



## Pilgrimage Tourism and Perspectives in Villupuram District

### KEYWORDS

Pilgrimage-Tourism-Components- Perspective- Recreation-Spirituality

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**ABSTRACT** *The interconnectivity and reciprocity between pilgrimage and tourism are integral part of human travel. That is how 'pilgrimage-tourism' is conceived as an alternative for the solution; of course this is more inclined to metaphysical issue and life philosophy: meeting sacred-and-profane. Pilgrimage-tourism is considered now as strategy for heritage awakening, deeper experiences and transferring the religiosity into global humanism and spirituality. The sustainable frame of pilgrimage-tourism and heritage should be promoted in three ways: philosophical, organisational, and managerial. The eco-healing approach to pilgrimage-tourism is considered as a post-modernist way to consider pilgrimage as a bridge between recreation and spirituality; this way pilgrimage-tourism will provide a rational alternative for cultural consciousness and strategy for poverty alleviation. Realisation by personnel and trusts involved in promoting pilgrimage will further help in better development programmes. Keywords: components, ecospirituality, ethics, faithscape, hermeneutics, perspective, resource management, sustainability, spatiality.*

### INTRODUCTION

Touring and sacred journeys have been an important part of Hindu tradition. However as tourism industry has developed and practiced in recent decades, various related concepts have emerged with respect to have "experiences". The concept of "experience" is now something of an 'in-word' in tourism in our 'post- or late-modern society'. Visiting a site has always been basically a matter of different "experience" in different setting. This distinction may be 'distinct', 'desperate', or/and 'dysfunctional' and requires different forms and ways and uses of consumption that result into formation of the concept of commodity. Nevertheless, 'the service or experience we request may have different values for different individuals depending, among other things, on experience, knowledge and interest. This means that the individual consumer is also a major part of the total product which produces the experience' (O'Dell 2002 as cited in Blom, Nilsson and Santos Solla 2007: 72). It is therefore, "the experience is closely related to the individual and must be described in terms of both its value and strength. From this follows that what is perhaps experienced in a positive manner by one customer may not be so by another and an experience may moreover be perceived as more or less intense" (Blom, et al. 2007: 72). This is also argued that "apart from motives for travelling there is no difference between pilgrims and tourists as even pilgrims use public transportation, eat at restaurants and cafes, stay in hotel [or rest-houses], motels or campgrounds and shop for souvenirs or mementos. Thus, not only are they statistically part of the tourism phenomenon, most also demonstrate leisure tourist-like tendencies and behaviours while in transit and in the destination" (Timothy 2011: 385).

In the Hindu tradition, pilgrimage-tourism is a new concept [cf. European expression of "pilgertourismus" and "religion-tourismus"]. Being a secular republic, religious journeys are not projected in spite of such a huge mass of pilgrims, crossing even 600 millions every year [of course this mass refers to total domestic tourists, of which more than three-fourth are pilgrims; cf. Singh and Haigh 2013]. Life philosophy and resultant lifeways, motivations and to follow on the tradition are many and varied, particularly in the context of modern preoc-

