



## WOMEN'S PILGRIMAGE RITES AND RITUALS (AS AN EXAMPLE OF TASHKENT OASIS)

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### ABSTRACT

*The article gave information about pilgrimage places of Tashkent oasis, and paid attention on women's pilgrimage rites. The article was illuminated based on tendencies of the accepted historical methods, comparative and logical analysis, impartiality and succession. As well as, the materials of the field expeditions were used which carried out in the pilgrimage places of (Zangi ota, Machit Ali, Parpi ota) in Tashkent region, during the years of 2017- 2020.*

*By the author, the participation of the women in the pilgrimage places, their pilgrimage rites were analysed and attitudes to pilgrimage places in Soviet period and after Independence were illuminated.*

*The article emphasizes the need for a comprehensive study of the shrines in terms of archeology, ethnology, agiography, linguistics, historical sources, documentation, Islamic studies, archival studies, which are an integral part of the Uzbek mentality in today's globalization process.*

**KEYWORDS:** *pilgrimage places, mentality, national value, Islam, saint cult, Zangi-ota, patriotism, culture, ritual, nature.*

### INTRODUCTION

In Central Asia and Uzbekistan, different religious convictions and outlooks, cults and also religions of Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Christian, shamanism and monism were wide spread. As a result of coming the Islamic faith, the archaic rites and rituals in the lifestyle of Central Asian people were not lost completely, on the contrary they adjusted to the Islamic traditions and organized the new symbiosis of the rituals and views. The local rites and rituals reflected Islam and religions before Islam are essential to realize the lifestyle and peculiarity of Uzbek nation. One of the ancient ceremonies is pilgrimage. In particular, pilgrimages, pilgrimage rites and traditions were shaped based on religious outlook of the Uzbek nation and became inseparable part of the Uzbek mental thought. Pilgrimage places, mausoleums, and cemeteries are not only the places where expressing the faith, receiving the spiritual nourishment, but also the places of meeting with people coming from different areas and as the center of exchanging with culture play a key role in building up the great feelings in new generations' bringing up. As well as, exploring the pilgrimage places helps to illuminate the historical basis of the Uzbek nations' culture, distinctiveness and distinctive rites.

### LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE TOPIC

The works written by the scientists as O.A.Sukhareva, G.P. Snesarov, V.N. Basilov have a great importance in the lifestyle of Central Asian nations and these books give scientific information about saint cult, pilgrimage rites and rituals.

After separating the USSR, the views to the sacred places were altered and researches were carried out with a view to the new spirit and national traditional values. The Islamic ceremonies were learnt by the contemporary scientists such as, S.N. Abashin, V.L. Ogudin and O.V. Gorshunova. But these explorations included mainly certain parts of the Uzbekistan and particular aspects of the saint cult. For instance, the ancientists such as, S.N. Abashin and V.L. Ogudin learnt mainly the Ferghana valley, the sacred places of the Karakalpakstan were explored by Yu. V. Knorozov. In her scientific works O.V. Gorshunova illuminated the importance of pilgrimages in the daily lifestyle of the women of the Ferghana valley, with the materials based on field expeditions. By the explorer the rituals connected with worships of Khazrat Ali, Khurkiz, Chakkatomar in Shakhmardan, Khoja Khizr Vali in Ferghana, Kaptarlik mazar in Margilon, « Girls' cemetery» in the village of the Mindan in Ferghana were studied. In the independent countries of Central Asia several explorations and scientific researches which



concerning religious issues are being carried out. In particular, in the article written by the European anthropologist Denis Kandiyot and the Uzbek ethnologist Nodira Azimova the Uzbek women's rituals were analysed and paid attention to the aspects connected with the elegance of pilgrimage places. It should be noted that, there is no exploration on pilgrimage places of the Tashkent oasis and explorations which carried out on women's pilgrimage rites.

## DATA SOURCE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The article was illuminated based on tendencies of the accepted historical methods, comparative and logical analysis, impartiality and succession. Likewise, the field expedition was used, which carried out in sacred places in Tashkent region (Zangi ota, Zarkent ota, Mechet Ali, Parpi ota) in the meanwhile 2017- 2020.

