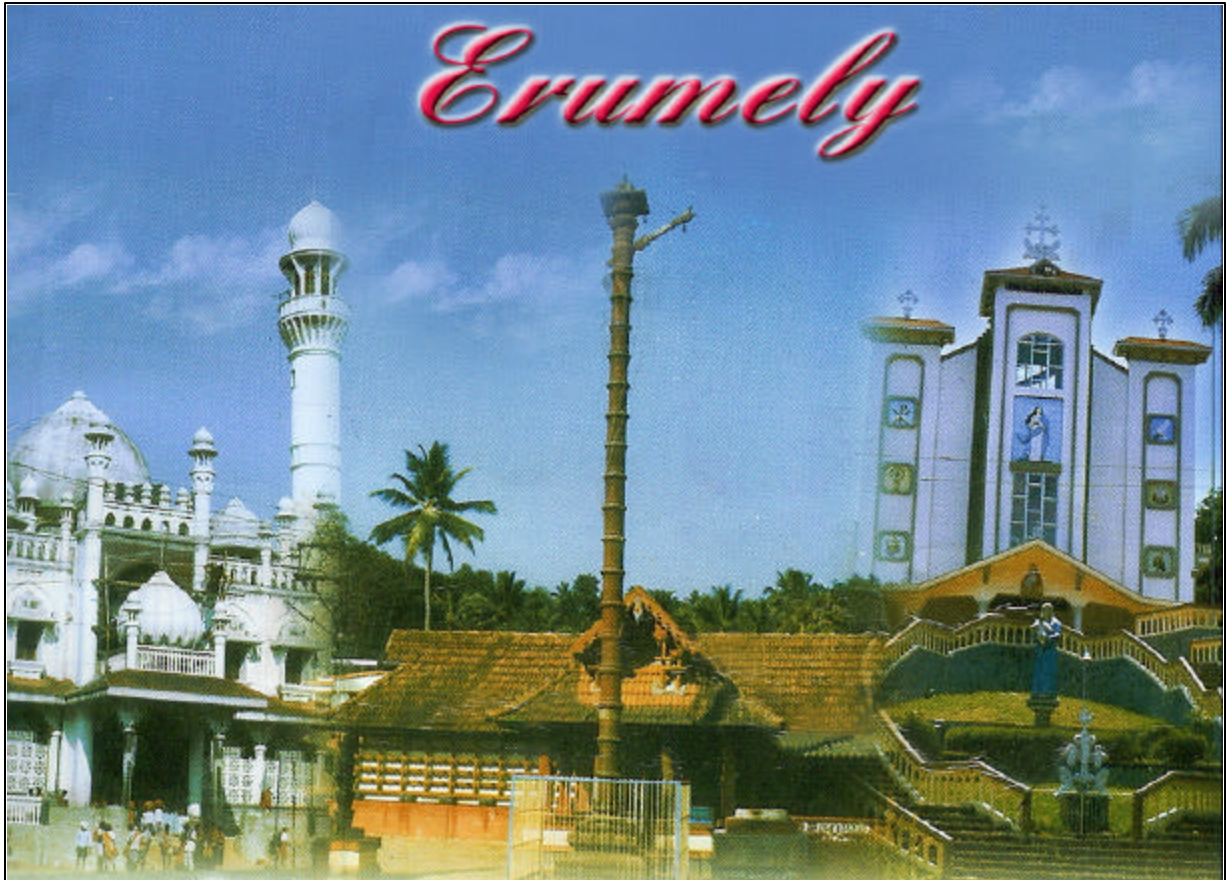


**ECONOMICS OF SABARI PILGRIMAGE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
THE HOUSEHOLDS IN ERUMELY GRAMA PANCHAYAT**



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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Indian pilgrimage is an old tradition. Hindus, all over the world believe in ‘chardham darshan’ and a visit to Thirupati, Vaishno Devi, Mathura, Haridwar, Shirdi, Pushkar, Sabarimala, Varanasi etc., as fulfilment of a life-long dream. The Muslim consider a trip to Ajmer Sheriff Nizamuddin Dargha as very pious. The Sikh community pay their respects to Harminder Saheb Golden Temple in Amritsar, and Patna Saheb to name a few. The Buddhist visits Bodhgaya, Sarnath and Nalanda. The Jains take their religion, very seriously. Their pilgrim centres include Sravana belgola, Palitana and other places. Christians visit pilgrim centres at Mylapur, Goa, Malayattoor, Palayoor and the like.

Sabarimala is now a fascinating phenomenon. It has surpassed all the accepted definitions of a pilgrim centre. The geographical, ecological and ritualistic uniqueness gives Sabarimala entirely different dimensions in comparison with other pilgrim centres.

The famous Ayyappa temple at Sabarimala is thronged by multitudes for nearly two and a half months every year. The devotees go for pilgrimage to Sabarimala after a period of penance. Taking a holy dip in the sacred river Pampa and having a darshan of Lord Ayyappa at the hill top temple is the fulfillment of Life’s ambition for crores of people. The temple is situated at a height of about + 914 m. above the sea level in the dense forest, forming a part of the Periyar Tiger Reserve. It is located in Perinadu village of Ranni taluk in Pathanamthitta District of Kerala. The Pampa River serenely flows by the foot of the hill about 4 Km. below the Holy Temple. Motor vehicles are allowed only up to Pampa and there after the devotees have to climb the 4 km. long steep stretch to reach the temple. Therefore, Pampa has become a base station for the pilgrimage.

The inflow of pilgrims to Sabarimala took on a high volume from the eighties and is still continues the trend. One estimate of the number of pilgrims who visited Sabarimala is 50 lakhs for the year 1984-85 and for the year 2001-2002, it was reported as 30-40 millions. It is estimated that each of the season there is a 20 percent increase in the number of pilgrims.¹

The gross inadequacies, at Sabarimala and enroute, for accommodation, sanitation, transportation and communication have led to water pollution, land pollution, traffic congestion and parking congestion. The pilgrims to Sabarimala have to stay at least one day either at sannidhanam

¹ The Week, January 31, 1999. p.19.

(temple precincts) or Pampa. Pilgrims from out side the State may stay even up to one week. Due to the inadequacy of the sanitary facilities, many resort to open-air defecation. The virgin evergreen forest around the temple is degenerating and wild life is also affected. The facilities available for pilgrims at Pampa and Sannidhanam and the base camps enroute are not at all adequate. Pandalam, Erumely, Vadasserikkara and Nilakkal are the main base camps. This result in environmental degradation at almost all places enroute to Sabarimala like Pandalam, Aranmula, Chengannur, Ranni, Erumey, Vadaserikkara, Plappally, Nilakkal etc.

Besides this environmental collapse, the pilgrimage brings forth economic benefits and costs to various agencies, households, and businessmen. For example Sabarimala temple contributes the lion's share of income for the Travancore Devaswom Board. In 1996-97 out of the total income of 57,47,29,712, Sabarimala's share to it was 34,42,60,749. In 2001-02 it is estimated that Sabarimala pilgrimage brought forth more than Fifty crores rupees to the Travancore Devaswom Board. It is believed that every year at least One Thousand Five Hundred crores of Rupees are pumped into the Kerala economy.

Thus, Sabari pilgrimage generates socio-cultural, economic and environmental effects throughout Kerala especially in Idukki, Kottayam and Pathanamthitta Districts.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Erumely is a Panchayat in the taluk of Kanjirappally in Kottayam District. It is a historical place and has an integral role to play in the legend of the Sabari Pilgrimage. Erumely is the major transit point of the Sabari Pilgrimage. "Pettathullal", the famous ritualistic ceremony associated with Sabari Pilgrimage take places place at Erumely. It is compulsory and customary that the devotees on their first pilgrimage (Kanni Ayyappan) should visit Erumely. It is estimated that during 2000-2003 pilgrim season one core pilgrims visited Erumely and 1,29,000 special vechicles arrived at Erumely during this season.² Majority of them belongs to the neighbouring states. The devotees bought provisions from the Erumely market (*Petta* means market and *thullal* dance) bundled them in blankets and suspended them on long rods, the ends of which rested on the shoulders of a set of two people. For this provision they spend atleast fifty rupees per head. Before the beginning of *Petta thullal*, they pray at Kochambalam, the small Saastha temple. From the small Saastha temple they dance their way to the accompaniment of drumbeats to the place of worship of the Muslim lieutenant vaavar and his followers. From there, they proceed to the Valiambalam, the bigger Shrine of Dharma

² The Legislative Committee on Environment of 9 th Kerala Legislative Assembly headed by Prof. A.V.Thamarakshan, reported that about one crore pilgrims visited Erumely during pilgrim season.

Saastha, where the *Petta thullal* is completed. They pay offerings at all these three place of worships, which sets a fine example of religious harmony.

This exodus of pilgrims into a small town like Erumely for a short duration of two months brings forth enormous changes in and around Erumely during the pilgrim season. During the off season (for nine months from February to October) majority of the households in Erumely Grama Panchayat earn their livelihood from agriculture. Out of the 8082 households nearly 25 percent are involved in business activities and the rest in service sectors. But during the pilgrim season (during December-December-January) there is a paradigm shift in the occupational pattern of the households. Some of them are directly involved in seasonal business activities, like selling ritual articles, selling coconuts, vessels, snacks, operating motor workshops, STD booths etc. Certain others earn income by letting out their surroundings for parking, business purposes, or making profit by providing toilets, bathroom facility, *virivakkal* facility etc. There is yet another category of households, which provide services, like *virivakkal*, toilets, parking, drinking water etc, free of cost. There are certain households, which do not involve in activities that are directly connected with pilgrimage. Seasonal employment is also created by way of manufacturing ritual articles, jobs in petty business activities etc.

Besides the households, business people are also widely involved in pilgrim related activities. It is estimated during the off season there are only 200 business people in the Erumely town, while during season their number increases to around 400. Most of them belong to the category of service providers and petty traders. Again, it is estimated that more than 50 percent of the business income during the year accrued during three months of the pilgrim season.

Devaswom Board and Juma-Ath are actively involved in pilgrim-related activities. Besides provision of ritual facilities they are providing *virivakkal*, parking, shopping, toilet facilities. They are economically benefitted by way of offerings, auction, letting the land etc. It is estimated that the Erumely Devaswom authorities alone receives more than one crore rupees by way of receipt from various activities during a pilgrim season. Besides these voluntary agencies like Ayyappa Seva Sangam is actively involved in providing services to the pilgrim.

The other important agencies involved in seasonal activities are the Panchayat, the K.S.R.T.C, Primary Health Centre, Electricity Board, Water Authority, Police Department, Post and Telegrams, Civil supplies etc. It brings income to many agencies. For example, during off-season earning per k.m. for K.S.R.T.C ranges between Rs.14-16, whereas during the season it is more than Rs.26 per k.m.

In order to meet the requirements of the increasing number of pilgrims, new roads, bridges, stadiums, toilets, hotels, shopping centres etc, are constructed. During this year a Pilgrim Amenities Centre worth one and a half crore rupees was established by K.T.D.C at Erumely.

However, during pilgrim season, the local people encounter various incidental problems such as theft, motor accidents, shortage of drinking water, voltage fluctuations, traffic congestion, problem of illicit liquor, flies and mosquito menace, wastage disposal problem, picking pockets, shortage of medical facility etc. Normally the pilgrim season ends with wide spread diseases due to pollution and the scavenger flies. These negative effects result in great losses even to those who are not at all involved in pilgrim related activities.

