they had one thing in common viz. love for the motherland. For her they were ready to make the supreme sacrifice and were destined to spend the rest of their life on this penal island. Later they were joined by other groups i.e., Bengali refugees of East Bengal, Tamil refugees of Sri Lanka, Telugu fisher folk of Andhra Pradesh, Oran and

other tribal groups of Ranchi etc., who were either transported from the mainland either for settlement package or to serve for the development of Andaman. It is followed by the migration and settlement of diverse groups on account of government service, business, wage labour and so on.

What ever may be the reason for the coming of the various groups to the Island; a pluralistic society was thus finally formed. But one point must be kept in mind that none of those who live in Port Blair today are autochthones of Andaman. They are all outsiders and have come to *kalapani* under duress. Today they are laying the foundations of a new 'Mini India' where an individual will be recognised for his intrinsic worth not for his pedigree. It is in such situations of culture contact where different religions historically having been brought together to get a chance of affecting each other that syncretism can come about.

As such people from diverse ethnic as well as cultural backgrounds come to this place and living together. In this case contact of multi cultures can be seen in day to day life which reflects pan Indian identity i.e., *Local*. Here not the only two cultures instead many cultures fuse together as a result of observance of varied traditions with in a limited territory. This is a unique situation, which can be understood not by comparison rather by micro level study on the nature of syncretism that prevails in these Islands. Thus the present study made an effort to understand not only the functioning of Hindu-Muslim syncretism but the cultural fault line of Andaman Island in particular.

Objective of the study

The present study mainly intended to understand why and how this particular *Mazar* (tomb of a Muslim patriot) is still revered by the residents of this island irrespective of caste and creed. An attempt also been made to understand the factors causing syncretism, cultural admixture and its impact on its hinterland Port Blair and vice versa. Further the process of adjustment that is taken place in the study area also attempted to exhibit the spirit of tolerance to outer world.

Methodology

For the present study, primary data has been collected from the intensive fieldwork at *Mazar Pahad* in South Point of Port Blair town in different phases by using qualitative anthropological techniques. They are mainly participant observation, case studies of knowledgeable and aged people, schedules, and interviews by using structured questionnaires. Besides this, door-to-door random household survey was conducted (100 samples) in the surrounding of *Mazar* settlement to understand people's perception about the sacred place. Secondary data has been collected from the records of Andaman Wakf Board, available Urdu scriptures, published books and articles.

The study area

For the present study, *Mazar* of South Point is purposively selected for understanding the process of syncretism. This shrine is just eight kilometers away from Port Blair and located on the way to famous tourist place i.e., Carbines Cove. Around the *Mazar* there are a few trees and the ground is covered with sand. In the front of the *Mazar* structure

is the sea. By the side there is a big *nalla* (drainage), flowing towards the sea. Previously it was simply a graveyard. Only fishermen and cattle herders used to come to this place and this area used to remain vacant. In the course of time surrounding area of *Mazar* is occupied people of diverse communities and settled. As such, this area known as *Mazar Pahad* in local parlance.

The physical structure of *Mazar* consists of three separate tombs surrounded by a compound wall. At the entrance main mausoleum of Khairabadi is located followed by Liyakat Ali. A Peepal (*Ficus religiosa*) tree is present besides the Liyakat Ali's tomb, which is used by the visitors to tie the sacred knots. The grave of Rahmatiya (earlier care taker of *Mazar*) is present underneath of this Ficus tree. One interesting thing is that a Mosque is also established in the precincts of *Mazar* compound for the purpose of *namaz* by the visitors as well as the settlers.

Historical Background of *Mazar*

The first war of Independence was fought in the sub-continent of India in 1857 against British imperialism. Though not directly involved, Andaman also soon came into its purview when the victorious British started moving the patriot designated convicts to the penal settlements of these islands. One such detainee was Hajrat Allama Fazul Haque Khairabadi, who belonged to the court of the last Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar of Delhi. To really appreciate the history we have to go back about 150 years when the East India Company was ruling India. India was seething under its mis-rule on the one hand and craze for acquisition of native kingdoms by the top officials of the Company on the other. The antagonism towards British is exploded in the form of a revolt in 1857, which has been called the 'Sepoy Mutiny' by the British and the 'First War Of Independence' by the Indians of Independent India.