cupations and concerns where religion may not always be the prime motivator, mostly in the western world. The anthropologists Eade and Sallnow (1991: 3) argue that pilgrimage is as much about historical and cultural behaviours and meanings as it is about pious intentions. In Frey's (2004) study of the Camino de Santiago, the pilgrims are often on the road '... for a host of cultural, spiritual, athletic, and personal reasons'. Similarly, for Morinis (1992: 4-5), pilgrimage is motivated by the pursuit of embodied ideals, a '...journey undertaken by a person in quest of a place or a state that he or she believes to embody a valued ideal', an ideal which one cannot achieve at home. Some of the intrinsic rewards of engaging in modern pilgrimage are not unlike those found in traditional, religious applications where people search for identity, spiritual quest or divine experiences (cf. Osterreith 1997). These examples reflect the fact that religion may not always feature as a prime motivator for pilgrimage. Indeed, pilgrimage also has a close relationship with the roots and growth of tourism (Graburn 1989), and could even be considered as the longest tradition and an ancient form of tourism as it draws upon traditions grounded in varying religious beliefs, including even the primordial culture (cf. Gouthro and Palmer 2010: 4-5). For anthropologists Turner and Turner (1978: 240), a modern characteristic of contemporary pilgrimage is that it is indeed 'blended with tourism, and involves a major journey, usually by modern means of transportation, to a national or international shrine'. In anthropological discussions of tourism, pilgrimage features as a dominant motivator for visits to many different sacred sites (Graburn 1989; Badone and Roseman 2004). Also as Morgan and Pritchard (2005: 41) point out certain tourism places are deemed sacred because they are charged with personal and social-cultural significance and visits to such places serve 'to shape the images we have of ourselves', and also to see our reflection in the mirror of the sacredscapes. In passage of time, understanding of the concept of pilgrimage has undergone significant change in response to engagement with tourism and leisure pursuits (Badone and Roseman 2004) such that the concept is also applied in a changing acceptance of secular sense (Reader and Walter 1993). For example, Aitchison, MacLeod and Shaw (2000) show how druids have for many years worshipped at the English tourist attraction of Stonehenge, us-

ing it as both a meeting place and a centre for ritual practice, especially by New Age travellers, who make annual visits to the site in order to celebrate the summer solstice. Similarly in Indian traditions various sects, and retreats of saints (ashrams) are now popularly accepted as pilgrimage destinations, of course befitting to the modern requirements and alternative ways to satisfy the quest and to see the other areas.

They tend to gravitate to sacred (heritage) sites such as this because of their association with the sacred beliefs of prehistoric and indigenous peoples in the West (Digance 2003); while in Indian context these are mostly historical sites of grand temples lying close to natural beauty. In south India, there are chains of such grand temples, dated ca. CE 10th to 14th centuries, which maintains and promotes pilgrimages and accommodate the transformations and emerging technologies.

Popularly, it is perceived that tourism is always a boon to the economy; nevertheless it also creates so many dark side resultants (Singh, Ravi 2000: 176-179). It includes (i) cultural and social conflicts of different communities, and inside-outside stakeholders, (ii) pollution and overload of strangers that deteriorate the local cultural and environment, (iii) increasing pace of crowding and congestion through new structure and increasing intensity of traffic, (iv) pressure on local artefacts, monuments and heritagescapes that consequently deteriorate religious, historical, or aesthetic significance, (v) consequentially increase of mental pollution and increase of consumerism and materialism, (vi) loss of city image, traditional and symbolic skyline (like in case of Varanasi), (v) degeneration of local socio-cultural fabric that easily be seen on Indian life style, value systems, social nouns, attitude and behaviour, etc., and (vii) pressing pace of social evils, like introduction of drugs and drug-addiction, prostitution; and several such associated and resultant negative impacts.

If, such consequences are allowed to grow unchecked, serious implications converging into the irreparable loss to the heritage and culture would naturally become inevitable (cf. Neub 2012). The widely accepted alternative is the concept and practice of "pilgrimage-tourism" based on the frame of 'spiritual tourism' where the visitors should awaken his/her quest and feelings to realise the serene and divine message of the spirit of place, i.e. meeting of humanity and divinity through ecospirituality. This convergence would embody the following issues:

#### **PILGRIM ATTRACTIONS IN THE DISTRICT**

##### **Sendamangalam**

Lord Siva in the name of "Abath hayeswarar Temple" is located in the entrance of village. This temple is part of the Koperunchingam kadavarayan King fort and it was destroyed a few years ago. Now this is undertaken by Central government and development process is going on. This village is in NH 45 and next to Gedilam river when drive from Chennai.