In spite of all these constraints people in Erumely welcome pilgrimage, why? Is it due to the infrastructural development that takes place in Erumely? Or is it due to the fact it brings forth income/employment to the households or agencies directly involved in pilgrim related activities? If so, how does the income generation take place? What is the attitude of the local people towards pilgrimage? The study entitled “The Economics of Sabari Pilgrimage with special reference to households in Erumely Grama Panchayat” is an investigation to seek answer to these questions.

1.2 Review of Literature

Over the years Sabarimala and Sabari pilgrimage have undergone unimaginable changes; some are for the good and others are not. The famous Ayyappa temple at Sabarimala is situated at a height of about + 914 m. above mean sea level in the dense forest, forming a part of the Periyar Tiger Reserve. It is located in Perunadu village of Ranni Taluk in Pathanamthitta District in Kerala.

The Sabarimala temple is at present kept open for darsan during the first 5 days of every Malayalam month and for about two and a half months every year during the festival season covering the ‘Mandala Pooja’ and ‘Makara Vilakku’. Starting from the first of Malayalam month ‘Vrichikam’ and ending with the first of ‘Makaram’ usually in November – January. In addition to this the temple is kept open during other popular festivals of Kerala like Onam and Vishu.

Large numbers of pilgrims visit the Sabarimala temple during the Mandala Pooja and Makara Vilakku festival season. Among the devotees, 40 percent hail from Kerala and the remaining 60 percent are from rest of India especially from the neighbouring States of TamilNadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The number of pilgrims is increasing every year.

Erumely is the major transit point of Sabarimala pilgrimage. It is compulsory and customary that devotees on their first pilgrimage (Kanni Ayyappas) should visit Erumely. It is estimated that sixty percent of the Sabari pilgrims visit Erumely. Enormous changes have taken place in a few years in Erumely.

Though, pilgrimage has much economic, historic, cultural and environmental significance in Erumely, the academic community seems to be neglecting the sea changes that taken place in and around Erumely resultant to Sabari pilgrimage. This may be the reason why the researchers on the topic particularly about the economic impact of pilgrim tourism especially among the households, are very limited in number. However, the researcher went through the available published work as far as possible to obtain a clear theoretical background for the present study. The findings of the literature review are briefly given below.

Tourism

The word ‘tour’ originated from the Latin word ‘tornus’ that was later changed into ‘tourn’ meaning turner’s wheel. Hence the word ‘tornus’ or ‘tourn’ means a round journey. It means a journey started from one place and returning to the same place, i.e., a circular journey. The word ‘tour’ is defined by Webster’s dictionary as, “a circular trip usually for business, pleasure or education during which various places are visited and for which an itinerary is usually planned”. The *Encyclopaedia of Tourism*³ has this to say: “A tour is now commonly used in two distinct senses, to describe either a day trip or excursion or any touristic journey involving a period of travel and overnight stay”.

The League of Nations defined foreign tourist as ‘any person visiting a country other than, which he usually resides, for a period of at least 24 hours’. The World Tourism Organization, an intergovernmental set-up under the aegis of the United Nations has defined a tourist as a temporary visitor staying for at least twenty four hours in a country visited where the purpose of the visit can be classified under any of the following headings:

- (a) Leisure, recreation, holiday, health, study, religion and sports, or
- (b) Business, family, mission and meetings.

Maslow’s⁴ need hierarchy theory can be aptly used to explain the hierarchy of motivations of tourism.

Needs	Types of Tourism
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³ Jafar Jafari, Ed: 2000, *Encyclopaedia of tourism*, Routledge, London.

⁴ A.H. Maslow, 1954, *Motivation and Personality*, Harper and Row, New York.

Self actualisation needs	Pilgrim tourism
Ego needs (esteem)	Travel to exotic destinations
Social needs	Package, Wild life, Beach tours
Safety needs	Tours to overcome fear of flying
Physiological needs	Health tourism, Spas, Rest and Relax

Adapted from: *Marketing of Tourism, Holloway and Robinsons, 1992.*

An effective and successful development of tourism includes the development of four major sectors. They are: infrastructure development, tourism product development, human resources development and market development. An appropriate development of tourism necessitates a large-scale development in infrastructure, which requires large-scale investment. A concerted and deliberate effort is needed for tourism product development at national and international levels. Since tourism is highly labour intensive, sufficient emphasis has to be laid on human resources development. Finally, tourism marketing is a specialised activity that requires professionalism. Long term planning, market research analysis and clear sense of direction in tourism marketing can step up tourist arrivals and increase the time and money spent by the tourists. Thus, the need of the hour is a sustainable development.⁵

The TCS Survey titled ‘Economic Benefits of Tourism Sector in Kerala’⁶ highlighted the economic benefits received by Kerala because of tourism. The survey has gone through the duration of stay of tourists, expenditure of tourists and employment and income generated by tourism. It also calculated the economic impact of arrival of foreign tourists and domestic tourists.

The draft of the Tourism Vision 2025⁷ prepared by the Department of Tourism, Govt. of Kerala, has gone through the salient features in detail and the present scenario of Kerala tourism. On the basis of the present scenario, it has tried to provide a clear vision and direction for optimising the

⁵ Krishan K. Kamra, 2001, *Economics of Tourism: Pricing, Impacts, Forecasting*, Kanishka Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, p.59.

⁶ Tata Consultancy Services, 2001, Survey on “Economic Benefits of Tourism sector in Kerala”, Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala.

⁷ *Tourism Vision 2025 (Draft)*, 2001, Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala.

tourism potential of the state. Whether the vision proposed by the Tourism Department is viable or not is to be tested by time.

Menezes and Lobo⁸ mention that the employment benefits, through multiplier effect, can generate myriad other industries, and enable the percolation of economic benefits to less developed areas. Ratandeep Singh considers tourism as basically a benevolent, smokeless industry⁹.

In a study conducted by ICCT for the government of India, it is found that income creation and foreign exchange are two major economic benefits¹⁰. In his doctoral thesis, Gupta¹¹ tried to analyse the income and employment effects on the economy of Jammu and Kashmir. He is of the opinion that in developed countries the economic benefits from tourism ranged from 20 to 40 percent. Hilary Metcalf¹² has gone through the employment generation aspects. He tried to identify the various categories of temporary employees in tourism industry and their work responsibilities. According to him, part-time workers hold about 30 percent of all permanent jobs in the field of tourism.

Kaul in his three volumes of "Dynamics of Tourism"¹³ tried to study tourism related industries and its multiplier effects. To Kaul, accommodation, transportation and marketing are the three aspects to be given special importance. He also studied the inadequacy of general infrastructure as the basic hindrance to tourism. A.P.Singh¹⁴ made an in-depth study into different travel attractions and the different motivators of travel. He argues that historical and cultural attractions play a crucial role in the promotion of foreign tourism.

⁸ Menezes and Lobo. 1991, *Luxury Beach-Resort Tourism in Goa, India: The Dark side of 'Development' and 'Growth'*, Books for a Change, London, p.11-12.

⁹ Ratandeep Singh. 1998, *Infrastructure of Tourism in India*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, p.43.

¹⁰ Government of India, 1987, *Economic Benefits of Tourism* (prepared by ICCT for National Committee on Tourism) Dept.of Tourism, New Delhi, p.113.

¹¹ D.B.Gupta, 1983, *Income and Employment Effect of Tourism: A case study of Jammu and Kashmir State*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Jammu, pp.48-49.

¹² Hilary, Metcalf, 1987, "Employment Structure in Tourism and Leisure", IMS Report no.143, University Sussex, Brighton.

¹³ R.N.Kaul, 1985, *Dynamics of Tourism*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi.

¹⁴ A. P Singh, 1998, *Himalayan Environment Tourism*, Chugh Publications, Allahabad.

The cost benefit analysis and the multiplier effect of tourism industry were subjected to study by Robert Christy Mill and Alastire M. Morrison¹⁵. They made an elaborate study of the opportunity cost, socio economic costs and benefits of tourism development. They found that tourism is more labour intensive than any other industry. They concluded that the marketing aspect of tourism is essential for the promotion of tourist products.

Impacts of Tourism

Tourism brings about an intermingling of people from diverse social, cultural, political and economic backgrounds. The benefits and cost of tourism accrue to both the visitors and the resident population. It has a wide variety of impacts, some measurable and quantifiable, others immeasurable and qualitative. Some may be positive, others negative.

Usha Arora has this to say about the impacts of tourism. "In addition to the direct revenues which tourism brings into a country, there are tremendous secondary benefits. The money that is directly spent by a tourist travels through many levels in the overall economy, increasing purchasing power all along the way. As it does so, it provides both direct and indirect employment opportunities. It also provides an infrastructure of facilities and amenities that form a base and stimulus for the diversification of economy and for the development of other industries. It is an industry that can be developed in places which are deficient in resources other than climate and scenery".¹⁶

According to Mohammed Zulfiker, the general issues concerned with the impact of tourism must include the notions of carrying capacity. He further says: Carrying capacity is a relatively straight forward concept in simple terms it refers to a point beyond which further levels of visitation or development would lead to an unacceptable deterioration in the physical environment and of the visitor's experience. Any consideration of the tourism's impact must recognize the pivotal role which carrying capacity plays by intervening in the relationship between the visitor and the resource"¹⁷

Zulfikar further says that the demonstration effect may be replaced by confrontation effect. He also says that excessive and badly planned tourism development affects the physical environment of a country. The uncontrolled commercial exploitation of tourism development may intrude into

¹⁵ Robert Christy Mill and Alastire M Morrison, 1984, *The Tourism System* Prentice Hall International, USA.

¹⁶ Usha Arora. "Strategic Management in Travel and Tourism", *Facts For You*, October 2000, p.36.

¹⁷ Zulfikar Mohammed, 1998, *Introduction to Tourism and Hotel Industry with special focus on Front Office Management*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, p. 53.

surrounding cultural and scenic environment.¹⁸ Zulfikar has advocated for a sustainable development and response consumption tourism. Planning should be made designed to maximise the economic and social benefits from tourism to the resident population. Lesly France and Clive Sowden, in a paper, have expressed mixed opinion about tourism development in St.Lucia.¹⁹ Though tourism has been perceived by less developed countries as a viable route towards modernisation and development, the negative socio-cultural effects may outweigh the benefits of tourism.

Aranganathan observed the following negative aspects of tourism on society:²⁰

- i) Ecological and Environmental degradation
- ii) Exploitation of common resources
- iii) Destruction of livelihood of the local people and social tensions
- iv) Unplanned tourism growth

He points out over exposure of the flora and fauna, adverse effect on the tranquillity of wild life, encroachment into nature's personality, the over exploitation of ground water, creation of more and more concrete structures, mounting up of garbage, enormous increase in vehicle traffic etc as some ecological and environmental problems due to tourism development. The exclusive use of common resources like water and electricity by the tourist may be at the expense of the local people. The influx of tourism increases prices and impoverishes local communities. Hotel and tourist complexes may grab agricultural land. Social tension and illegal activities may occur. Over exploitation undermining local culture for the lure of foreign exchange, mismatch of culture between the host and foreign tourist, etc., may happen as the negative aspects of tourism.