One of the innocent victims of this conflagration was a gentle soul attached to the Court of last Mughal Empire in Delhi. In this discourse Hajrat Allama is variously referred to and today in Port Blair he is referred to as *Mazar baba*. As he belonged to Khairabad district in present day Uttar Pradesh, he was colloquially known as Khairabadi. After the fall of Delhi, he also fell in the hands of the British. He was possibly protected from the gallows by his frail health and advanced age but these could not protect him from transportation to the Penal Colony of Andaman for life.

His pious personality and extensive knowledge soon brought him in the limelight even in the dark surroundings of the penal settlement of Andaman. The fellow convicts used to turn to him to get at least mental peace from the harsh conditions of the penal settlement. The saintly personality of Khairabadi was soon noticed by his British captors and being impressed by the same they allowed him limited freedom. With this, Khairabadi stayed on at Ross Island, which was a sort of capital of the Penal Settlement and where the British officials lived. On this island he settled in a hut. His daily requirements were met by people nearby his settlement.

Almost simultaneously another compatriot who was also captured around another centre of Sepoy Mutiny viz. Lucknow by the name Janab Liaquat Ali had also been freed by the British and was passing a mendicants life in Port Blair. He had first settled what is

now known Aberdeen jetty. He is attracting handsome gathering due to his pious life at this place and blocking whatever traffic there was during this period and he was shifted to near by Fire Brigade. There also his presence created similar problems and ultimately he had to shift again. This time he shifted to a rather lonely place near South Point where he settled and made a small hut near which he planted a peepal tree.

Janab Khairabadi was continued to live a hard and difficult life in Ross Island. In due course his life came to an end. His body was allowed by the authorities to be taken to Port Blair for burial. Oral history reveals that when his son reached Port Blair with the release order to take his father back to the mainland he saw his father's coffin being off loaded from a boat. Whatever may be the case; Liaquat Ali took possession of the body and buried it by observing all Islamic rites below the *Ficus* tree, which is very near to his hut. Out of reverence and love for his departed friend, Liaquat Ali maintained the grave of Khairabadi clean and well cared for during his lifetime. When he died he was also buried next to his friend. For some time people around took good care of the twin graves but soon these became a couple of dilapidated structures.

The whole picture of the *Mazar* reveals that it has no great historical significance. It is not the *Mazar* of a prophet or a great saint who is known to the whole world in general or even Muslims in particular. It does not figure in the holy places of Muslims or does not even find a place even in the holy places in India. Still it has definitely built its own place in the mindset of people of this island. People pay homage to a great saint rather than a freedom fighter because the people say that they have a great faith on this place. Hence the people visit this place in large numbers along with their families and offer prayer.

Even the inanimate graves of the patriots seemed to give this place a halo. For the visitors and settlers either of them singly or collectively is *Baba* a term by which an elderly respectable person is to be addressed or referred to. Not many of the locals are really even aware of whose grave which one is. They refer it as '*Baba ka Mazar*' and when anybody plans to perform any ritual at the *Mazar*, it is simply performed at the *Mazar* without any reference to who's *Mazar*. So it is observed that the people no longer referred to the grave yard in general or to the grave of Khairabadi or Liyakat Ali in mundane terms. They used to refer these graves with due respect and soon they were referring to *Baba ka Maqbara* or *Baba ka Mazar* which was soon shortened to *Mazar* and in time. The hillock at the base of which the graves are located became known as *Mazar Pahad*. Over the passage of time the *Mazar* has retained its importance in the mindset of the local people. Thus, today also a good number of people visit the *Mazar* regularly. What is interesting is the reverence that this *Mazar* gets from Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and other religious faiths.