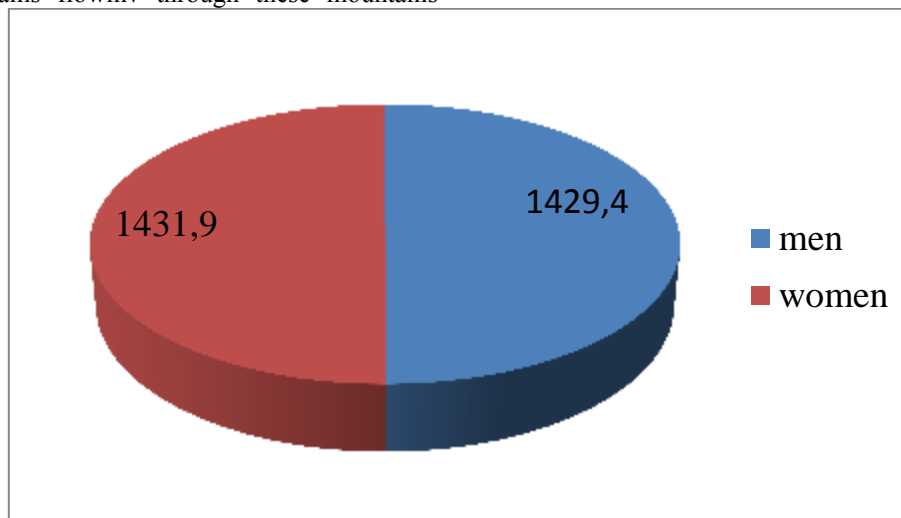
## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The Tashkent oasis is covered with the Tyan Shan from the west, with the chain of mountains Ugom, Piskom and Chotkol from the east, the tributary streams flow through these mountains

make up the Chirchik River. Because of region's landscape and the convenience of the natural, geographical conditions it was opened up from the Stone Age. (Kolbuloq, Khojirahmat, Khojakent).

Tashkent oasis which is famous with the names of Iloq, Binkent, Choch, Shosh was the important trade center at the crossroads between Europe and Asia, and it was named as «Sharq darvozasi» for its services as the Asian Gate, and became famous with its natural, geographical placing, history and rare memorial monuments. The Tashkent region adjacent to the Republic of the Kazakstan from the north, and northern west, to the Republic of the Kyrgyzstan from the northern west, to the Namangan region from the east, to the Republic of the Tadjikistan from the south and to the Syrdarya region from the southern north. Nowadays Tashkent region is considered as developed with its industry, agriculture, social and economical infrastructure culture and art. Particularly, 20% of industrial goods of the republic, 45% of electricity, 98% of coal, 43% of cement, 100% of the renting steel and metal are produced in Tashkent region.

According to the 1 of January, 2018, the population consisted of 2861,3.



**Photo.1 Distribution of the population of the Tashkent region according to their gender.**

Tashkent region owns rich cultural heritage. Therefore, in this oasis the worships and distinctive sacred places of local inhabitants are available, and they are located not only in big cities and in the centre of the region, but also in the countryside and neighborhood. The widespread terms of «Ziyarah» and «Ziyaratgah» (pilgrimage and pilgrimage place) are Arabian words and mean «going to somewhere». Ziyarah – is worship to revered cemeteries and sacred places. Valued pilgrimage places and ceremonies for centuries were interpreted as out of date. In the 30 th of the last century, the activities of the religious organizations (mechet, medrese, sacred places, mausoleum, school) were completely stopped and