##### **Thirukoilur (derived from Tirukovilur)**

Lord Vishnu in the name Thiruvikkrama Swamy & Vedavalli Thaayaar (Vaamana Avathaaram) temple is located in the center of this town. This temple comes under 108 Divya Desams. East of the town has the Sivan Temple situated on the banks of River Pennar. Near to the temple, in the river, there exists Kabilar (Saint) Kundru (tiny mountain). Tirukoilur is one of the "Ashta Veeratanams" - eight and - Place of Bravery. Tirukoilur is also a very regarded place for madhwas (followers of Dvaita philosophy of Sri Madhwacharya). On the banks of River Pinakini, we can find the Moola brindavana of Sri Raghunathama Teertha (1595 A.D) and Sri Satyapramoda Teertha (1997), very eminent pontiffs of the Uttaradi Mutt of Madhwa lineage. One of the famous Jyotir ling mutt of Sri Gnananda Tapovanam is on the Tirukoilur - Thiruvannamalai Road. This mutt was started by his holiness Sri Gnananda Swamigal and still continues to be thronged by pilgrims seeking his blessings.

##### **Melmalaiyanur**

Melmalaiyanur is famous for its Ankaala Parameswari temple which is thronged by devotees on no moon days.

##### **Anniyur**

Anniyur is famous for the two important temples of lord shiva and vishnu. They are located inside the village. The Saneeswaran statue inside the shiva temple is the important one.

##### **Thiruvamathur**

Thiruvamathur is a temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. In this temple, the shrines of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvathi are opposite to each other. Because of this, this temple is believed to unite lovers.

##### **Mailam**

Mailam is famous for its Murugan temple atop a hilllock. It is located off the National Highway proceeding to Chennai from Villupuram and the nearest railway station is Mailam (on the Villupuram - Chennai Egmore railway line)

##### **Kandachipuram**

A Lord Shiva temple decorates Kandachipuram. The legend is that the Shivalingam is made up of sand and it was installed by Lord Rama during his tenure in the forest as depicted in the Hindu epic, the Ramayana.

##### **Tiruvakkarai**

Tiruvakkarai, a small peaceful village situated on the banks of a river is famous for its Vakkara Kali Amman temple. Full moon days are considered auspicious days to visit this temple. Also look out for the fossil wood park where century old trees have been transformed into rocks.

##### **Sustainability**

Question of sustainability has appeared rather prominently in recent times in every aspect of human life — social, political, economic, environment, etc. There should be a balanced bridge that promotes sustainability between economic returns and the heritage resources used through the reverential development and promotion of ethical values.

##### **Deeper Sense and Feeling**

The deeper sense of attachment is pre-requisite for awakening (of awareness). Once one can develop deep feeling (of love) to a place that would help caring for it — a path that helps one to have realization leading to revelation. As the 'caring for the place (the Earth)' is inherent in the pilgrimage-tourism, it provides opportunity to intimately sense and deep feelings for the place and the people — their behaviour, their heritage, and the present in which they live, act, and keep the glorious tradition alive.

##### **Ethical Values**

Ethics is the essence of every civilized society. The prevalent ethical values generally reflect the societal needs and social response to them. Our life is basically governed by the value system learnt in the process of socialization and education. We are governed by the ethics of many institutions with which we associate. Their ethics are necessarily different if not contradictory and control our behaviour effectively. Pilgrimage-tourism, being concerned with sustainability, gives priority consideration to ethics, and attempts to check accelerating ethical and moral pollution — deterioration of the sense of culture and even the identity of humankind. In fact, it aims to promote a new spirit of sustainability by awakening mass awareness in the context of conventional cultural values, including emotional bonds and spiritual quests, individual and community consciousness.

##### **Caring for the Mother Earth**

Fragility of earth is the open secret today. However, care and concern to protect her is yet to get into the mind of masses. Popular tourism has inflicted harm upon both dharā ("the

mother Earth") and dharohara ("heritage"). The greater objective of pilgrimage-tourism is 'healing the Earth' through the means of ecospirituality — a way of life in harmony with health of the Earth! It is an innovation with vision, clarity and genuineness of the objective, understanding and moral action.

In the passage of time the meanings change and new connotations manifested or superimposed; similarly the notion of pilgrimage changes, that is how the ways, structure and traditions get new understanding and expositions. In ancient India the travel always referred to 'tour', while today 'pilgrimage' and 'tourism' are reciprocal and interdependent part of the system, therefore the concept of 'pilgrimage-tourism' is more rational and integral part of travel. Of course, today the concept of pilgrimage has taken on new meanings and has accepted new forms, sites, and modes of travel. This shift has also influenced in significant ways the structures and meanings of traditional pilgrimage. Gitlitz's (2010: 126) remarks that "What makes a journey a pilgrimage in our times is what each individual brings to it. If a person yearns to visit a place because it is — for some reason that he may or may not be able to articulate — important to him, meaningful, special, then for him the journey is a pilgrimage". However, in strict sense the traditions always modified and change in terms of time and function, thus results the wide spectrum of pilgrimage-tourism.

