PILGRIMAGE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN PUDUKKOTTAI DISTRICT: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Venkatesan Karnan¹
Research Scholar, Department of History, H. H. The Rajah’s College, Pudukkottai, India
Email: venkatpdkt1983@gmail.com

Dr. Muthuramalingam Pargunan²
Assistant Professor, Department of History, H. H. The Rajah’s College, Pudukkottai, India
Email: mpargu@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT
Pilgrimage tourism is that form that is exclusively or strongly motivated for religious reasons. It is one of the oldest type of tourism and a worldwide phenomenon of religious history. Pudukkottai, the former princely state that was the first to join the Indian Union after breaking away from foreign yoke, is indeed the archaeological treasure-house of Tamil civilization. The rich cultural heritage of this district is also evidenced by the archaeological and cultural remains. Pudukkottai has been astonishingly impressive in pilgrimage tourism. It is blessed with plenty of well-known religious destinations. This paper will explore the phenomenon of pilgrimage tourism in the perspective of Pudukkottai. The aim of this study was to determine, what pilgrimage tourism is, how it is different from other forms of tourism, and the opportunities, issues, and challenges in pilgrimage tourism in Pudukkottai. The infrastructural issues in pilgrimage sites of the district are dealt with in this paper, and it also covers the emerging challenges in pilgrimage tourism promotion in Pudukkottai.

Keywords: Pilgrimage Tourism; Tourist Centres; Problems of Tourist; Infrastructures; Government Schemes

INTRODUCTION
Religion has played a central role in emotionally and physically moving people and pilgrimage is a direct representation. The ‘sacred-site-seeing’ (‘pilgrimage-tourism’) has become a most common form of tourism in present-day India. Socio-cultural theorists have pointed to pilgrimage — as a religious form of travel — often traversing distinctive lands and drawing in a variety of peoples of different histories, cultures, and social status as a means of unifying a diverse populous. Tamil Nadu is the land of pilgrimages. And it has a history that dates back to several thousand years. It is a land where traditions and culture blend and continue to live in harmony. The state abounds in monuments and temples that are ancient and each has its own story of religious, artistic and cultural accomplishment and specialty waiting to be heard. With thousands of temples occupying the landscape of Tamilnadu.

Pudukkottai, the former princely state that was the first to join the Indian Union after breaking away from foreign yoke, is indeed the archaeological treasure-house of Tamil civilization. The rich cultural heritage of this district is also evidenced by the archaeological and cultural remains of Kodumbalur, Narthamalai, Kudumiyanmalai, Kunnandar Koil, Sittanna Vasal, Thirumayam and Avudyar Koil. Its emergence as a princely state occurred in the 17th century and even before that, from time

Available online on www.abhinavjournal.com
immemorial, it has been a centre of culture, civilization, art, architecture, fine arts and polity. It is therefore no wonder that historians, anthropologists, archeologists and lovers or lovers of art have an absorbing interest in Pudukkottai. Pudukkottai has been astonishingly impressive in pilgrimage tourism. It is blessed with plenty of well known religious destinations. Pilgrimages to these destinations bring enormous economic gains to local residents. Pudukkottai has lot of pilgrimage potentialities, some of the major places are, Avadaiyarkoil, Thirumayam, Peraiyur, Thirukokkamam, Thiruvapur, Kumaramalai, Thiruvuranjkulam, Narthamalai, Kattupava Pallivsal, Avur church. These are some of the famous pilgrimage sites visited by all over the year.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It reviews the important studies relating to Tourism and Pilgrimage Tourism in India as well as Abroad. Gupta (1999) in this study praised Indian religious tourism which grew for many years without causing negative environmental, cultural and social impacts. The author viewed that pilgrimage had less burden on environment, benefited local communities, was seasonal and provided economic benefits to the local community. Kreiner and Kliot (2000) in their paper analyzed behaviour characteristics of Christian pilgrims towards religious sites. They stated that there were considerable differences between pilgrims’ and tourists’ behaviour towards any religious site inspite of the fact that both had three common elements like discretionary income, leisure time and social sanctions. Mishra (2000) in his study evaluated the growth and prospects of pilgrimage tourism in Brajmandal. The study revealed that with the increased mobility of urban class, more and more people were coming for weekend trips in Brajmandal area. The study also highlighted the main problems regarding poor infrastructure, accommodation facilities, quality of food, shopping facilities, public convenience, communication and cheating and misguiding etc. faced by pilgrims in Brajmandal.