The devotees came with the sacrificial animal and food materials and cooked near the *Mazar*, which was served to the guests after first offering to the *Baba*. The person who held the feast went to the neighbouring areas and invites the people to participate in the feast. At that time no organisation took care of the *Mazar* neither was anybody residing in there. The *Mazar* compound was without a boundary. The local people used to put on an oil lamp in the evening. They used to offer a prayer at the *Mazar* before going back home. The devotees who held the feasts clears the surrounding of the *Mazar*.

It is in this ambiguity that the present study has to identify the first kernel of syncretism and when probed the situation in depth interesting points come out. A point worth mentioning at this juncture is that the graves of a couple of Muslim patriots have become a place of reverence and social gathering in just about a century. Though it is very difficult to prove one way or the other possibly the fact that both Khairabadi and Liaquat Ali were convicted prisoners of the British won them a place in the psyche of the local people who were by and large Hindu. The sentiment of patriotism perhaps won over the sentiment of narrow religious feelings. This sentiment was further strengthened by various stories and rumors regarding the miraculous powers of Baba, which soon started floating.

Formative period of *Mazar* and its present status

Since its inception (in the closing years of the 19th century), *Mazar* has under gone various changes both in terms of people looking after it and the physical structure. In fact the miraculous powers of Baba and the popular stories associated to him brought a metamorphosis of these destitute graves into almost a place of pilgrimage along with the change in the socio-political scenario of latter settlers in its surrounding over a period of just more than fifty years is itself an interesting point to study.

In the initial years, maintenance of *Mazar* was taken over by Muslim clerics who were associated with the Aberdeen Bazaar Mosque. With the gradual development of pilgrimage to this sacred place from distant places in Andaman, internal management problem was cropped up regarding deployment of workers, sharing of donations and maintenance of the *Mazar*. The matter is sternly dealt with the *Mullahs* (religious elders), the local administration and other concerned people. As a result of mutual discussions, it was decided that the responsibility be vested with the Wakf Board, which is nominally under the Administration control.

This land over which the entire built up structure of the *Mazar* Durgha Complex stands is in South Point. It was never formally allotted to the erstwhile *Mazar* Durgha management committee, which was functioning earlier to maintain *Mazar*. Despite the fact that the majority of the opinion was for the Wakf Board to take over the *Mazar*. There were some individuals who felt that their interest would be hampered if control of *Mazar* was taken away from their hands. Of course the committee claimed statutory status and request to the administration for allotment of the land. But it is not materialized by the administration. Finally, the *Mazar* Durgha committee voluntarily hands over the power to *Wakf* board on 2nd June 1998. On subsequent request from the *Wakf* Board for allotment of the land, after revenue survey by the administration, it was duly notified in the Official Gazette and registered with the *Wakf* Board under the Act of 1954. According to that notification, *Mazar* Durgha is located on a land measuring only 0.08 Hect. (800 square meters).

Though Administration officially allotted the plot of land in the name of the *Mazar*, a suit was filed in the court of law claiming the right over the place by the descendents of the original land-holder who are residing around. They claim that the present land was allotted to their father by the administration as a part of settlement package when they were repatriated. Hence, now they are demanding their legal rights over the maintenance of *Mazar*. As such the matter is in the court and is presently sub-judice. Due to this problem, the Wakf Board is unable to undertake any further development of the structure.

Sacred Performances at *Mazar*

This place is never used as a place of rendezvous for young boys and girls because this place is very lonely and isolated. On the other hand police patrolling is rather regular for the protection of the *Mazar* as well as the safety and security of the tourists. So no case was found of such any antisocial activities around the *Mazar*. So we can say that the local persons treat the *Mazar* as a holy place. By association with the dead bodies of two saintly personalities, the area has acquired a holiness of its own. Though illicit liquor brewing and drinking is quite prevalent in the nearby *basti* (settlement area), nobody enters the *Mazar* while in intoxicant state. The devotees come to pay regards and receive blessing of *Mazar Baba*.