Gunn narrates the positive and negative impacts of tourism.²¹ The positive impacts of tourism are primary and secondary. The primary or direct impacts include business receipts, income, private

¹⁸ Zulfikar Mohammed, 1998, pp.53-67.

¹⁹ Lesly France and Clive Sowden, "Tourism Development on the Island of St. Lucia", *Tourism Management: A Global Perspective*, 2001, (ed.) G.S Batra and A.S. Chawla, Deep and Deep publications, New Delhi, pp. 13-32.

²⁰ T. Aranganathan, "Tourism a Social Aspect", *Indian Commerce Bulletin*, vol.2, August 1998, Commerce Association of Kerala, pp. 6-10.

²¹ Gunn A Clare, 1998, *Tourism Planning*, Taylor and Francis, New York, p.2.

and public employment, and government receipts. The secondary effects are indirect benefits from primary business outlays by spending of primary income, the social and personal values derived from tourism, improvement from natural and manufactured environment, etc. The negative impacts may be economic, social or personal. In the economic side there is the cost of tourism development, drain on the economy due to the seasonality of tourism, and the high opportunity cost. Under the social and personal side, there are displacement of the local people, demoralization, growth in prostitution and crime, conflict in values, loss of local culture and ecological and environmental problems.

Economic Impacts of Tourism

Roger Doswell remarks that the study of the economic impact is directed mostly to the aspect of how to achieve a more successful control of a country's economy in the context of an accepted political framework, and the system of mechanisms of checks and balances to regulate the economy so as to achieve a desired and specified outcome.²² Negi states that the economic benefit received from tourism has immense multiplier effect.²³

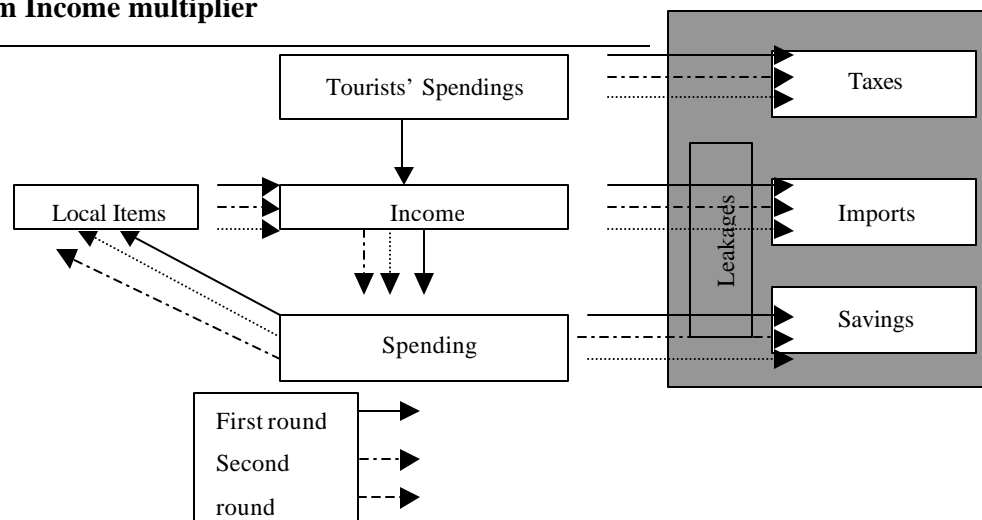
Income generated with in the country

Income in an economy can be generated from various sources like salary, wages, rent, taxes, interest, profit and so on. The expenditure made by one person is the income of another person. Income is created directly or indirectly. Tourism a labour intensive service industry, can create direct as well as indirect income from tourist expenditure by providing tourist goods and services. For example, expenditure in hotels, investment in infrastructure development, taxis, car parking, catering services, purchase of goods, and services like water, electricity, gas, food and beverages etc all result in income generation. The flow of money generated by tourism multiplies many times as it passes through various sections of economy. This is known as the multiplier effect of tourism earnings. It is the extra income produced in an economy as a result of the initial spending of money. This extra income is again invested directly or indirectly and there can be different rounds of income generation. Along with the initial spending and with each round of spending of tourism income, some benefits of spending may be dissipated through different sources known as leakages. Savings made by individuals or by the country, tourists purchasing imported goods, imports to be made by the local people, remittances of income outside the country etc are the examples of leakages. The following figure explains the tourism income multiplier.

²² Doswell Roger, 1978, *Case Studies in Tourism*, Barrie and Jenkins Ltd, London, p.42

²³ J.M.S. Negi, 1982, *Tourism and Hoteliering*, Gitanjali Publications, - New Delhi, pp. 31-32.

Tourism Income multiplier



Adapted from: Krishnan K Kamra, 2001

The shaded portion represents the area of leakages. There is an inverse relation between tourism income multiplier and proportion of leakages. As the proportion of leakage is high, the proportion of tourism income is low and vice versa.

Negi²⁴ finds that money spent by tourists (tourist expenditure) does not stop moving after it is spent; rather it circulates through the economy of the country. When a tourist visits a place and spends his money in that particular region, part of this money becomes income for the people living in that region. Part of this income is spent which generates income for others to spend. A part of this income is again spent and so on and so forth. This money changes hands a number of times and is spent and respent. This impact of this expenditure on the nation's economy will go on multiplying if it is spent and changes hands again and again. Thus the national currency exchanged for foreign currency that enters the country spreads quickly in the market. The intensity of the multiplier depends on the proportion of the income from tourism that is redistributed to other branches of the national economy.

The Master Plan of 1986 of the Government of Kerala says: "tourism Industry looms large in the economic sphere of Kerala as a potential revolutionary agent of change. A well-organised thrust in the field of tourism can attract millions of people to Kerala from other parts of India and abroad and ensure a steady flow of vast sums to the state demanding a variety of services and goods and thereby providing employment to an ever-increasing number people, educated and uneducated. In

²⁴ J.M.S. Negi, 1982, *Tourism and Hoteliering*, Gitanjali Publications, New Delhi.

fact there is no other industry which can meet successfully some of the most vexed problems of Kerala such as poverty and unemployment”.²⁵

The tourist expenditure has a tremendous effect on the economy of the host country. From the frontline level it diffuses into the inner levels of the economy. Kamra catalogued the various levels of the impact of tourist spending as the direct, the indirect, and the induced effects.

The direct effect or the first round effect is the most obvious effect of tourism spending. The effect is created in the front-line tourist sectors of provisioning of tourist goods and services. Expenditures on hotels, restaurants, taxis, railways, domestic airlines, tourism-generated exports etc are included in this group. The direct impact is in general and depends on the capability of the destination to provide for tourist demands.

The indirect effect is a series of the successive rounds of secondary expenditure by suppliers to the tourist sectors, which results from the direct expenditure. Purchase of goods and services by the front-line establishments from local suppliers and wholesalers and from other sections within the local economy constitute indirect effect. Generally, indirect effect will be less than the direct effect because of the leakages in the direct effect.

The incremental local incomes accrued to the local people in the form of direct or indirect income may be spent or re spent for non-tourism goods and services. Such income generates further additional rounds of income and it is called induced effect of tourist income. For example, hotel workers purchasing goods and services from their wages.

Taxes

Tourism can be used as an important resource for generating government revenue. The tax income to the government from tourism sector may be direct or indirect. Most taxes on tourists accrue in the form of sales tax on tourist spending. The government can collect tax also as import duty on goods imported for tourists' use. Tourism therefore, contributes to tax revenue both directly through sales taxes and indirectly through property, profits and income tax. Pran Nath Seth gives the following chart to explain the state benefits from tourism revenue.²⁶

²⁵ “Master plan for development of tourism in Kerala”, 1986, a project report prepared by the Asian institute of Development and Entrepreneurship, the Department of Tourism – Govt. of Kerala, p.36.

²⁶ Pran Nath Seth, 1997, Successful Tourism Management, vol. 1, Fundamentals of Tourism, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, p.76.

Babu Paul IAS writes: “Government have endeavoured to promote tourism into major economic activity of the state. The entire potential of tourism as a generator of employment has to be further tapped”.²⁷ He also advocated the creation of conditions for the smooth passage and stay of tourists in the state, so as to increase their period of stay and optimise the economic benefits accruing from tourism.

Bhatia²⁸ explains the unemployment multiplier, which can be expressed as the ratio of the combination of direct and secondary employment generated per additional unit of tourism expenditure. In multiplier evaluations the Keynesian model is usually used. This model is based on identifying streams of income and employment, which are generated in rounds. They diminish in geometric progression because of leakages at each round. Payment of goods and services produced out side, remittances of incomes outside, direct and indirect taxation, savings etc are examples of leakages.

Pran Nath Seth²⁹ also explains the multiplier effect of employment. He says that if there is an increase in the number of visitors to a destination, there is an increase in the manpower requirements. An increase in the occupancy of tourist hotels will result in an increase in more staff at the hotel counter, more drivers, guides, salesmen etc. It is the direct employment. At the same time indirect employment is also created in other areas like agriculture, horticulture, manufacturing, etc. A third level generation of employment is created by the diffusion of receipts from direct and indirect beneficiaries. This is called Down stream or Induced Employment.

Tourism policy of Kerala 1991 says: “for an appropriate development of tourism, there has to be large scale investment. Investment by the government as well as by the private sector will have to be stepped up. It has a hassle-free and friendly atmosphere that facilitates investment”.³⁰

²⁷ D. Babu Paul, IAS - “A perspective paper on tourism development in Kerala”- 1991, Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala, p. 6.

²⁸ A.K. Bhatia, *International Tourism: Fundamentals and Practices*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, pp. 453-456.

²⁹ Pran Nath Seth, 1997, *Successful Tourism Management*, vol.1, Fundamentals of Tourism, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, p.83.

³⁰ Tourism Policy Kerala, 1991, published by Kerala Tourism, Park view, Thiruvananthapuram, pp.8-9.

The State Planning Board of Kerala³¹ considers infrastructure development as the major thrust area of the VIII and IX plans of the state. It points out that in spite of the huge investment made in the sector, the Task Force on Tourism Development has observed that the problem of lack of infrastructure facilities, marketing and publicity still stand in the way of tourism development in Kerala. Creation of infrastructure facilities, development of information system, strengthening of marketing efforts and assistance to Public Sector and other undertakings closely connected with tourism development are the main programmes envisaged in the Ninth Plan.

Usha Arora is of the opinion that: “Travel and Tourism promote and improve amenities for the local population and enhancement of market for the local products”.³²

Standard of Living

Tourism can play a vital role in enhancing the standard of living of the people of the tourism-developed areas. The standard of living of a community largely depend upon the earnings of the people, infrastructures available, mode of employment, regional development etc. Tourism is a vibrant and economically useful activity. Tourists not only bring money into a locality, but also carry a strong and visible lifestyle, dress code, food habits, merry making manners, new cultural and social habits, etc. The local people can imbibe a lot from the tourists. They can study and adopt better techniques of life from the tourists who invariably have a better standard of living.

The joint declaration between WTO and UNEP³³ states that the protection, enhancement and improvement of the various components of man’s environment are among the fundamental conditions for the harmonious development of tourism. Efficient management of tourism may contribute to a large extent to protecting the physical environment and the cultural heritage as well as improving the quality of life.