Batra (2003) in his study highlighted different Buddhist pilgrimage sites like Lumbini, Bodhgaya, Sarnath, Rajgir, Nalanda and Kushinagar situated in India. The researcher viewed that India had tremendous potential to attract a large number of tourists from Far East and South-East Asia but due to lack of proper roads, basic amenities, infrastructure facilities and inadequate promotional efforts on the part of both the central and state government the growth rate of Buddhist tourism in India was very slow. Bleie (2003) in his study discussed pilgrimage tourism in central Himalayas with the help of Manakamana temple in Nepal. The study suggested that pilgrimage tourism must build on principles of sustainable tourism to overcome the cultural, developmental, conservational and commercial risk associated with it. Poria and Airely (2003) in this study discussed the effect of religion and religiosity on tourism industry. They observed that religion had direct impact on tourists’ consumption habits and their preference to choose any destination. The study highlighted that the tourists’ preference to visit a particular site was directly dependent upon their religion and their strength of religious belief. Sarathy (2006) in this article gave an overview of religious tourism with respect to Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism and Jainism. The author found Hinduism as third largest faith amongst the world’s religions and having largest number of religious places. Singh (2006) in her study highlighted pilgrimage tourism in Indian Himalayas with the help of four dimensions of tourism namely travel, strangers, leisure and secularity. The author opined that increasing number of pilgrims and tourists in Indian Himalayas was responsible for several problems like overcrowding, congestion, traffic and environmental pollution. Dasgupta, Mondal and Basu (2006) in their study made an attempt to evaluate the impact of pilgrimage tourism at Ganga Sagar Island. They viewed that in India people travelled large number of pilgrimage places to earn virtue. Similarly Ganga Sagar was the place where a holy dip during Makar Sankranti earned that much of virtue which one could earn by visiting all the pilgrim centres through put life.

The interest in pilgrimage tourism has affected a number of industries around the world (John Elsner 1992), including the tourism industry. Pilgrimage tourism seems to be a new concept but it is not a new phenomenon. Based on the literature review and interviews conducted with various stakeholders in various countries, this study defines a pilgrimage tourist as someone who visits a place out of his/her usual environment, with the intention of pilgrimage growth, without overt religious
compulsion, which could be religious, non-religious, sacred or experiential in nature, but within the Divine context, regardless of the main reason for travelling. A predominant theory of marketing argues that every market consists of groups or segments of customers with different needs and demands (Kamla-Raj 2010). It should be noted here that segments are unlikely to be mutually exclusive, and this would also apply to pilgrimage tourism.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper will explore the phenomenon of pilgrimage tourism in the perspective of Pudukkottai. The aim of this study was to determine, what pilgrimage tourism is, how it is different from other forms of tourism, and the opportunities, issues, and challenges in pilgrimage tourism in Pudukkottai. The infrastructural issues in pilgrimage sites of Pudukkottai are dealt with in this paper, and it also covers the emerging challenges in pilgrimage tourism promotion in Pudukkottai.

Pilgrimage Centers in Pudukkottai

The rock-cut cave Temple of Sri Kokarneswarar Brahandamba at Thirukokarnam is of Mahendraverma Pallava’s period. The presiding deity is Kokarneswarar and His consort Brahadambal. Some later additions have also been made. The idols of Gangesa, Gangadhara, Saptha Kannikas are artistic creations of perennial value. An image of the saint Sadasiva Brahmandra is seen at the foot of a Bikula tree. The deity is the family deity of the Raja and in reverence of Brahadambal, coins called ‘Amman Kasu’ were released by the king.