It is worth mention to state that several religious performances are celebrated at this place ranging from simple prayer salutation to ritual activities, from offerings of new cloth (*chaddar*), incense sticks, sandal paste, offering of sweets, offerings of goat and fowls, knotting of cloth to the peepal tree, distribution of amulets, talisman and ritual shave etc. Thus the sacred performances observed at *Mazar* can be organised into the following categories for holistic understanding of the *Mazar*. They are mainly

- ÿ *Mundan* (Tonsure Ceremony)
- ÿ *Dawat* (feast after fulfilment of vows)
- ÿ Other performances

***Mundan*:(Offering of first hair)**

Of the performances stated above, *mundan* is considered as significant as it display the syncretic practice of both Hindu as well as Muslim performances simultaneously at *Mazar*. The process of removing first hair is observed according to the Hinduistic tradition of hair offering to the god. Once this process completes, the remaining offerings are held as per Islam and it is usually performed under the guidance of *Moulvi* (Muslim priest). When the practice started is anybody's guess. It is quite possible that some father and mother who was Hindu wanted to perform the *Mundan* ceremony for their child and finding no suitable place on the island 60 years ago did it here without a Hindu priest performing sanskritic rituals. Since then at least for the residents of *Mazar Pahad* that has become the norm.

Today the practice has got further associated with the case of non-fertile couples. With a view to attain children, they keep a secret vow at *Mazar* and tie a piece of cloth to the peepal tree hoping to be blessed by the Baba that will fulfill their desire by giving them a child. After fulfillment of their desire, they perform the *mundan* at *Mazar* with utmost devotion.

When a worshipper performs *mundan*, first the child is given special bath before the hair is barbed. The parents select a plot of land either under the *Ficus* tree or besides the Baba's grave. Then turmeric water is sprinkled on the ground for purification and draw *rangoli* (colorful sketch) where the child is supposed to sit. A brass container filled with turmeric water, mango leaves and coconut (resembles *purnakumbam* of Hindus which

is kept as auspicious symbol during worship) is placed in midst of the drawn *rangoli*. They arrange two wood pieces for sitting the child as well as barber. A new white cloth is kept under seating portion of the child. Then mother's sister holds the *atta* paste in two palms and wraps from time to time to prevent the fall of removed hair on the ground. The mother and her sister (*masi* of the child) assist the barber in removing the hair by holding the child. Then barber smears the head of the child with a kind of paste, which is made up of turmeric (*haladi*) mixed with clarified butter or oil. After completion of hair removing, the barber collects hair into *atta* paste and tells the parents to dispose in the open sea. After this ritual act, feast giving party sacrifice a goat to *Mazar* Baba as a part of their promise.

At the time of sacrifice the *moulvi* who actually does the ritual part of severing the jugular vein of the sacrificial animal according to the Muslim tradition. Where in people assists *moulvi* in the *halal* (half-cut according to Muslim slaughtering rules) sacrifice by holding the animal properly. Then *moulvi* utter chantings for sometime and cut the throat of the animal. Then the Muslim butchers make ready the sacrificial meat for the proposed feast which is followed by prayer. When the meal is ready, then they come in procession to offer first serving to Baba and *moulvi* who conducts prayer for *mundan* child. Then the child is taken to inside the first saintly grave along with family members for worship. Then *moulvi* puts his hand on child's head and prays for sometime. After the prayer, elderly male relatives drop some money in the donation box as per their wish. This is followed by grand feast on its premises to the present gathering. Besides this, invitees of the concerned party and from the settlement area, *Mazar* committee members and even passers also participates in such feasts. There is no restriction in common dinning. The belief is that they have to exhaust the cooked food there itself and not supposed to take back to their residence.

