



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 "religionstourismus"]. 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-