The Athmanathaswami temple, Avudaiyarkoil is unique in many ways. There is no Lingam in the sanctum, only the Audaiyar or it bottom pedestal worshipped. Even the Goddess is not displayed by any form. No Neivedyam of food is offered to the deity. Even Nandhi the mount of Siva usually in front of the deity is absent. There is deep spiritual significance in the queerness. Hinduism allows idol worship only for the beginners in the initial stage. As the devotee and his devotion mature he has to realize the absolute truth as formless.

Peraiyur the Naganatha-swami temple is well known for Naga worship, and barren women have been making pilgrimage to this village for centuries and install stone image of Naga-s. The stone images installed over the centuries now accumulated to give a breathtaking site. Peraiyur contains a temple of considerable interest. Dedicated to Siva in his Naganatha-swami (lord-of-the-snake) aspect. A tall stone Nataraja dances at the entrance to the main shrine. The sculpture of Siva and Parvathi seated on their bull are excellent pieces. The oldest extant portion of the temple is the western gopuram behind the sanctum. It is of the 10th century and is done in the Chozha style. The specific Chozha architectural features of the structure coupled with the presence of a Sapta-matrika group in bas-relief on a single stone, and an inscription of Rajendra-chozha I (1012-44) on the rock near the tarn, show that the temple was originally a Chozha structure of the 10th century, but was later renovated in the 12th or 13th century. There are other Chozha and Pandya inscriptions belonging to the 13th century.

Tirukkattalai Siva temple is a good specimen of early chozha architecture of the second half of the 9th century. This is a parivara complex type with sub-shrines around the main shrine. The inscriptions in the temple help to understand the history of the temple. The Siva-worshiped as Sundaresvara seen in the village is a highly venerated shrine and is regarded by local Vaishnavites to be second in sanctity only to the temple at Srirangam. It is called Adhi-rangam (‘original-Rangam’) and is claimed to be older than the temple at Srirangam. Actually there are two Vishnu shrines. One is the cave temple and contains one of the most
complete and the largest Anantha-sayi groups in India, conforming, almost to the detail, to agamic specifications of Anantha-sayi. The other is a structural temple in which Vishnu is worshipped in the form of Sathya-moorthi. The Siva rock-cut temple, dedicated to Sathya-girisvara is the earliest monument in Thirumayam. It is to the west of the Vishnu temple. This cave temple, from its architectural style and epigraphs, is attributable to the 7th century AD.

Thiruvararangulam is noted for its fine ancient temple dedicated to Hara-tirthesvara and Brahadambal. A Nataraja bronze of superlative quality from this temple is now on display at the National Museum, New Delhi. The place was once a centre of iron-ore mining and contained in outcrop of ochre on the bunds of one of the temple tanks, called the Brahma-kundam. The main shrine of the temple, which has been expanded down the ages, was built in the 12th century Chozha epoch. The earliest inscription in the central shrine is dated in the fortieth year of Kulottunga Chozha III (1218-19). The temple may have been built either in the reign of Raja Raja II or early in the reign of Kulottunga III - the reign of Raja Raja II is considered to be more probable judging from the architectural features.

Thiruvengaivasal is a well-known and ancient place of worship. The name means the 'Sacred place of gate of the Tiger', and refers to the story of the God Gokarnesvara who here took the form of a tiger, to terrify and finally grant salvation to a cow that daily brought the sacred water for his ablution. The main shrine, which has been renovated, perhaps in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries, must have been originally an early Chozha (9th - 10th century AD.) structure. The earliest inscription in the temple is dated back to reign of Raja Raja Chozha I (1011AD). The present structure is of Pandya style of the 13th-14th centuries. Thiruvengaivasal had both a Sabha or Brahmin assembly, and an Ur or common village or town assembly, during the centuries of Chozha and Pandya rules. There are 15 inscriptions in this temple; six are Chozha inscriptions, seven Pandya, one of the Vijayanagara period and one of the Pallava-rayar.