Dhawat (feasting)

The followers generally kept secret vows at *Mazar* on various tasks ranging from seeking of employment, marriage proposal, recovery from sickness, purchase of new motor vehicles and opening of commercial outlets etc. Some of the women also vow by tying a knot to the Ficus tree for conception which is a common tradition followed by Hindus. In case those vows are fulfilled, then the followers fulfil their promise by offering sacrifice and grand feast in the premises of *Mazar*. Whenever the devotees intend to arrange feast at *Mazar* first they approach *mutavalli* (*Mazar* worker) regarding booking of dinning hall and kitchen that are attached to *Mazar*. Before confirmation of the feast date, *mutavalli* thoroughly verify the booking register to check whether any other person reserve the hall on that particular day or not. In case somebody reserves on the proposed date, then *mutavalli* suggest next available date for the convenience of staff and place. In case hall is vacant on the proposed day, *mutavalli* enter their name in the register and allot the date on their choice. Soon after completion of these formalities, then the entire staff i.e. butcher (Muslim), Safaiwala (Tamil), helpers (Hindu) makes their presence to help in making necessary arrangements for the proposed feast by extending all sorts of help.

On that particular day, the concerned party come to this place with their promised animals to offer sacrifice at *Mazar* early in the morning hours. Women and aged people are engage

in preparatory works for the feast. Where as men busy in offering and slaughtering of the feast animal at *Mazar*'s slaughtering ground. Not only the feast giving party, but all the invitees also offer prayer separately in front of tomb by lightening incense sticks and candles. The person concerned of the secret oath is then performs special worship inside the tomb and offer first serving to *Baba*.

There are some rules and regulations observed at *Mazar* regarding the feast. No body is allowed to carry out the feast items or utensils outside the premises of the *Mazar* Durgha for consuming. They have to eat only in the dinning hall. The main intention behind this inter-dinning may attribute to coexistence of people irrespective of their personnel identity i.e. caste, creed, sex and religion.

Other performances

Apart from *Mundan* and *Dawats*, the *Mazar* is a hub of various liturgical activities that are performed daily as well as on certain auspicious occasions. It is already stated that a Mosque is established within the same compound of *Mazar* in a separate room. Where in Muslims of South Point area frequent to perform *namaz* (formal prayer) daily as per the Islamic schedule (5 times in a day). Thus both religious performances are held concurrently and the reading of holy Quran does not disturb the ongoing activities of *Mundan* and other Hindu rites.

After undertaking of Wakf Board, the musical performance like *quavvali* (an artistic devotional singing) and other performances are observed once in a blue moon. These celebrations attract handsome gathering from South Point as well as from other parts of the Island. Regarding the performance of birth and death anniversaries of the pious personalities (*Urs*), on enquiry it is found that no such anniversary functions are observed at *Mazar*. The staff of *Mazar* stated, "*Since everyday festivity functions are common and hence no such separate birth or death anniversaries are observed at Mazar*".

Socio-religious significance of *Mazar*:

Interestingly syncretism transcended the religious sphere in this particular case of *Mazar* and went into such mundane sphere as patriotism for which the two main actors were transported to this place, the then penal colony. The first point that comes to the mind of even the most casual observer of the *Mazar* in this island is that in the universally believed Muslim mythology there is no mention of any saint or holy person by the name of *Khairabadi*. The maximum credit we can possibly give him is that he was a patriot par excellence who sacrificed his best years and ultimately died in a distant land away from his kith and kin. The metamorphosis of a couple of uprooted patriots into a supernatural being thereafter emerging syncretism is an interesting phenomenon in Andaman Islands.

Of course at least to start with Liyaqat Ali's devotion to the memory of *Khairabadi*, his loving care to the grave of his friend gave this place a halo. The pious way of life of Liyaqat Ali and the subsequent burial alongside *Khairabadi*'s grave on his death possibly raised the supernatural image of the graves further. Subsequently miracles of these saintly personalities for curing of prolonged illness to those who removed the carcasses of dead dog from the grave and lighted lamps every evening as a mark of respect.