#### Holy Places & faiths cape: towards Pilgrimage-Tourism

Devi is, quintessentially, the core form of every Hindu Goddess; as the female manifestation of the supreme lord, she is also called Prakriti, as she balances out the male aspect of the divine addressed Purusha, a giant anthropomorphic being. The energy that She uses to perform her task is a 'cosmic delusion' (māyo) that makes multiplied forms (rupa) for different motives, in different contexts and various ways — her omnipresence power. Devi (Prakriti) is also eulogised as an equal counterpart to the divine masculine (Purusha), and hence manifests herself as the Trinity — thus in a way the primordial force behind the three qualities of the cosmic rhythm, i.e. the Creator (Sarasvati or the Divine energy of sound and speech, consort of Brahmā), Preserver (Lakshmi or the Divine energy of light, the consort of Vishnu) and Destroyer (Kālī, or the Divine energy of darkness/ dissolution, the consort of Shiva in the form of cosmic dancer). That is how Devi is narrated as the fundamental creative energy.

Prevalence of goddess worship since ancient times is amply verified and explained in the vast literature. Goddesses' typology and their forms — vivid and symbolically meaningful, explain the richness of their specific geographical location (rather setting) and their setting places become the 'sacredscapes' where the nature spirit merges with the divine and those places apparently possess the Nature spirit — metaphorically said as node of spiritual magnetism (cf. Singh 1995, also Singh and Singh 2006). It is clear that goddesses occupy central position in the entire gamut of Indian (cultural), heritage. Even though, dhard, the root of dharohara ("heritage") itself refers to the mother (goddess) Earth; however, this aspect of 'our heritage' is overlooked for some unknown reasons till today. In fact, in the studies on (Indian) philosophy and religion also, we are yet to find the due space of goddesses given. Thanks to the new awakening to promote pilgrimage-tourism in the purview and spatial ordering of the 51 Shaktipithas, conceptualising and initiated through a recent National Seminar on "The 51 Shaktipithas' Pilgrimage Route and Cultural Tourism: Vision from South Asia": 15-16 April 2012, Lucknow (cf. Singh 2012 b).

The approach to study tourism so far has been the study of economic activity almost always. It limits the scope and answer to many questions posed as consequence. On the line of 'commodification approach' proposed by Ashworth (1991: 111) the 'eco-healing package' (cf. Fig. 9.1.) may be explained here which extends the horizon of potential re-

sources in pilgrimage-tourism as an alternative tourism.

The purpose, of developing 'eco-healing approach', evidently is to highlight the strong rationality of developing pilgrimage-tourism on the pathways of ecofriendly and ecospiritual ways. The components of this package may be briefly explained as the following (Singh, Ravi 2000: 184-185):

#### The Resources

This package identifies cultural and spiritual heritage as resources. In one hand, the goddess shrines and associated territories form the cultural heritage resources; and, the rituals, awe, deep feelings and faith, belief, and the system of vratas and fasting, etc. together make the spiritual resources on the other hand. The live traditions of continuing maintenance of these resources reflect their inner strength. Their qualitative and quantitative richness may be taken as the indicator of their potentialities for serving as the basis of an alternative tourism. Additionally, the involvement of spiritual resources will effectively check the consumer (tourists) behaviour and thus ensure healing of the mother earth.

#### The Assemblage

The process of assembly begins with selection of the way. Apart from it, this process, also involves interpretation. With reference to goddesses, the assemblage of archetypal symbolism represented by the goddess's form and geographical setting, the spiritualscape, and the cultural context make the spirit of place meaningful and confirm its potentiality for pilgrimage based tourism. While interpreting, the importance of deep feelings and intimate sensing to be projected in clear and simple terms. Making simultaneous reference to enshrouding value system is also equally significant.