Kunal Chathopadhy points out: “Tourist centres are frequently located in ‘untouched’ regions usually in less favoured parts of a developing country, where the local population has been cut off from the process of socio-economic development and many have had to recourse to migration to the

³¹ Ninth Five Year Plan 1997-2002 and Annual Plan 1997-1998, vol. 1, State Planning Board, Thiruvananthapuram.

³² Usha Arora. “Strategic Management in Travel and Tourism”, *Facts For You*, October 2000, p.6.

³³ Joint Declaration between WTO and UNEP, Madrid, 1982.

nearest principal city in search of a job. In other words, tourism, particularly domestic tourism, opens up new growth centres in the interior of a country".³⁴

Smith³⁵ argues that one of the major benefits of regional development from tourism is a significant contribution to their economy, and the creation of new jobs. The revenue earned from tourism is a basic income since it is equal to export earnings. The money spent by tourist is new money in the local economy. It is not just a recycling of wealth. It is the creation of new money.

In some cases, a place is made famous and is made economically advanced, only because of tourism-related activities. The example of Gokarna in Karnataka is a case in point. As *India Today* remarks, "the economy of this tiny town is entirely dependent on the floating pilgrim population, the chief attraction being the temple dedicated to Mahabaleswara".³⁶ Kerala too has such tourist spots which are otherwise ordinary underdeveloped rural areas. Kovalam, Kumarakom, Varkkala, Sabarimala and Bekkal have seen the kind of socio-economic development we find today only because of the tourist inflow to those places. Moreover, they are places, which possess no other potential for development, as they are comparatively unsuitable for industrial development or other economic ventures.

Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage brings forth benefits, both quantifiable (such as additional employment options, rise in property value, enhanced public revenue through taxes) and non-quantifiable (such as increased use of public utility services, more entertainment options, general development of the region, and rise in the standard of living). It generates costs both quantifiable (such as increased cost of living) and non quantifiable (such as the effect of increased congestion, probable increase in crime, pollution, diseases and threats to traditional values³⁷ during the pilgrim season the resident population not only has to put up with the effects of congestion, unknown during the rest of the year, but also often has to change the way of life completely. This 'co-existence' is by no means always easy and social tensions (particularly acute in places where there is many tourists may occur.

³⁴ Kunal Chathopadhy, 1995 *Economic Impact of Tourism Development, An Indian Experience*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, p.90.

³⁵ L.J. Smith Stephen, 1989, Estimating the local economic magnitude of tourism, *Tourism Analysis: A handbook*, Longman, UK, p. 27.

³⁶ *India Today*, September 30, 1983.

³⁷ Middleton V.T.C.1998 *Marketing in Travel and Tourism* Heinemanns.

Pilgrim-tourism enables the flow of money earned in other regions to the host regions, thereby creating additional business revenue, income jobs and revenue to the local government. Some portion of the money received by the business establishment individuals and government agencies is thereby creating further rounds of economic activity. These secondary effects can in total considered exceed in magnitude the initial direct effects. The pilgrimage helps to improve the household's income by acting as monetary incentives to local crafts, market for local produce and effect on the welfare of the resident population. The infrastructures created primarily to cater for pilgrimage provide access to wider markets, for many locally produced goods. Pilgrimage may lead to the increase of value of land and which, in turn, benefit the households.³⁸

Srikanth observed that during the pilgrim season millions of people move towards the shrine of Sabarimala which brings-forth economic, political, socio-cultural, environmental and ecological effects on the people and the locality in and around Sabarimala. Economic importance of pilgrim tourism can be studied in relation to its contributions to income and employment generation.³⁹

Omman of the opinion that the most obvious material benefits from pilgrimage are that it creates employment provides a source of income, brings up a better standard of living and helps regional development.⁴⁰

Agalappa observed that an activity like pilgrimage brings forth impact on air, noise, water, and land, biological and socio-economic environment. The economic impact is by way of creation of employment, its multiplier effects on secondary and tertiary employments. The socio-economic structure may be altered and the quality of life would be improved due to the accrual of more income and infrastructure facilities to them.⁴¹

Taran commented that pilgrimage is not picnic. "Wet shoes, tired knees, gorgeous views, indifferent food, glorious sunsets, dirty sleeping bags and dangerous ascents are all a part of the pilgrims mixed bag."⁴²

³⁸ Mohammed Zulfikar (1998) introduction to Tourism and Hotel Industry with special focus on front office Management, Vikas publishing house Private Ltd. New Delhi, pp-58.

³⁹ Srikanth C.V.Manoj (1998) Sabarimala, Its timeless message. Integral Books Payyannor P.119

⁴⁰ Omman M.A, (1998), Interview 16th April Mahajan, L.C.Shunali Mahajan, Shanta Agarwal (1996) Tourism Business King Books, New Delhi.P.14.

⁴¹ Agalppa Moses (1997) "An impact Assessment of Dream city Calicut", PP 10-12

⁴² Tarajan Vijay (2001) An odyssey in Tibet: pilgrimage to Kailas Mansarovar, Ritwik P4.

Sabari Pilgrimage

Sabarimala is now a phenomenon. It has outgrown all the accepted definitions of a pilgrim centre. The geographical, ecological and ritualistic uniqueness gives Sabarimala an entirely different dimension when compared with other centres of pilgrimage.

In spite of the hazards and inconveniences, the number of pilgrims to Sabarimala has increasing at an astounding rate. Over the last 20 years it has grown from thousands to millions.

Take just one example: During the 1985-86 season, a total number of 70,043 vehicles made trips to Pampa. In 1990-91, it grew up to 11,02,718. In 1994 it was 1,32,721 and in 2002 it was 2,65,172. The figures do not include those hundreds of trips by K.S.R.T.C. buses. The graph is ever soaring up.

One can imagine the stress and strain this exerts on the whole system. The basic facilities remain the same. Only the demand has increased. This has virtually turned the phenomenon that is Sabarimala into a sociological problem. It has now grown into nothing less than a crisis.

Total breakdown of the whole system that makes Sabarimala tick has been inevitable, considering the ever increasing flow of humanity during the 'sacred season', that is between November and January. Whatever has been done in and around Sabarimala to help the pilgrims has apparently boomeranged. The fact is that the magnitude of the problem has grown out of proportion over the years.

Time has changed. The sacred mountain temple is now the goal for millions from all over the country. Thus the crisis does not confine to Sabarimala alone, anymore. The entire South India feels the pressure, during the season.

"The Mathrubhoomi" give a very detailed description of the whole sabarimala pilgrim activities and the main Ayyappa Temples in the state. Besides Sabarimala, there are four other important Saastha temples in different parts of the state. They are situated at such as Achancoil, Ariankavu, Kulathupuzha and Sasthankotta.⁴³

Saji remarked that there was a significant variation in the level of satisfaction of the pilgrims as regards the various facilities provided to them at Erumely. However, he is of the opinion that there exists a wide scope for pilgrim Tourism at Erumely if sufficient infrastructure is created and professional management of the pilgrim center is taken place.⁴⁴

⁴³ The MathruBhoomi journal "Sabarimala special 1993 PP1-10

⁴⁴ Saji George (1997) "Pilgrim Tourism a study with special reference to Sabari pilgrimage, M.com dissertation (unpublished) P7-11.

'The Hindu' reported that there were conflicting views with respect to the number of pilgrims who visited Sabarimala and Erumely during the pilgrim season. According to Travancore Devaswom Board, a total of six core pilgrims reached Sabarimala during the pilgrim season (during 1998) of which 60 per cent visited Erumely. The sociologist Mr.S.Guruvayrappan who conducted the study under the Indian Eco-development Project sponsored by the Forest Department reported that only 45,93,912 pilgrims visited Sabarimala during the season 1998-99. It is found out that there exists a wide gap between the need and availability of various facilities to pilgrims both at Sabarimala and Erumely.⁴⁵

'The Malayala Manorama' highlighted the limitations of the facilities provided to the pilgrims and the suggestions to overcome them. It stressed the need for infrastructure development such as construction and maintenance of roads sanitation, hospital facilities traffic management, pollution control etc.⁴⁶

'The Malayala Manorama' reported that the water pollution resultant to the pilgrimage leads to the destruction of fishes in the river Pampas. The illicit liquor Mafia and the fly menace create great hardships to the people and the pilgrimage.⁴⁷

The Legislative Committee on Environment (headed by Prof.A.V. Thamarakshan) reported that the main entry point to Sabarimala was through Erumely and it was estimated that about one core devotees visited Erumely during pilgrims season. It had reported that there exists a gap between what was needed and what was provided to the pilgrims. Lack of toilets, facilities for virivakkal and parking, inadequacies at the health centre, water scarcity etc were the major problems encountered by the pilgrims. The committee observed that on an average the devotees spent one and a half day in Erumely. Among the pilgrims 40 percent hails from the state itself. The rest are from Tamilnadu, A.P., Karna taka and Maharastra. The report also indicated that there was 20 per cent increase in the number of devotees every year.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ The Hindu "How many Pilgrims visited Sabarimala during season" Friday 29-03-99 P.5

⁴⁶ The 'Malayala Manorama' Editorial December 29, 1998 P6.

⁴⁷ The 'Malayala Manorama' "Sabarimala and Environmental Problems" December 29,1998.

⁴⁸ Thamarakshan A.V. (1998) Chairman Legislative Committee on Environment of the 10th Kerala Legislative Assembly PP 11-14

While presenting a Fact Paper and Postulate for the organised development centred on the Shrine - Chandra Sekhara Prabhu (1994) remarked that, Over the years Sabarimala and Sabarimala pilgrimages have undergone unimaginable changes; some are for the good and others are not.

Even though rituals and tradition have not been watered down to awesome levels, the demeanour of the administrating authority leaves much to be desired.

First of all it must be admitted in no uncertain terms that Sabarimala, is a forest shrine. The history and legend of Ayyappa speaks in volumes of his adventure in the dense jungle of the Eastern Ghat. Child Ayyappa himself was found in the thick jungle. He subjugated Mahishi in a forest. He fought many battles camped in deep forests and finally, discarding the Crown of Pandalam Kingdom. He settled in a pristine tranquillity of the lush green forest fortified by 18 mountains. No other haven would have been more comfortable to a God who rides on a tiger and spend most of his life's mission in the thickets.

That being the legendary ambience of the saga of Lord Ayyappa, one cannot think of any ecological imbalance sought to be perpetuated on and around the seat of Ayyappa. The abode of Forest God will have to be in the midst of unmauled and undescrated virgin forest. This fact being a pre-requisite, has to be accepted by all who deal with Sabarimala in whatever manner, and thinking about Sabarimala has to be progressed on this premise.

The basic issue on pilgrimage is this: [i] who is the end beneficiary of Sabarimala Pilgrimage; [ii] Philosophy and Principle of Ayyappa Darsanam, [iii] and yoga.

The end beneficiary of the Pilgrimage is no one but the pilgrim himself. And hence any planning to provide maximum help and convenience to the pilgrim has to be evolved strictly adhering to a futuristic methodology, with minimum or no injury to the protective eco system, already brutally assaulted upon. The traditional pilgrimage is through thick-canopied forest, which abounds in wide varieties of animals. Traditionally forest is tranquil bed of mediation and the fountain of all knowledge hence our ancient sages, and seers made it their home. We inherit this tradition rooted in deep jungles, nurtured by great seers and branched out over the millenniums. Sabarimala pilgrimage is a sacred reminder of this primitive wisdom.