As a matter of historical evidence of the deposition of sacred tombs of these two pious personalities, the people of South Point visit often to this place to offer worship as they feel a sense of possession. One can simply understand that people come here to pay a homage to a great saint rather than a freedom fighters because still the people say that “... *they have a great belief of this place because it is a miracle place and people’s desire fulfill here*”. This belief is crucial for attracting people of diverse religious backgrounds.

The syncretism is being facilitated further by the settlement of multi-ethnic people in the study area. The socio-economic survey revealed that 77% of non-local settlers and 23% of local settlers are visiting the *Mazar* in a week. This participation level can be shown from their linguistic background.

Table 1: Linguistic division of devotees visiting to Mazar

Sl.No.	Community	Devotees	Percentage
1	Tamil	28	36.36
2	Bengali	16	20.77
3	Malayalam	12	15.58
4	Telugu	9	11.68
5	Utter Pradesh	5	6.49
6	Punjabi	4	5.19
7	Haryanvi	1	1.29
8	Rajasthani	1	1.29
9	Bihari	1	1.29

A further analysis of the data shows that among the non-locals the largest number of visitors constitutes Tamil origin. They represent 36.36 percent of the total devotees visiting the *Mazar*. The people of West Bengal, Kerala and Andhra origin visiting *Mazar* constitute around 20.77%, 15.58%, and 11.68% respectively of total non-local community. On the other hand people from Haryana, Rajasthan and Bihar are the least in number (only one from each state) or only 1.29 percent each. From the foregoing analysis of data, it becomes clear that people of South Indian origin constitute the largest group i.e. 63.56% which goes to the *Mazar* to pay respect to the *Baba*. Among these the Tamil business class people form the majority.

A few points are obvious to even a casual but observed that these are playing crucial role in peaceful co-existence and mutual respect of different communities at *Mazar*. The first point that comes to the notice is that, it is a *Mazar*, which by definition is a Muslim graveyard. Today, at least, it is located in an area where the majority of the populations are non-muslims viz. Hindu. It is surprising that even in such a situation the *Mazar* has been able to retain its popularity.

Table 2: The settlements in *Mazar Pahad* area (South Point)

Sl.No.	Creed	H.Hs.	Population					
			Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
1.	Hindu	71	154	53.2	135	46.7	289	67.8
2.	Muslim	19	61	63.1	36	37.9	97	22.8
3.	Christian	10	23	57.5	17	42.5	40	9.4
	Total	100	238	55.9	188	44.1	426	

*H.Hs: Households

The above table reveals out of 100 households 71% of them were Hindu households while 19% and 10% are respectively Muslim and Christian families. The total population of these one hundred households is 426. The Hindu population is 289 individuals including 154 males and 135 female. Muslims are 97 individuals of which male number 61 and females 36 individuals. The third community i.e. is of Christians who constitute 49 individuals of which 23 are males and 17 are females. These figures compare very well with the population statistics of Port Blair in general where the Hindu is in majority. Predominance of Hindu population over the rest of population in the South Point area illustrates the characteristics of recessive syncretism in the region.

Though it is not always crowded in terms of crowds at places of worship or pilgrimage in the mainland, it is often crowded in terms of crowds at Port Blair. As has already been said offering feasts at the *Mazar* is quite popular both among Hindus and Muslims. Here lies the unifactory role of the *Mazar* that is revered equally by members of the major religious groups of the Islands of Andaman and Nicobar.