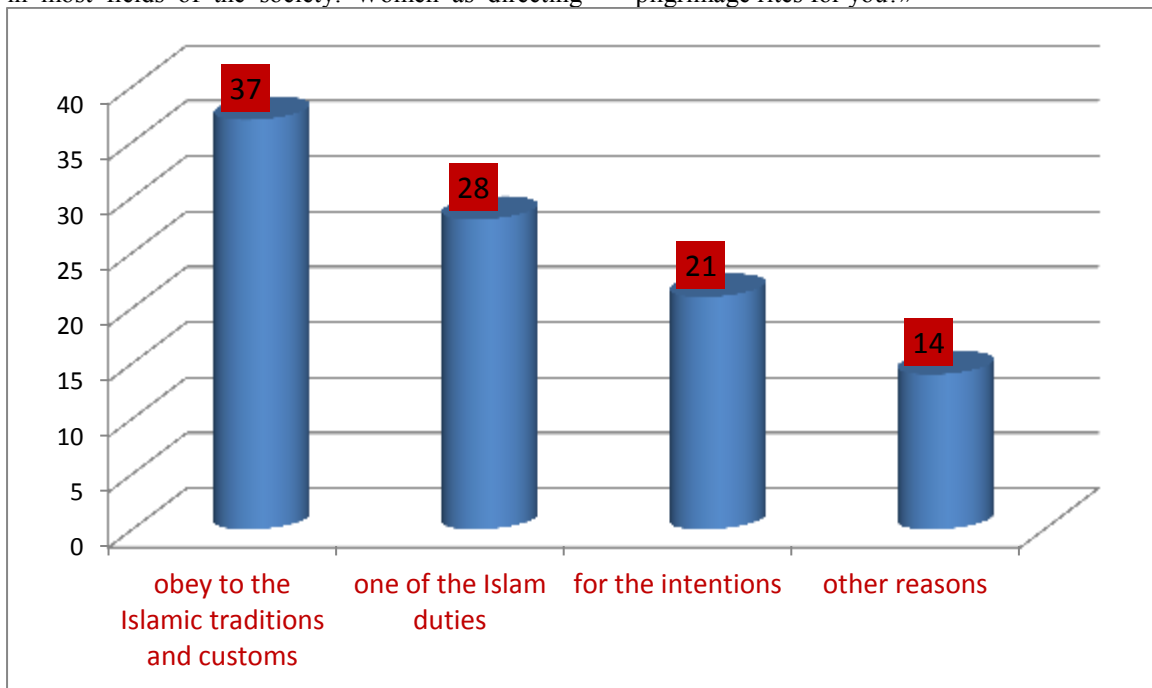
closed. A plenty of muslim scientists were shot down. They were exiled to the Syberia and other parts of the former Union. Buildings were transformed into dwellings, workshops, warehouses and others. Mausoleums and sacred places were considered as the heart of prejudice and the weapon of the religious exploitation, as a result, most of them were neglected, lost its feature and disappeared. The policy violence of the Soviet authority could not conquer the religious spirit of the Uzbek people completely. In traditional families, elderly people tried to bring up their children in accordance with faith, shariat rules and Islamic etiquette. Going to the pilgrimage places and worship rites became family

traditions. After independence attitudes to the pilgrimages were intensified. The pilgrimage places of Zangi ota, Machit Ali, Qirq qiz, Gumbaz bobo, Buzruk buva, Shodmalik ota were reconstructed based on national architecture. Nowadays, in Tashkent region, overall 721 of cultural heritages were registered by the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the main scientific producing management of protecting and using for the objects of the cultural heritage, the regional state inspection concerning region of Tashkent, Syrdarya and the city of Tashkent, 141 of them consist of sacred places and pilgrimage places. Each worship in oasis embodied the ancient legends and myths in it and play a key role in waking up the religious feelings of the pilgrims.

Nowadays it can be seen that, women are active in most fields of the society. Women as directing

force, play key role in ensuring the duration of nation and religious values. Because woman as a person attempts to realize herself and attitudes to others by means of the trust. Woman is elegant naturally, and passionate, attempts to not neglect and to claim each acts. In these cases, majority religious rites are organized and lead by women. In particular, 70% of women and 30% of men's visits to pilgrimage places could confirm our opinion. According to the Islam, women are not allowed to go to the mechets, therefore pilgrimage places are the main worship where women try to satisfy their religious and spiritual requirements.