Viralimalai is one of the well known places of worship of Lord Subramanya. This temple is situated majestically on the hilllock. The Lord here was sung by the Saint Arunagiri Nathar. The temple was once a renowned seat of the Bharata natyam dance form and boasted of a separate dancer for each of the 32 adavu-s (dance movements). Viralimalai is a natural sanctuary for Peacocks.

The old chapel, Avur was constructed in 1547 A.D. by Fr. John Venatius Bachet and the new Roman Catholic Church was built in 1747 A.D. Tamil Scholar Rev. Father Joseph Beschi (Veerama Munivar) also served in this Church. The Easter Passion play followed by Car Festival, take place in summer which attracts people of all faiths. There are two important churches in the Pudukkottai town. The church of Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, an elegant spacious edifice, was built in 1910. It is the principal church of the Pudukkottai Catholic Parish. The protestant church is at the northern end of the town and belongs to the Swedish Mission. It was built in 1905.

Kattubava Pallivasal is one of the important Islamic centers, this is located on the Thirumayam-Madurai Highway. Both Hindu and Muslims visit this place. Annual “Urs” takes place in the month of Rabiyul Ahir.

Pilgrimage Tourism in Pudukkottai

Pudukkottai has been astonishingly impressive in pilgrimage tourism. Pudukkottai is blessed with plenty of well known religious destinations. Pilgrimages to these destinations bring enormous economic gains to local residents. The number of people visiting pilgrimage centres is almost equal to the population of Pudukkottai. Pudukkottai has lot of pilgrimage potentialities, some of the major places are, Avadaiyarkoil, Thirumayam, Peraiyur, Thirukokarnam, Thiruvapur, Kumaramalai, Thiruvarankulam, Nanthamalai, Kattupava Pallivsal, Avur church. These are some of the famous pilgrimage sites visited by people all over the year. The Govt. of Tamilnadu has taken recent measures to promote the various places of worship as a fine channel of pilgrimage tourism. There have been some individual efforts too by a few tour companies in promoting some pilgrimage festivals which unavoidably are the best times to experience Tamil culture and religious rituals. Infrastructures are
improved every year to accommodate the ever increasing number of devotees. Even the tourism
department runs several busses to link the various sacred sites through the State. Tamil Nadu, which
over the pages of history has evolved as an ideal place for pilgrimage tourism. It takes place in the
pilgrim centers of Pudukkottai, to see the architecture, the history, the legends, the festivals, the
traditions, the rituals, and the music which gives Pudukkottai a mystical charm and an edge over all
other districts. Pilgrimage tourism reveals the high positive effects of pilgrimage season on income,
employment and high standard of living of the residents in Pudukkottai.

Scheme for Development of Infrastructure Facilities in Pilgrim Centers

The department of tourism has formulated a scheme for development of infrastructure facilities in
certain selected pilgrim centers in cooperation with charitable, institutions, trusts or local bodies
responsible for maintenance of the piligrim centres, shrines and creation of facilities for the pilgrims.
The facilities to be provided under the scheme include toilets, drinking water, food outlets,
dormitory accommodation, bathing facilities etc. under the scheme central assistance upto 25% of the
project cost is extended for creation of addition facilities in the selected pilgrim centres, the 75% being
met by the bodies administering the pilgrim places. Assistance under the scheme is extended to the
following guidelines apart from the relevant item in the general guidelines applicable for all projects
the scheme will cover pilgrim centres of all religions communities and which are frequented regularly
by pilgrim tourists. The trusts/charitable institutions concerned should be registered under the income
tax act and eligible for tax deduction under section 80g or other applicable sections of the act, the
proposal for financial assistance should be accompanied by audited statements of accounts of the trust/
charitable institution/local body for the previous three years, assistance will be available only for new
projects or additional facilities in the existing projects. responsibility for provision of basic
infrastructure like roads, water supply, sanitation, sewerage, drainage, parking facilities etc. will rest
with the religious trusts/charitable institutions/local bodies/ state Govt. detailed cost estimates and blue
prints of the projects should be certified by a qualified engineer. The grants given by the Govt., shall
be kept in a separate account by the trust/charitable/institution/local body and it will be operated solely
for the purpose for which it has been sanctioned no diversion of funds for any other purpose is
permissible.