Table 3: Frequency of visits to *Mazar* by local households

Name	Daily	Weekly	Fortnight	Monthly	Annually	Never	Total
Hindu	5 (7.04%)	32 (45.07%)	8 (11.26%)	21 (29.57%)	1 (1.4%)	4 (5.63%)	71
Muslim	—	10 (52.63%)	1 (5.26%)	6 (31.57%)	—	2 (10.52%)	19
Christian	1 (10.0%)	—	—	—	—	9 (90.0%)	10
Total	6 (6.0%)	42 (42.0%)	9 (9.0%)	27 (27.0%)	1 (1.0%)	15 (15.0%)	100

From the above table it is obvious that out of 100 households among the Hindu, members of 5 households (7.04%) visit the *Mazar* daily, members of 32 (45.07%) households visit the *Mazar* weekly, members of 8 (11.26%) households visit the *Mazar* at least once a fortnight, members of 21 (29.57%) households do so once a month and one household (1.4%) is visiting *Mazar* annually, while members of 4 (5.63%) households never visit the *Mazar* as they have no faith in the Baba. Among Muslim community out of 19 households none goes to the *Mazar* daily, 10 (52.63%) households are visiting the *Mazar* weekly, 1 household (5.26%) is visiting *Mazar* fortnightly, while 6 households (31.57%) visit the *Mazar* only once a month. Only 2 households (10.52%) claim to have no faith in *Mazar* Baba.

Among the 10 Christian families in the area only one family (10%) is visiting *Mazar* and that too daily and the rest of the families (90%) are not visiting due to their attachment to the Church. It is obvious from the foregoing account that though the *Mazar* belongs to a Muslim, today is the property of the *Wakf* board, it is more popular among the Hindu than among the Muslim.

Peoples Attitude towards *Mazar*

Though people of South Point are belonging to different religious faiths and following their own calendrical festivals, most of them have great respect towards *Mazar Baba*.

Table 4: Expression of faith in *Mazar* Baba (community-wise)

Particulars	Hindu	Muslim	Christian	Total
Have Faith	67 (94.36%)	17 (89.47%)	1 (10%)	85
Have No Faith (New settlers)	4 (5.64%)	2 (10.53%)	9 (90 %)	15

Out of 71 Hindu households, 94.36% had faith on *Mazar* and 5% had no faith; where in case of Muslims, out of 19 households, 89% had faith and 10.53% had no faith. Christian households are having less belief as per the figures shown in the table when compared to other groups. By and large majority of the local settlers had faith (85%) in *Mazar* where as few households (15%) had no faith may be attributed to their new settlement in the area.

Features of Syncretism

One interesting point is according to Hindu tradition that the head of the sacrificial animal is slaughtered at a one stretch and placed before the god as a part of propitiation. Where as at *Mazar* it is performed according to Muslim tenets i.e., half cut (*halal*) of the animal to facilitate the flow of blood. It is performed by *Imam* otherwise in his absence some other staff of the *Mazar*, did the sacrifice according to the Islamic tenets. Since the sacrifice is done inside the premises of the *Mazar*, the Muslim tenet is strictly followed and the goat is actually slaughtered by the *moulvi*. Surprisingly the Hindu invitees do not object to eating this meat when it is served in feasts inside the *Mazar* though it is slaughtered in Muslim fashion by a *moulvi* and also cooked by a Muslim.

According to Hindu order, use of turmeric, vermilion, and sandal wood paste is common in image worship. The present study *Mazar* has showed a great capacity of incorporation of these sacred items notwithstanding Muslim. One such Hindu religious trait was incorporated into the daily worship at *Mazar* is the use of sandal wood paste. As Islam is a religion, which is totally against, image worship there is no place in the philosophy of this religion for sandal wood paste. On the other hand, it is extensively used in Hindu religion both in worship as well as part of ritual decoration. It will not be wrong to say that no Hindu ritual can be performed without sandal wood paste. Consequently Hindus who constitute the majority of *Baba's* followers in South Point tend to use sandal paste in the *Mazar* also though it violate the main tenets of Islam.

As a consequence in the sacred area, sandal wood paste is kept inside the tomb in a small vessel for the use of the devotees. After offering prayers to *Baba*, devotees dip their finger in the sandal wood paste and apply the same to their forehead, chest and neck. This practice is totally against the tenets of Islam but has been accepted by the officials of *Mazar* and may be said to be another manifestation of syncretism. Unlike the earlier situation where syncretism transcended the boundary of religious activity and entered the mundane sphere where Islam accepted a religious trait of the Hindus viz. the application of sandal paste without religious connotation. Followers of Islam rationalized it as a symbol of having visited the *Mazar*.