#### The Operational Aspect

Experience(s) and the capacity to experience are two most vital issues at the interface between the product and consumer, i.e. spirit of place and (pilgrim) tourist. Here, the greater emphasis is on the (pilgrim) tourist who has to undergo the process of experiencing, which depends upon certain prerequisites, e.g. reverence and respect, belief and faith, and more importantly deep insight to understand the revelation and a developed sensitiveness to feel the spiritual bliss.

For the successful operation of this kind of alternative tourism, it needs to be well organized. This stage involves many supporting agencies to provide infrastructural facilities. Ashworth (1991: 118-119) talks of certain 'necessary preconditions', like organizational integration, motivational integration, financial integration, functional integration, and spatial integration — for the efficient functioning of his model. All of these seem to be equally essential in the case of pilgrimage based alternative tourism that remains oriented more towards the health of heritage (and mother Earth) than commercial profits (for appraisal in India see, Neuß 2012).

#### Pilgrimage-Tourism: A Perspective

The pilgrimage is such an act which explains deep feelings, faith, belief, respect to the divine and above all sincerity of devotee(s). The tradition of pilgrimage along with mythology maintains the sanctity and significance of sacredscapes. That is how promoting a deeper sense of tourism (spiritual) in the form of 'Pilgrimage-Tourism' will be an alternative way leading to sustainable frame of integrating humanity and divinity. It is now empathetically accepted that popular tourism consequently leads to promote rash commercialism having least concerns for the nature, centuries-old repositories of human culture, and the more comprehensive and the transcendental mother Earth. Hereby it is also meant that the current tourism and environment, at large, are essentially hostile to each other. To popular tourist activities the quality of environment, whether rural/natural or urban, remains at best marginal and at worst irrelevant.

The significance of (Hindu) religion in the (cultural) heritage

of India can not be denied. So are the holy centres and places for their built structure, natural or geographical context, and ages-old genius loci possessed therein? Temples, gigantic in form and detailed interiors and exteriors with symbolic meanings stored in them, are excellent pieces of masonry work and architectural expertise of the Indians. It is a brief statement on the richness of purely religious components of 'our heritage'. The 'eco-healing package' discussed above shows the workable way to protect the mother Earth. Here it is to be argued that in backdrop of malevolent character of the popular tourism, a kind of tourism for the next millennium has to be evolved on the lines of religious (dharmic/ cosmic) practice of pilgrimage having a deeper quest to experience and reveal the spirit of feminine divine.

Despite stark differences at various levels and basic in multiple ways, presence of some degree of basic analogy between pilgrimage and tourism can not be rejected. Smith (1992:1) highlights synonymy between these two through Latin (literary) derivation. Undoubtedly, pilgrimage involves more and more deeper senses, spiritual motives, economic benefits to locals and eco-healing; in the case of tourism generally such qualities lack (cf. Table 9.1). Nevertheless, there is a structural analogy between these two systems (cf. Fig. 9.2).

### According to Eck (2012: 443) has lucidly clarified the scenario of tourism and pilgrimage:

Nothing in the world, however, begins to match the extensiveness or intensity of pilgrimage travel in India. While Hindu pilgrimages may sometimes include stops at places, governmental buildings, or old temple monuments, there is an important distinction between tourism and pilgrimage. Tourism may take us to "see the sights", but [Hindu] pilgrimage takes us for darshan, the "beholding" of a sacred image or a sacred place.

### CONCLUSION

Pilgrims play an important role in the system of pilgrimage and the same is true for tourists in tourism. Pilgrims become crucial in the maintenance and continuity of pilgrimage. In case of pilgrimage, the maintenance and use of sacred places (the sacredscapes) go home in hand, simultaneously. The visiting pilgrims' goal is to experience the supreme spiritual bliss and the actions guided by the ethics they learn from traditions and mythologies. That's how conservation of environment is intrinsic to pilgrim-behaviour and further to the system of pilgrimage. The Hindu Tradition of Pilgrimage deep senses are their characteristic attribute, which have helped the divine spirit of place survive and sustain since many centuries.

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