Problems and Issues in Pilgrimage Tourism

Pilgrimage tourism based on religious sites or arte facts faces difficulties and raises controversial
issues. These include competition between faiths for a location and heritage, and conflicts between
pilgrimage and secular, commercial tourism, the building shrine or arte fact may have great spiritual
value but a commercial value too as such and often in any openly accessible situation, it is vulnerable
to theft and to vandalism. Furthermore, as with other specialist or low-key tourism assets, financial
benefits associated with say, temple visiting do not pay for the resource and its management. The
temple may be the attraction but the money is spent in the local café, pub or gift shop and with little
reinvestment in presentation or conservation of the site, building or artifact the situation is not
sustainable. There are aspects of sacred site visiting and management already noted that vender some
problems particularly important. There can be serious conflicts between a desire to keep facilities
freely open to religious visitors need to raise money to maintain the fabric and the vulnerability of
often remote sites to vandalism theft and desecration. According to the pilgrimage tourist board survey
more than half of the pilgrimage sites assessed had suffered from theft and almost as many from
vandalism with up to 80% of sites affected. There were problems of wear and tear, damage to
buildings, noise disturbance and litter a more recent study considered the problems of pilgrimage
tourists.

Problems Faced By Pilgrimage Tourists in Pudukkottai

While tourism contributes towards the development of a region, the problems associated with it hinder
the development. The researchers have identified thirteen major problems associated with the
pilgrimage tourist centres of the Pudukkottai district. There are lots of problems faced by the
pilgrimage tourists, the problems start from the railway/bus station itself. The pilgrims had to wait a long time after reaching the bus station to get a bus, the special busses run by the Govt. of India will start only after being filled up by the pilgrims. When the pilgrims reach the place they had to face heavy traffic problems for food, drinking water, parking, facilities, accommodation, language, communication facilities, toilet facilities and the problem of security. Problem of food; most of the restaurants are in open air, so that they can’t keep the edible items away from the dust and files. The profit-motivated shop owners do not attach much importance to hospitality and cleanliness. The price list has not been exhibited, so they can charge whatever price they like. Many tourists are of the opinion that they are ready to pay anything, provided quality and neatness are maintained.

Drinking water is an important problem faced by the pilgrims. There is no sufficient drinking water to the pilgrims. Adequate pipe connections are yet to be implemented. The present supply of water from water pockets which a joint venture is undertaken by water authorities in nearby pilgrimage centres. This water is not pure enough to drink. The pilgrims are forced to drink it for want of alternative drinking water facility. They use the same water for bathing and drinking. The parking facilities are not in commensurate with the increase in number of vehicles. The existing parking grounds are not systematically and orderly arranged. So they face much difficulty while returning to some of the pilgrimage centres. The accommodation facilities available to pilgrims are in sufficient when compared to the number of pilgrims. Above 70% of the total pilgrims are from other states. Their language differs from person to person. So in the absence of a common medium of communication the problem of language remains as a serious one. The heavy rush and terrible traffic fill the place with noises, dust and dirt. The authorities do not give much importance to clean this waste left by the pilgrims during the season. The ultimate impact is on the shoulders of the local people as a result it affects their health and they become ill after every season. We are living in a technologically advanced scientific era. Day by day the distance between places is shortened as a result of tremendous development in science and technology. Proper communication facilities are not available during the season in and around India. Lack of the toilet facility is another problem for the pilgrims. Pilgrims have to come across during the season in pilgrimage centres, the available toilets and sanitation facilities are not sufficient. So the pilgrims are forced to open defecation, these unhealthy atmosphere affect public health to a great extend as a result they are often caught by the dark hands of epidemics. The town tank and its surroundings become dirty and nasty due to lack of sanitation facilities. The facilities available for accommodation the pilgrims are not at all adequate. Facilities provided by the Local Government administration for accommodation the pilgrims during the festival season are not adequate. Most of the pilgrims use the private land for accommodation and for meeting their sanitation needs. Open defecation is common this is causing unhygienic and unhealthy condition and water and air pollution. The problem becomes all the worse when coupled with waste water from hotels and other commercials establishments. Solid waste consisting of mainly the food waste generated at pilgrim centres is being discharged in a hap hazard manner. Solid waste generated at pilgrim centres is being disposed near the temple. The decayed garbage is washed off during the rains in to the drainage. The solid waste management at pilgrimage centres is also not satisfactory. Existing network of roads in pilgrimage centres is quite in adequate to meet the ever increasing need of the pilgrims. Especially during the festival season due to traffic blocks the pilgrims have to wait long hours at pilgrim centres for their vehicles to reach their boarding point. In addition to road network, the public transport is also inadequate. Parking facilities provided for private vehicles at pilgrimage centres is not adequate. Traffic area blocks of vehicles entering and leaving the parking area and is frequent causing hard ships to the people and giving rise to air pollution. Sufficient parking space with fuelling facilities and basic amenities to the drivers and passengers are not available at pilgrimage centres.