Pilgrims are focal point in Sabarimala. Every effort to provide facility to them must be planned keeping in mind the changing pattern of pilgrimage and ever-increasing need to protect the environment. Facilities for Darshan and protection of environment should move hand in hand and should not be mutually contradictory or destructive. In this context it must be made specifically clear that Pilgrimage does not necessarily mean camping at Sabarimala for days on end. It was permissible

in yester decades, when transport facilities were nil and pilgrims were forced to move in groups for fear of attack of wild animals. Such a situation is not at all existent now. Hence the style of pilgrimage has to be fine-tuned to the prevalent situations, which in no way undermines the spirit or sanctity of pilgrimage. No pilgrim, well versed in Ayyappa legend, would want to destroy the forest around which provides shade to the Lord.

Yoga, the coalescence, of the devotee with the deity is the ultimate destination, or the bliss of the pilgrimage. It is incumbent on the authorities to provide all facilities to have darshan in front of Ayyappa, without interference of police or other officials. Having had darshan pilgrims are expected to trek back immediately, for overstaying will cause overcrowding and other related problems. This is the case with every other shrine as well.

What the pilgrim needs is not cosy accommodation to stay or costly food to tickle his palate, but minimum needs on the way up and down, without the deafening sound of crackers and non-stop blare of loud speakers besides the pestering vendors, who literally hold you at ransom often times.

Again, humane approach to pilgrims in front of the shrine is a prerequisite to sustain the sanctity of the shrine. It is the pilgrims right to be served Appam and Aravana made out of pure and prescribed materials, for the price he pays.

It is also important to take care of his health on his journey is most important. During the last season itself about 27 deaths were reported on the pilgrim route. Some due to natural causes, but most were cardiac deaths. Out of 23 deaths due to cardiac arrests, at least some, even if it is just one could have been saved if timely medical care available in Cardiac zone on the pilgrim route. Some of the heart patients could have been dissuaded from up journey if BP apparatus were positioned wherever needed.

Some appalling is the sanitary situation at Pampa and Sabaimala that a sudden burst of epidemic is not ruled out by a Govt. agency concerned with Sabarimala. The faecal contamination in the drinking water supplied by Govt. agency is alarmingly high and unfit even for body wash. The level of coliform bacteria is where between 1600 to 3003 per hundred millilitre of water whereas the permitted level is maximum 10 bacteria. This fact was given out to the press by Govt. Chief Secretary himself. Admitting that most of the well water in Kerala is contaminated to the extent of 100 to 700 bacteria Coliforms, the level of upto 3000 bacteria in Sabarimala water portends a potential calamity, much more alarming than Surat Plague, which saw India quarantined by International Community.

Even the piped water is not purified except for the sprinkling of some bleaching powder. Worse still, the Latrines just in front of the Shrine often overflow and all its filth and excreta is carried by rivulet down to the Triveni, where pilgrims take holy dip. The same water is pumped up to Sabarimala to be served as potable water, through taps to the pilgrims, hoteliers and for umpteen uses.

Sanitary condition in Pampa, Sabarimala and all along the pilgrim route is horrifying. Practically neither proper cleaning work is neither done, nor sanitary workers or scavengers seen around. The result is, Pampa and Sabarimala are left to rot amidst heaps and heaps, and tons and tons of waste; waste thrown by shoppers, pilgrims, human excreta, donkey drops, carrions, bottles, plastic containers and what not. Tons of waste rotting all and just around shrine and no attention is paid nor attempt is made to clear them off. Nauseating stench fouls the air round the clock. Come rain, and move around without chappals, you are done for; awash you will be with knee-deep filth.

As for the power supply, the arrangement is poor to dismal. No sub station could be established in Pampa so far, from where generating unit i.e. Moozhiyar is only a few k.m. away. The result: In Peak hours even water supply is broken down, unable to pump water due to low voltage, Latrines will have to be closed down for want of water. Imagine, all these in a place where lakhs of people assemble in a given time.

Over-charging by shoppers, in spite of the intervention by Court appointed official, goes on season emboldened by alleged support of some shady elements.

Shopkeepers even encroach the pathways to spread out their wares or to drain out wastewaters. Battalions of load carrying donkeys also invade the pilgrim path driving the pilgrims helter-skelter, to be, sometimes, trampled upon. Pilgrims discomfort is all the more with hundreds of beggars menacingly lined up on both sides of the track. They are professional beggars brought from across the State by goons. Of course a ritualistic ban on begging is proclaimed every year, only to be defied by non enforcement. Even VVIP strut the route unmindful of the menace pilgrims were put to face.

Thus the end beneficiaries of Sabarimala, viz., the pilgrims, are pushed around by all and sundry and they squirm in a place where they seek spiritual satisfaction of the higher level, in a tranquil setting.

The problems of Sabarimala now hog the national attention, as the shrine has become so famous that most of the pilgrims are from other states, who want to be paid for the regimen they undergo.

The ill-planned Sabarimala Development so far has done irreparable damage to the environment and left the area a vast garbage dump. Putting up more buildings create further problems. Latrines are built wherever free space could be found showing utter disregard to the surroundings. In between buildings, waste is dumped; all over without any concern or care.

The Mahabala Rao Committee appointed by the Govt. in 1985 has also come down heavily on the Devaswom Board for denuding the forest in the name of development, which, the committee points out is 'against the fundamental methods of Sabarimala Pilgrimage'. And the Committee makes it clear that '... What pilgrims expect at Sabarimala is not a comfortable sojourn. All that they expect is a modicum of facilities to enable them to complete the pilgrimage to the satisfaction of their spirit.'

"Sabarimala Ayyappa Temple is one of the famous shrines in the whole country...It has to be accepted that it is impossible to set up the facilities available to the pilgrims commensurate with their ever increasing number, nor it is desirable to do so. Much of the sanctity of the Sabarimala Temple is derived from its sylvan setting. It is not worthy that Lord Ayyappan is also regarded as the guardian of the wild animals. In olden days the pilgrims had to face severe physical hardships to reach the temple. It is this ordeal, which elevates it to the level of sublime, the real test of the spiritual strength. Provision of comforts to the pilgrims goes against the fundamental ethos of Sabarimala pilgrimage. Such a move deprives the temple of its forest surrounding and would dilute the intensity of religious ardour. In this respect a farsighted approach in tune with the sanctity of tradition is necessary. What pilgrims expect at Sabarimala is not a comfortable sojourn. All that they expect is a modicum of facilities to enable them to complete the pilgrimage to the satisfaction of their spirit.

Further down, Committee sounds an alarm, thus:

"There has been a severe degradation of environment at Sabarimala due to uncontrolled influx of pilgrims and unplanned expansion of pilgrim facilities. The flow of pilgrim will increase every year and it is imperative that the environment be preserved clean and natural. The temple lies in the southern portion of the Periyar Tiger Reserve naturally and traditionally," and further,

"Deforestation is a major problem. The temple will lose its scared atmosphere if the surroundings are denuded of vegetation. Every year construction of sheds and the need for firewood in hotels cause several trees to be cut down in their prime..." and

"The destruction of land, it has to be borne in mind, goes against the spirit of Ayyappa cult and as such indiscriminate leasing of land is harmful, both to the environment and traditional faith..."

It further cautions, that -

“...already an area of 65 Sq.km of forests around Sabarimala Temple are receiving the impact of the pilgrims...Forest cover in other areas like Pampa, Cheriyanavattam, Kozhikkanam, Karimala, Erumeli etc. are also subjected to biotic pressure during the season...” The same report laments of pollution caused through the Region. The reports further says:

“... Severe water pollution caused to the streamlets and river in and around the 65 sq.kms. of the Sabarimala Region. The Pilgrims use these water bodies for drinking and other daily needs. “The river Pampa is being polluted with filth and bio waste. Around 3000 families live down stream and are affected by the polluted Pampa.”

The rail proposed through the thick jungle, from Erumeli to Sabarimala, will cause have to the precious ecosystem and endanger wild life, sounds Environmentalists. Thousands of trees will have been cut down and the serenity of sanctuaries will be violently violated, they point out.

Conceptually, different and integrated ecofriendly development programme with Sabarimala’s tradition and architectural singularity in mind is what is needed to arrive at a permanent solution to the malaise that has set in. A coherent and well thought out approach by different agencies, to draft the expertise of Ecologists, qualified Engineers, Architects, Technocrats, intellectuals is a prerequisite to the planned development of Sabarimala without destroying the nature around.⁴⁹

The leading dailies like ‘The Hindu’, ‘Malayala Manorama’, ‘Mathrubhumi’ etc has brought out elaborate reports on the situation prevailing in Sabarimala and Erumely. The important observations in them are:

Pampa, at the foot hills of Sabarimala, has become the heaven of flies and mosquitoes, once the pilgrim season is over Mr. M.K.Sukumaran Nair, Secretary, Pampa Parirakshana Samithi (PPS) observed that once the season is over the authorities concerned leave the place in a hurry without taking steps for the safe disposal of the waste.⁵⁰

The State Pollution Control Board has observed that the quality of water at river Pamapa is good before the Sabarimala season begins. The quality of water gets deteriorated slowly once the pilgrim season begins and gets polluted heavily when the number of pilgrims increases. This is

⁴⁹ Chandra Sekhara Prabhu, (1995) “Seminar on Sabarimala Development” October 15, 1995, organised by Malayala Manorama. pp.3-5.

⁵⁰ The Hindu 31-11-94, P5

mainly due to open defecation done by pilgrims by the riverside, over flow from the pits of public latrines, the waste discharged from the hotels etc. The daily opined that the construction of an environment management call, construction of sewage treatment plants would help to solve the problems to a great extent.⁵¹

The unmanageable crowd at Sabarimala, the poor sanitation and drinking water facilities and the improper waste disposal mechanism has all been a matter of deep concern. The increasing number of pilgrims gave rise to several problems for the fragile eco-system that consists of evergreen forests and rare wild life.⁵²

Many of the agencies involved in Sabarimala development including the TDB and KSRTC exploit the pilgrim season. There is no proper co-ordination between various agencies. There is no disaster control mechanism at Erumely and Sabarimala. Absence of a fool proof waste disposal mechanism and effective measures to check the pollution at Pampa and Erumely makes the matters worse. It stressed the need for earmarking the income by way of offerings received from pilgrims towards improving the welfare of the pilgrims both at Erumely and Pampa. A 'High power committee' for co-coordinating and monitoring Sabarimala is the need of the hour.⁵³

The seminar on "Erumely and Sabari Pilgrimage" observed that the main problems at Erumely during the season were the lack of primary facilities for pilgrims, lack of proper co-ordination between various departments/agencies, inadequate parking facility parallel road, water supply waste and disposal mechanism.

Sukumaran Nair while inaugurating seminar on Erumely and Sabari pilgrimage; pointed out that Erumely is a pilgrim center well known for its religious harmony. He observed that about one-core devotees visited Erumely during the last pilgrim season and around 2,00,000 vehicles passes through Erumely during the season and the carrying capacity is not incommensurate with the number of pilgrims and their needs. He commented that the environmental degradation has its impact on the neighboring Panchayat and Districts. Inadequate waste disposal mechanism leads to the outbreak of various diseases after the season. He observes that there is better scope for economic development of

⁵¹ The Hindu 25-09-1995,P3

⁵² The Hindu 20-01-1999, P3

⁵³ The Hindu 28-03-1999, P4

Erumely if pilgrimage is used as a platform for pilgrim Tourism. The infrastructure created for pilgrimage may be used for income generation during off-season.⁵⁴

Salim P.A, a political activist while participating in the seminar observed that the facilities made at Erumely during the seasons is purely on “ad hoc basis”.