The diagram below shows the results of the questionnaire which carried out among 100 people in the pilgrimage of Zangi ota in Tashkent region, in the theme of « What are the pilgrimage places and pilgrimage rites for you?»



**Photo2. Results of the questionnaire « What are the pilgrimage places and rites for you? »**

In the pilgrimage places in Tashkent region. The certain rites were done by women mainly: revolving around the cemetery, reading the Koran « especially read by the Shikh of cemetery with the special sound», switching the light on for the saints, binding the materials to the trees with intentions (nowadays it is prohibited), drinking the spring water of the pilgrimage places, sacrificing (especially sheep and cock) cooking and donation. For the pilgrimage places special dishes, such as bogirsok, qatlama, chalpak are prepared and woman go to the worships alone or with group.

To the sacred places, it is visited mainly in the seasons of spring and autumn, on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Sundays. The distinctiveness of the pilgrimage places is very important. For instance, for recovering the children from illnesses go to the « Parpi ota» and childless women go to the «Qirq qiz» («Fourty girls»). The water in the pilgrimage place «Mechet Ali» is considered as a medicinal, therefore most of people come to the water, though the medicine was developed. Nowadays there are all necessary facilities for praying, sacrificing and cooking in pilgrimage places.



**Photo-3. Women are preparing food in the «Parpi ota» in Tashkent oasis.**

According to the reporters, visiting to pilgrimage places became family tradition, pilgrims visit not only for pilgrimaging, but also for meeting with relatives and consulting each other on family issues. Besides that, the certain parts of the products which were bought for the wedding ceremonies, such as rice, oil, flour, sweets, and meat were devoted to pilgrimage places. After the wedding bride and bridegroom, went to the pilgrimage place with relatives and gave the products to the Sheikh. The Sheikh prayed to God for children and fortune for new family.

One of the reasons of women's pilgrimage rites is childlessness and nowadays one of the main problems of Central Asian women. In Uzbekistan childlessness causes for the divorcing in most cases. For saving the family, traditional and medical methods are used widely. According to the opinions of the scientist G.P. Snesarov, several superstitions were done before marriage for avoiding childlessness. Nevertheless, if the baby was not born

in family, first of all people visited to the pilgrimage places and did several ceremonies.

According to the reporters, there are many women who intended in the pilgrimage places with belief and had a baby. Women who gave birth come to the pilgrimage places with family and sacrificed for the God, for the child, they connected giving birth with pilgrimage places and the Sheikh had baby's hair cut for the first time. The Sheikh reads verse of the Koran and cut the baby's hair saying « Bismillahir rohmanir rohiym». This rite is called « Kokil oldi» («Cut plait»).

Pilgrims sacrifice the sheep as possible. Because in the Islamic book « Muhtasar», in the rules of sacrificing, the heep was considered as sacrifice. If it was impossible, except the sheep the hen was killed. Hen killing and squeezing out the blood is the ancient superstition which became apparent based on religions before Islam. According to the historical information in the centuries 7-6, in Central and front Asia, the cock was valued as the poultry saving from « black evil forces».





Photo-4. The ritual of «Kokil oldi»

## CONCLUSION

According to the research's results women do pilgrimage rites in these cases below: for remembering the deceased relatives; dealing with family problems; with the doctors' advices. While observing the women's rituals in pilgrimage places, we convinced that the thoughts before Islam were kept and joined with Islamic rites. We can see them in the rites of switching the light on, sacrificing and binding a piece of materials to the trees. Lately, women's interests to the religious are exceeding. In most cases women participate in ceremonies for the purpose of enriching the religious outlook.

In conclusion, visiting to the pilgrimage places as inseparable part of Uzbek mentality, manifests in it the optimistic virtues, such as making the deceased people's soul glad and hoping the dreams come true. The sacred and pilgrimage places function as reserve for natural ecosystem in these day's ecological problems are increasing and globalization process. It demands the need for a comprehensive study of the shrines in terms of archeology, ethnology, agiography, linguistics, historical sources, documentation, Islamic, and archival studies.

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