SUGGESTIONS

In the context of above findings the researcher gives the following suggestions to overcome the problems involved and to promote pilgrimage tourism in Pudukkottai district.
1. The pilgrimage tourism centres of the district have not gained enough publicity and therefore the visitors to the spots from and other states are less in number. Therefore, it is suggested that intensive publicity is to be given by the tourism department about the pilgrimage tourism spots and occasions in Pudukkottai district.

2. The infrastructural facilities such as transportations, sanitation and drinking water facilities are not enough in the pilgrimage tourism centres of the study area. Lack of cleanliness and beggars’ nuisance are the most important problems faced by the tourists in the study area. Therefore, the government authorities especially the local authorities should pay the special attention on their inconveniences and make necessary arrangements to correct them.

3. The pilgrimage tourism of the study area is exploited by the local transport operators and this is found to be one of the most important problems they face. Therefore, it is suggested that the exploitation by the local transport operators is to be checked by strict enforcement of rules and licensing mechanism by the government, especially the local government authorities.

4. The quality of the hospitality service in the study area is found to be poor in the pilgrimage tourism centres of the study area. Therefore, it is suggested that the government authorities should take necessary steps to enhance the quality of the hospitality services provided in the study area.

5. Since pilgrimage tourism contributes to the development of locality the local people are to be oriented in tourist friendly-values and a tourist-supportive-system is to be evolved. The nuisance by local people especially by the misuse by beggars and the exploitation by the local vendors and service providers are to be checked seriously by the Government authorities and the authorities of the worship places.

CONCLUSION

Pilgrimage tourism is now recognized as a source of diversifying the countries economy. It would how ever be folly to pretend that the sector will continue to stimulate the economy without pro active measures aimed at managing the forces confronting this sector. The study has revealed various problems that confront the sustained development of pilgrimage tourism. The data presented in this paper indicate the potential for pilgrimage tourism development. Although development to date has been limited to few major sites, the analysis shows that it should be possible to spread the development of pilgrimage tourism to more parts of the region. Particularly taking into account the potential for combining pilgrimage tourism with cultural and nature based tourism and the potential for developing new age pilgrimage tourism it should be possible to use the major anchor sites identified to stimulated regional development. In pilgrimage tourism a tourist seeks for peace of mind and a sense of spiritual satisfaction. Even though the visitors to the spiritual tourism spots of Pudukkottai district are satisfied with peaceful atmosphere they experience and the friendliness of the local people, they are dissatisfied with the basic infrastructure like sanitation and drinking water facilities, lack of cleanliness and exploitation by the local vehicle operators. If these problems are addressed properly and enough publicity is given the pilgrimage tourism avenues of the Pudukkottai district shall be explored to the optimum level. It is useful to consider these various recommendations and suggestions abundantly show that by the paper effective implementation of these suggestions, pilgrimage sites can be developed as a heavenly destination for pilgrimage tourism.

REFERENCE