Gopalakrishnan Pillai, a resident of the Erumely observed during the seminar observed that the income derived from the pilgrim-related activities is not beneficial to the households because they are forced to part with a substantial amount for meeting the medical expenses.

Participating in the seminar Balan Pillaiopinioned that the present practice of auctioning the land for seasonal business by the Devaswom Board creates various problems. In order to make good the increased rent the business people charge the pilgrims exorbitantly.

Addressing the seminar Gopinath observe that for the economic development of Erumely the creation of infrastructure facilities such as parallel roads, traffic island strengthening primary health sewage disposal system and fly over are a must.

P.H.Salim, Former Panchayat President, during the deliberations in the seminar observed that the governmental and the agencies and the traders exploit the pilgrims a lot.

P.J.Sebastian Ward member of the Erumely Panchayat opinioned that since Erumely and Sabarimala are situated in two districts namely Kottayam and Pathanamthitta there is no proper co-ordination with regard to the implementation of various schemes for the development of Erumely.

Advocate Shajahan, the President of the Panchayat, while participating in the seminar agreed that there is lack of co-ordination between various agencies, there is a wide gap between the need and availability of various facilities to the pilgrims.

Prof. M.G.Varghese observed that development of Satellite Township in and around Erumely would act as a catalyst for the development of the region.

The Environment Committee of the State Assembly has called for urgent steps to check the pollution hazards faced by the hill shrine of Sabarimala where millions of Ayyappa devotees visit from across the country during the November-January season.

⁵⁴ Seminar “Erumely and Sabari pilgrimage organized by Dr. M.D.Baby, Project Holder, Economics of Sabari pilgrimage with special reference to Erumely Grama Panchayat dated 16-11-'99, at Erumely, Sukumaran Nair A, Secretary PPS from his inaugural address, seminar on ‘Erumely and Sabari pilgrimage.

In a report placed in the Assembly recently, the nine-member panel of MLAs headed by George J Mathew said the menace posed by pollutants and stress caused on its fragile environs posed a grave threat to the very sanctity of the hill shrine.

The report was drawn up after the MLAs visited Sabarimala and its surroundings during the pilgrimage season.

“No other holy place in India is visited by such a large number of pilgrims within a short span of three months every year. Naturally, the environmental hazards faced by Sabarimala are huge”, the report noted.

Located at 467 meters above the sea level and surrounded by 18 hills, Sabarimala forms part of the Periyar Tiger Reserve, home for diverse flora and fauna. An estimated three crore devotees visit the temple a year, with a 20 per cent increase over the years.

The biggest victim of man caused pollution is the holy river Pampa, which gets choked by solid wastes at the height of the pilgrimage season, Pampa, in which every pilgrim takes a dip, is the sole source of drinking water in the area, the report said.

A sample test of the Pampa water last year showed that the level of coliform bacteria in 100 ml water was more than 1.5 lakhs, much above the permissible level.

“This is really alarming and the Government should probe the harmful effects this could have on the pilgrims,” the report said adding that discharge of human excreta and dumping of solid waste are the major factors contributing to the degradation of the Pampa. This necessitated urgent attention to step up the capacity of the sewage treatment plant and post a technical officer to oversee its working. Building check-dams to flush out the river now and then would also help, the report added.

The excess use of plastic is a major cause for worry in Sabarimala, the report said though the sale of plastic articles is banned, there is no effective mechanism to check whether these are being brought and thrown around by pilgrims, it added.

The incinerator set up at Sabarimala is yet to get the Pollution Control Board’s nod as it has been found technically flawed. The authorities should see to it that the flaw is rectified and the incinerator put to use before the next pilgrim season, the report said.

It also said the pilgrims reaching Pampa and Sabarimala are often greeted by swarms of flies. Possibilities of using harmless chemicals to repel the disease spreading insects should be thought about.

Besides Kerala, a good number of pilgrims visiting Sabarimala are from Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. There should be a drive to make them aware of the rites and traditions associated with Sabarimala, the report said.

Herds of donkeys carrying goods uphill often-posed difficulty to pilgrims trekking the steep route to Sabarimala from Pampa. They should be diverted along the alternative route and a ropeway should be built for transportation of goods.

The report also suggested other measures to improve the conditions of Sabarimala, including preventing beggars' entry, improving the medical facility available, regular checking of the hygiene of food supplied by hotels and way-side eateries and providing stalls to supply good quality food to pilgrims.⁵⁵

A study conducted by the School of Social Science of the Mahatma Gandhi University on issues relating to the management of the Sabarimala Enclave says that promoting Sabarimala pilgrimage will lead to serious problems in future.

“It is unwise and unscientific to promote (Sabarimala) pilgrimage any more. Policy makers should be aware of the alarmingly surpassed carrying capacity, besides the ecological, legal and managerial crisis of the site”, the study warns.

The study, conducted under the guidance of Dr. Rajan Gurakkal and Dr.S.Raju of the School of Social Science, was commissioned by the Periyar Tiger Reserve, where the Sabarimala shrine is located.

Highlighting the need for a long-term policy plan for Sabarimala, the study notes that every development activity being carried out at this pilgrim centre is in response to a crisis.

“The policy-makers have to be extremely cautious about the long-term effects of the urgent ad hoc measures they take for managing crises...temporary alternatives adopted for resolving crises emerging out of a density of population far beyond the carrying capacity of the forest could be detrimental to the ecosystem. So the most important points is to anticipate the ecological consequences of the temporary measures well in advance and preclude human pressure-based crises at the Enclave. The basic quality of a management strategy should be its capacity to avoid situations necessitating urgent ad hoc remedies,” says the study.

⁵⁵ The Hindu dated July 28, 2003.

The study warns that uncontrolled movement of dense crowd can also give chances for terrorist and criminal activities. “Even if the strength of the police and other security forces is increased by five times during the seasons, given the present scenario, it is impossible to prevent any such deviant attempts...how to control pilgrim movement within the grove is thus the most critical issue before the policy makers.”

The provision of amenities other than those related to necessities of the pilgrims has been the main objective of the activities in Sabarimala. This order of priority should change in favour of the controller management of the pilgrims and should be the guiding motto when long run policies are formulated, says the study.

“The call for such a shift in the order of priority itself is a policy suggestion to be taken seriously with immediate effect. The formulation of any plan or policy should be based on the recognition of the need to generate mechanisms and infrastructures for controlled mobility of pilgrimage, which is obviously different from controlled pilgrimage”, the study notes.

The study suggests that the basic policy objective in Sabarimala should be to minimise pilgrims’ presence within the grove and provide adequate time for ‘darshan’. At present, the pilgrims get almost no time for darshan and they are forced to rush through the front portion of the sanctum sanctorum with just a fleeting glimpse of the deity.

An unmanageable crowd in a mood of frenzy carries with it the threat of stampede. And such an event can be catastrophic along the pilgrimage route, where the terrain is steep. The stampede and loss of several lives in 1998-99 is only a pointer to the emergency of the problem. Even a small chaos can culminate in a big disaster costing the lives of thousands, the study warns.

The study suggests that there should be some regulative mechanism, comparable to those, which exist in other major pilgrim centres like Kailash, Thirupathi, Mekka, Rome and Vaishnavadevi, to control the movement of pilgrims in Sabarimala. As of now, no such mechanism exists in Sabarimala. Nor is any such thing visualised in the management plans of this pilgrim centre. “It is indeed strange that this issue has been ignored for so long, even under the pressure of an ever-increasing flow of pilgrims. As this pilgrimage generates a huge income, funds will not be a problem for evolving and adequate regulative mechanism,” according to the study.

The study suggests setting up of satellite stations at places like Nilakkal, Laha, Perinadu, Erumeli, Mukkuttuthara, Thulappally and Vadasserikkara to regulate the flow of pilgrims to the Enclave.

‘Granted passage through all the existing routes to Pampa and Sannidhanam to regulate the flow of pilgrims from these satellite stations has to be seriously considered. The best way to check the density of population at the Sannidhanam is to institute chartered conveyances and pass system from the satellite stations. This will tremendously reduce the need for expansion of roads and parking grounds,’ says the study.

The study says the problems in Sabarimala can be eased to a considerable extent if the pilgrimage practices can be successfully restored to the traditional framework. Carrying one’s own consumption basket is one of the most vital traditional practises of this pilgrimage. Except drinking and cleaning water, nothing should be available for purchase. Self-reliance in food and drinks, complete abstinence from urban goods, adherence to a way of life that suits the forest environment and devotion to the sacred geography were integral to the traditional practices.

If this tradition can be rejuvenated, the shops that mushroom along the pilgrimage routes during the season, taking up vital space and constricting the movement of the pilgrims, will no longer be a necessity. In fact, commercial activities along the pilgrimage routes contribute a major share of the pollution related problems in Sabarimala. The shopkeepers, who indulge in large-scale collection of firewood from the area, are also the main culprits involved in the degradation of forests of the Enclave.⁵⁶

The former president of the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad, R.V.G.Menon, has stressed the need to set up a full-fledged base camps for Sabarimala pilgrims in various satellite town of Pampa with a view to easing congestion at Pampa and Sannidhanam during the pilgrim season.

Addressing a seminar on “Sabarimala development” organised by the *Mathrubhumi* at Chengannur today, Prof.Menon said that a systematic approach was needed to provide basic facilities for pilgrims at Sabarimala.

According to him, special treatment for VIPs should be discouraged at Sabarimala pilgrimage. Prof.Menon said that vehicle parking at Pampa should be stopped by providing parking lots at Nilackal and arranging frequent chair transport service between Nilackal and Pampa.

He expressed concern over the ongoing trend of ‘concrete culture’ that ultimately converted the sacred grove into a ‘concrete jungle’.

⁵⁶ The Hindu, dated August 25th, 2002.

Participating in the seminar, the Assistant Field Director of the Periyar Tiger Reserve (PTR), S.Sivadas, said that an average Sabarimala pilgrim never sought comfort for luxury. What he aspired was a heart-warming 'darsan' of the presiding deity and a safe pilgrimage, he said.

"Pilgrimage is no picnic and concretisations is no development", Mr.Shivadas said. He said that a true assessment of the needs of the pilgrims coming from different parts of the country vide eco-friendly facilities for them in the forest areas.

"Providing basic facilities for pilgrims is not shaving the hills",⁵⁷ says Mr.Shivadas.

Mr.Shivadas stressed the need to provide basic pilgrim facilities at Sabarimala situated in the PTR without affecting the ecological balance of this rich bio-diversity hot spot.

The two independent studies at Sabarimala conducted by Dr.R.Ajaykumar Varma who heads the Environmental Science department at the Centre for Earth Science Studies (CESS) and the Thiruvananthapuram-based Centre for Environment and Development (CED), headed by Dr.Babu Ambatt, are very relevant in the backdrop of the unusual geological phenomena like subsidence of earth, minor land slips and mild tremors being reported from different parts of the State.

Dr.Varma said that the area surrounding the Ayyappa temple especially in the north-eastern part, has a relatively less drainage density due to the dominant percolation of water to the ground and subsequent recharge of the ground water or sub-surface flow along the slope direction.