In fact use of sandal wood paste is not only confined to applying on the body. It is also used for worshipping of new vehicles. As per the prevailing system of worship at the *Mazar*, the new vehicle is brought there and parked outside. The owner then goes to the inside of the *Mazar* with incense sticks where he offers prayer as guided by the *moulvi*. On coming out, the vehicle owner alone performs *harati* of the vehicle with the same incense sticks. Afterwards the vehicle is driven over two citrus fruits (lemons). Furthermore a lightening lamp is made with the symbols of Islam and Hindu is kept in front of the first tomb where the visitors light incense sticks and the resultant ash is collected for smearing on forehead.

Possibly the most lively example of syncretism vis-a-vis the *Mazar* is seen when the Hindu followers of *Baba* perform the *mundan* of their children at the *Mazar*. *Mundan* is a typically a Hindu ritual involving the offering of first hair of the child. Traditionally it was performed for the child those who have kept a secret vow. To accomplish this task barber is called on and perform the *Mundan* in front of their kinsmen, relatives and friends. Even the removed hair was carefully disposed off ritually in sea. Kinsmen collected at the spot were duly given a feast. In the absence of traditional background at a new setting, many of the local residents of South Point have started performing a shortened version of this ritual without any incantation of mantras etc. Thus we find that the Hindus are ready to perform this ritual in a rather short cut method devoid of details and the Muslims controlling a *Mazar* are ready to allow at least that shortened form of ritual within the compound of a Muslim graveyard.

Adjacent to Rahmatiya's tomb, there exists a ficus tree, which is worshipped by the visitors by tying a sacred knot to this tree for the success of their secret vows. It is quite popular practice of little tradition of Hinduism rather than Islamic one. As such the prayers of the Mosque as well as the sacred knots of the people existing together in the same compound of *Mazar* even till today.

It is customary to offer first serving of feast food to *Baba* as there is no such hard and fast rule in Islam. The person offering the feast was required to supply seven servings of cooked food to the *Mazar* that in turn used to distribute the same to the staff and other destitute. The invitees will simply sit in different rows and be served from their respective kitchen. To somebody not used to this sort of sense of equality or egalitarianism it may appear very incongruous. No such practice was found during visit of *Mazar*. The sitting arrangement is very simple and absolutely on egalitarian principle. No tables or chairs are used. People sit on the ground on slightly raised cemented platform.

Thus the above mentioned factors supports the hypothesis of syncretism i.e., whenever two cultures come in contact or whatever may be the situation, the traits are always exchanged between the two cultures. As such this proposition gets reflected in the present study since both the Hindu and the Muslim have accepted traits from each other.

Conclusion

Before drawing any conclusion, one must keep in mind the fact that followers of various religions are unequally distributed in India in general and Port Blair in particular. If that statement taken into consideration, then one can find that the popularity of the *Mazar* is not religion or language specific. It shows that despite having religious, linguistic and cultural diversity, people of Andaman have mutual love and respect for each other and participate in each other's festivals and feasts. Their love and respect for *Mazar Baba* be it Janab Khairabadi or Liakat Ali transcends them from the narrow boundaries of personal religion. *Mazar* thus starts acting as a unifying factor.

Some times, it is very difficult to judge from the behaviour of the persons whether they belong to same family or caste or to different ones. Such unity of love and affection among different religions are rarely to be seen in any other place. This love and affection is also found in the *Mazar*. The fact that it is a Muslim *Mazar* never deters the people of other religions from visiting this holy place. It is so because they respect the holiness of *Baba*. So a large number of the devotees visit the *Mazar* every day both morning and evening to offer their prayers. It is high time that we try and find such unifying factors of pan-Indian applicability, which will in time help forge a unity of mind. In that situation the present generation no longer get bogged down by narrow boundaries of religion, language or geography.

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