According to Dr.Varma, the temple is located almost on one of the suspected weak planes and also near what is thought to be an intersection of two lineaments. Moreover, one of the lineaments has already been found to be an active zone of erosion, he added.

"Any disturbance to the existing forests will certainly destabilize the soil system and ground water flow pattern which may lead to minor and major land slips in the immediate vicinity of the temple. The chances of such a disaster will be more if the absence of transition zone between the rock and soil observed at the rock exposure site is extensive," said Dr.Varma.

Talking to The Hindu Dr.Varma said that the distributive water percolation system is already absent in the immediate vicinity of the temple due to extensive concrete flooring. Thus, the entire waste water and rain water collected over the concrete surface is subjected to point-infiltration at certain spots, ultimately leading to the enhanced sub-surface flow and consequent escape of small particles of the sub-surface soil layer.

⁵⁷ The Mathrubhoomi, September, 14th, 2002.

Experts say that the draining out of water into a weak zone can also lead to sub-surface rock slips and even minor tremors.

The study report of the CED submitted to the Ministry of Environment and Forests says, “Over a long period of time, the sub-surface flow could loosen and weaken the layer of earth at the holy hillock which in turn would fail to sustain the weight and finally begin to slump.”

According to the CED director, Dr.Babu Ambatt, any activity in the valley portion of Sabarimala will only enhance the impacts on the high gradient upper terrain and this area should be considered as an “untouchable zone” as far as the sustenance of forests, stability of slope and the safety of the Ayyappa Temple are concerned.

Dr.Ambatt said the Sabarimala region has been converted into a geologically fragile area due to the unscientific development activities there without paying heed to the environment and to the geological factors there over the past several years.

There are persistent allegations that both the administrative body of the Ayyappa Temple, the Travancore Devaswom Board and the State Government have miserably failed in ensuring even a foolproof mechanism to provide basic facilities to the scores of Ayyappa devotees who reach Sabarimala during the annual pilgrim season.

Many devotees who talked to *The Hindu* allege that the TDB, which lacks even a professional management team, is more keen on constructing multi-storeyed concrete structures with plush accommodation facilities for the upper class pilgrims at the holy hillock.⁵⁸

The Pampa Parirakshana Samithi (PPS), a Kozhencherry-based environmental; organization which has been crusading for the cause of the Pampa river, has said that it is high time the Government took serious note of the assumingly high environmental; issues at Sabarimala.

Talking to *The Hindu* here today, the PPS general secretary, Mr.N.K.Sukumaran Nair, said that a study by two expert teams headed by reputed scientists had revealed that chances of landslips and tremors at the holy hillock due to the extensive concrete flooring at Sabarimala Sannidhanam are much high.

⁵⁸ The Hindu, dated September 15th, 2002.

However, the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB), the administrative body of the Ayyappa temple, continues to initiate more construction activities at Pampa and Sabarimala, disregarding the actual needs of the ordinary pilgrim, Mr.Nair alleges.

According to him, what an ordinary Ayyappa devotee expects at Sabarimala is a clean and hygienic surrounding, a soul-filling holy dip in clean Pampa river waters and a serene atmosphere for a holy darshan at the temple.

Many devotees alleged that it is unfortunate that a large number of pilgrims are put to much hardships as the pilgrim centre for want of clean and hygienic surroundings, safe drinking water, etc.

The 'ad hoc' arrangements by the Government and the TDB for the annual Sabbatical pilgrimage usually start at the eleventh hour and consequently they seldom get enough time to meet the needs of the pilgrims, an elderly pilgrim who unfailingly used to undertake the annual pilgrimage alleged.

The auctioning of space for shops at Pampa, the Sannidhanam and along the trekking path at high rates leaves enough room for the fleecing of the hapless pilgrims by the traders.

It is strange to note that though there are many voluntary organizations and religious bodies which are willing to provide free food and beverages to the Ayyappa devotees at Sabarimala the TDB appears to be "special" of their "motives".

What is needed at Sabarimala are not multi-storeyed complexes but temporary shelters and a fool-proof mechanism for sanitation and drinking water supply without disturbing the ecology and environment of the sacred grove, opined many Ayyappa devotees.

The eco group leader said that it is the obligation of the State Government to preserve the wild life and rivers from environmental degradation as per Article 48-A of the Constitution. The Water Act 1974 maintains that polluting river water is a punishable offence (sections 24,25)

However, the criminal negligence on the part of the Government and the TDB in taking timely, fool-proof remedies against the flow of filth into the river has raised the coliform count in the Pampa river waters drastically, Mr.Nair alleged.

The State Pollution Control Board (PCB) had observed a coliform count of more than 2 lakhs per 100 m of Pampas's river water during the last Mandalam-Makaravilakku season. Highly placed PCB sources confided that the coliform count had been went up to 16 lakhs on a particular day during

the last Makravilakku season when the human wastes from the TDB latrine complex were allegedly drained out into the river.

Mr. Nair stressed the need for pilgrim shelters at different base camps like Nilackal, Vadasserykkara Pandalam, Aranmula, Pathanamthitta, Ranni, Eumeli, Kalaketty, Perunadu, etc so as to minimize the human pressure on the holy hillock.

According to Mr.Nair, the TDB is supposed to provide only the minimum basic facilities in a safe and foolproof manner at Sabarimala with a view to minimizing the stay of pilgrims the holy hillock for a long duration.

He opined that the sewage collection tanks of the 450-member latrine complex on the banks of the Pampa would create pollution problems in the locality.

He also suggested the construction of a series of check dams in the upstream of Pampa Triveni so as to facilitate the flushing out of filth from the river during the peak days of the pilgrim season.

He said that a large fire place (Aazhi) should be kept at Pampa to facilitate the disposal of the remains of pooja materials and other wastes like rags, left behind by the pilgrims.

With only three months left for the next season, it is high time the Government took stock of the situation and takes more serious steps for the smooth conduct of the pilgrimage and to check the pollution of the river Pampa, Mr.Nair added.⁵⁹

The KPCC President K.Muralidharan said the influx of pilgrims to Sabarimala was increasing every year and the existing basic facilities at Pampa, Sannidhanam and along the trekking path were grossly inadequate, taking into consideration the large number of pilgrims visiting Sabarimala during the two-month annual Mandalam Makaravilakku pilgrim season.

Mr. Muralidharan pointed out that the Sabarimala temple remains open during the first five days of every Malayalam month, besides the 10-day festivals during Onam and Vishu. He said the Government was duty-bound to provide all the basic pilgrim facilities at Sabarimala.

It is a fact that the authorities have failed to provide adequate toilet facilities and resting places for the pilgrims along the trekking path, the KPCC president alleged. The Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) has even failed in the proper repair and maintenance of the existing

⁵⁹ The Hindu, dated September 30, 2002.

buildings at Sabarimala. The condition of the toilet complexes at the main base camp of Pampa and at Sannidhanan was unhygienic, he added. It is unfortunate that the authorities could not provide basic facilities at Sabarimala, despite the hefty revenue collection there during the annual pilgrim season, he alleged. According to Mr.Muralidharan, what is urgently needed is the effective utilization of the available forestland for providing basic pilgrims facilities at Sabbatical and along the trekking path without causing any damage.⁶⁰

1.3 Relevance of the Study

It was found during the literature survey that there are number of research publications and other published works relating directly or indirectly to Tourism, Pilgrimage and Sabari Pilgrimage but lacking of an exclusive study of the Economics of Sabari pilgrimage was specifically noticed. This is definitely a gap in the field of research and the attempt of the researcher is to fill this gap by exploiting the Economics of Sabari Pilgrimage with special relation to households of Erumely Grama Panchayat. Hence the study is relevant and significant.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The study covers the economic aspects of the pilgrimage among the households/ agencies. The area of investigation is limited towards VI and XVII, which are adjacent to Erumely Town. (See Figure 1 (Map of Erumely)).

1.5 Objectives of the study

The study has the following objects.

1. To examine the economics of Sabari Pilgrimage at micro and macro levels.
2. To understand the attitudes of the local people to the various aspects of the pilgrimage.
3. To investigate and analyse the effects of pilgrimage on the socio-economic conditions of the households.
4. To suggest suitable measures for the maximisation of benefits from Sabari Pilgrimage and also to suggest measures to mitigate adverse impacts.

⁶⁰ The Hindu, dated October 31, 2002.

1.6 Methodology

The study is empirical in nature and is based on survey method and observations. The required data were collected from both secondary and primary sources. In addition to this a SWOT analysis had also been made.

1.7 Collection of Secondary Data

The secondary data were collected from the following sources.

1. Records of the Grama Panchayat.
2. The Devaswom Board Office, Erumely.
3. The report of the Legislative Committee on Environment.
4. Newspapers.
5. Studies conducted by other Research Agencies/ Institutions.
6. Books and journals dealing with this subject.
7. Academic studies conducted by different Universities in the selected field.

1.8 Sample Design

All the households in Erumely Panchayat form the universe of the study. A selection of sample households for interview was made on the basis of a “multistage sampling technique”. In the first stage the entire wards in the Erumely Panchayat were classified into two groups viz. Direct Influence Zone (DIZ) and Indirect Influence Zone (IIZ). DIZ are those wards which are near to the main road to Sabarimala, near to the bylanes and rivers or nearer to the traditional forest route. These are the wards where pilgrims reach and stay for a short time and have great contact with locals by way of ‘virivakkal’, shopping, parking, meeting their primary needs etc. Consequent to this, income and employment and infrastructure development takes place largely in these wards during pilgrim seasons. Thus out of the 20 wards 14 wards, (ward numbers IV, V, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, XIII, XIV, XV, XVII, XVIII, XIX, XX) came under this group. From this one ward is selected at random. The ward so selected is XVII.

Again from IIZ, (out of six wards i.e., I, II, III, VI, VII, XVI) one ward is selected at random, which is ward number VI.

1.9 Selection of respondents/ households

Ten percent of the households were chosen at random from the selected ward viz, VI and XVII. In ward number VI there are 454 households and therefore 45 were selected. Whereas in ward XVII there are 503 households and therefore 50 households were selected. Again the selected households are classified into beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries.

Beneficiary households are those that have economically benefited from pilgrimage by way of rent, profit, wages and salaries, taxi fare etc. or those who get additional employment in connection with the production of ritual articles like 'Gadha', Kathi, Sarakkol, Kacha etc.

1.10 Data collection

For primary data collection methods of direct personal interview, observation and group discussions were adopted. For personal interview, a detailed structured interview schedule which was prepared after a series of discussions with households, knowledgeable persons and representatives of various agencies was used. While the first part of the schedule deals with socio-economic conditions of households its second part is concerned with the various aspects relating to Sabari Pilgrimage⁶¹. Before field survey interview schedule had been duly modified after pre-test. Relevant data were collected in two rounds – during the pilgrimage season (November, December, January) and off season (February to October). In order to supplement the primary data collected through direct personal interview, seminars and workshops were organised at two localities where pilgrim related activities are highly concentrated before the season and during the season. In the first seminar held at Erumely town on 16-11-1999, 35 respondents hailing from businessmen, NGOs, service sectors, Panchayat committee members and members of various political parties were participated. The workshop was held at Rotary Club of Erumely on 30-12-2002, 50 stakeholders were present in the workshop. Chairman of the Legislative Committee on Environment and local M.L.A, Sri.George. J. Mathew, Panchayat President, former Panchayat President, Members of the Panchayat, representatives of NGOs, Devaswom Board, Juma-Ath, Senior citizens, members of the Vyapari Vyavasaya Samithi and faculty members of the Department of Commerce, St. Dominic's College were present, among others.

For selecting agencies, purposive sampling method was used. It was found that twelve agencies were involved in pilgrim related activities. Out of this Devaswom Board, Grama Panchayat,

⁶¹ Copy of the interview schedule is given in the Appendix I

K.S.R.T.C and Schools were subjected to detailed study with the help of administering separate interview schedule. ^α

TABLE 1.1

Details of the sample

Ward Number	Respondents			Non Bene- ficiaries	Total
	Beneficiaries				
	Direct	Indirect	Total		
VI	22	10	32	13	45
XVII	15	11	26	24	50
Total	37	21	58	37	95

source : Primary Data.

1.11 Variables used in the study

- I. For analysing the profile of the respondents the following variables were used: -
1. Dwelling location
 2. Religion
 3. Size of the family
 4. Age
 5. Level of education
 6. Participation in Pilgrim –related activities
 7. Experience in the field of rendering services to the pilgrims
 8. Type of pilgrim related activities.

^α Copy of the interview schedule is given in the Appendix I.

- II. For the beneficiary – non-beneficiary analysis of improvements in the socio-economic conditions.
1. Type of roofing
 2. Type of flooring
 3. Source of drinking water
 4. Household amenities
 5. Value of household amenities

1.12 Limitation of the study

Non-availability of sufficient reliable data is one of the major limitations of the study. Authentic annual estimates of the number of pilgrims arriving at Erumely during the pilgrim season is not available. For instance the report of the Legislative Committee on Environment estimates that every year one crore pilgrims visit Erumely during the season. Another study reveal that about 60,00,000 pilgrims visited Erumely during the last ‘season’. The Erumely Devaswom Board authorities estimated that nearly 3 crores of pilgrims visited Erumely during the last pilgrim season. There is no data about the carrying capacity. Again, many of the respondents were reluctant to furnish information pertaining to income, savings, debt etc. In such cases the researcher had to resort to indirect methods for gathering information. Some of the primary data elicited from the respondents were based on the recall methods and are therefore subject to normal recall errors.

Further, the scope of the study is limited to two wards only. This study excludes traders who belong to other Panchayats and carrying out pilgrim related activities. The environmental impact assesment of the pilgrimage is not covered in this study.

1.13 Definitions of terms

1. Household
A group of persons who reside under the same roof and eat from the same kitchen
2. Beneficiary group
Those households that have economically benefited through the income generation and employment.
3. Non-beneficiary group

The households that have not economically benefited from the Sabari Pilgrimage.

4. Direct Services

Services rendered by the households to the pilgrims by participating in activities such as selling of ritual articles, coconut, vessels, snacks etc. with profit motive.

5. Indirect Service

Services like, virivakkal, parking, toilet facility, drinking water etc. provided to the pilgrims free of cost.

6. Economic benefits

Benefits accrued to households, agencies involved in pilgrim related activities in the form of (a) profit from the business (b) toll (c) rent (d) Hiring charges (e) Licence fees (f) Taxi fare, salaries and wages (g) offerings to temples/ mosques or employment generated at the house hold level in connection with the manufacture of articles for 'petta thullal'.

7. Pilgrim Season

"Mandala Pooja and Makara Vilakku" starting from the first of the Malayalam month "Vrichikam" ie. from November to January every year.

8. Viri

Collective stay in the open in contrast to staying in a room. This system doesn't require any roofed bedroom, but some space in the open air to spread a sheet or mat.

9. Direct Influence Zone (DIZ)

Wards in Erumely Grama Panchayat, which are directly exposed to Sabari Pilgrims and where the influence of pilgrimage is at maximum as the pilgrims go to Sabarimala either by motion or by foot.

10. Indirect Influence Zone (IIZ)

Wards where the influence of pilgrimage is at the minimum since they are away from the pilgrimage route to Sabarimala.

1.14 Organisation of the report

This report contains five chapters. The first chapter is the introductory chapter in which the statement of the problem, review of literature, relevance of the study, its major objectives, methodology, and variables used for the study and limitations are given.

The second chapter deals with the overview of Sabari Pilgrimage. Some general features of the Sabari Pilgrimage are given in this chapter. It also contains the profile of Erumely Grama Panchayat and impact of Sabari pilgrimage on it is examined. In chapter three, the economics of Sabari Pilgrimage to households and agencies and their attitudes about to the pilgrimage were examined. Major findings of the study are summarised in the fourth chapter. Along with it, some suggestions and recommendations based on these findings are also given.

CHAPTER II

Sabari Pilgrimage and Erumely Grama Panchayat

This chapter contains two sections, **Section – A** Sabarimala Pilgrimage: An Overview; **Section – B** Erumely Grama Panchayat and Sabari Pilgrimage.

Section – A

2.1.0 Sabari Pilgrimage: An Overview

Till about fifty years ago the pilgrimage to Sri Dharma Shaastha or Sri Ayyappa temple of Sabarimala was mostly confined to the people of the old Travancore State of South India. Road transport and rail facilities were very limited. With their hearts surging with devotion, the pilgrims in groups wearing blue or black clothes, and carrying on their head the Irumudikkettu, the package of offerings and provisions, used to trek long distances in groups to reach the shrine of Lord Ayyappa. The route covered small towns and villages and long stretches of mountain terrain of dense forests inhabited by wild animals. In those days the maximum number of pilgrims reaching Sabarimala was in any peak season only up to 15,000.

Today, the scene is drastically different. The latest estimate of their number is around two crores. The number is steadily increasing every year. Pilgrims from all over India and abroad reach this forest shrine to offer prayers to Lord Ayyappa. The whole of Kerala reverberates with the chanting “Swamiye Saranam Ayyappa”- O Lord Ayyappa, you are our refuge.

There have also emerged Sri Ayyappa shrines all over the country and they are being established abroad too. What is the reason for such growing popular focus on and participation in the worship of Lord Ayyappa? The comforts of man’s outer world have increased many folds, but his vital inner world remains neglected. This imbalance has increased his mental tension also many fold. As the over emphasised materialism of the consumerist civilization alienates him from his greater dimensions, the subsequent sense of suffocation makes him yearn for a different experience and a greater vision of life. It is the broad based spiritual longing and approach that transcend the limitations of religious dogmatism, combined with an opportunity for a period of holistic spiritual

disciplines that reinforce the body, mind and soul involved in Sri Ayyappa worship, that inspires him to take part in the Sabarimala pilgrimage.

There exist diverse theories and views about Sri Ayyappa and his worship. Most of them dwell elaborately on the legendary or historical aspects.

What attracts millions to this vibrant centre of Divine Power, is neither mythological stories nor historical importance, but the very personal experience of spiritual solace and harmony. In a historical assessment what is overlooked is the very essence the blending of many positive aspects of religious concepts and spiritual disciplines that gives a broad based practical impetus to the striving of man to know himself and to find a greater meaning to his life.

When proceeding to Sabarimala, you climb the eighteen sacred steps of the shrine and step in to the front yard of the temple, what greets you first is the huge inscription in Sanskrit and Malayalam “THATH THVAM ASI”, one of the four Mahaa-vaakyas, the great sayings, of the Vedas that reminds you: “You are essentially That – the Supreme Reality”. The emphasis again is on the “One Truth”.

The holy shrine of Sri Dharma Saastha is located deep in the Sahya mountain ranges (the Western Ghats) in Kerala, the state located almost at the south-western tip of India. Climbing some lofty mountain peaks and walking amidst dense tropical forests the pilgrims reaches the small shrine at Sabarimala, the mountain named after the ancient woman sage Sabari, mentioned in the Ramayana. During the pilgrimage season from November to January, according to the latest estimates, about fifty million people reach Sabarimala to worship Sri Ayyappa.

The natural settings of the region of unsurpassed scenic beauty on the way to the shrine, the spiritual disciplines that precede the pilgrimage and the solemn atmosphere of vibrant divinity, all blend well here to give the pilgrim a touch of awareness of the Transcendental and the Timeless- the Source of all that exists. He receives a reassurance from the Eternal.

The pilgrimage in its totality, including the pre-pilgrimage austerities, is specially conceived to give a practical training in Advaitic wisdom and bestows one with mental poise and a deeper perspective, the basic requirements for a healthy and harmonious life.

The worship involves the cultivation of a broad outlook and acquisition of a psychological orientation to inculcate the sense of the basic spiritual oneness. Each pilgrim is required to consider himself and all others as Ayyappa incarnate and address all as ‘Ayyappa’ or ‘Swami’. In fact, he is supposed to take everything whether living or non-living as nothing but the Lord.

Dharma Saastha enshrined in Sabarimala temple combines both the Para Brahman and Tharaka Brahman aspects of Brahman, which is at once immanent and transcendent. In the Puraanic lore, Lord Vishnu represents the Divine Power of Brahman that maintains the universe, which is the objective expression of Reality, and Lord Siva the power that releases the objective expression from its limitations and makes it one with the unconditioned glory of Reality. Dharma Samantha is a combined personification of the Vishnu and Siva aspects of Reality, representing in one Divinity both the protective and liberating power of Brahman. Hence, Dharma Saastha is also known as Thaaraka Brahman. *Thaaraka*, means a deliverer.

Dharma Saastha is also known as *Kaliyuga-varada*, one who protects the devotees from the evil propensities of this *Kaliyuga* (the age in which the freedom-giving higher values of life get degraded) and bestows on the devotees divine grace for the smooth progress of life to the destined spiritual liberation.

2.1.1 Saga of Sabari Pilgrimage

To get an insight into the Dharma Saastha and Ayyappa concepts, let us make a study of the Puranic as well as the historical points of view.

Puranic view

The *Boothanaathopaakhyaanam* is the main Puraana related to Dharma Saastha or Ayyappa. Dharma Saastha is also known as *Boothanaatha*, because from Him-the supreme Reality – evolved the *Pancha boothas*-s, the five elements, or the five phases of evolution from the subtlest to the grossest, as *Aakaasa* (the physical space), *Vaayu* (the gaseous stage), *Aghni* (the fiery stage, or the stage of chemical combination), *Apa* (the stage of liquidity) and *Prithvi* (the stage of solidity).

In this Puraana also there is a mixing of mythology and history regardless of the time factor. But the message is what matters.

Let us have a glimpse of the salient points the Puraana tells us about the Dharma Saastha concept.

Brahma, Vishnu and Siva are described in the Puraana-s as the three major divine aspects of Reality associated with creation, maintenance and dissolution of the universe. These Divinities, granting the prayer of a Rishi-couple Athri and Anasooya, took a partial manifestation as their son Datta. The consorts of the Divinities also thereupon took a partial manifestation as Leela, the daughter of another great Rishi. Datta eventually married Leela and after living a few years of

conjugal love, he wanted to renounce the worldly life and engage in spiritual disciplines to transcend his conditioned being and to be one with his greater existence.

But Leela would not agree to this. She wanted to continue the life of mundane pleasure in the company of Datta, who tried to convince her that one can never find lasting contentment in a lustful life. But Leela was adamant. An enraged Datta cursed her to be born as a Mahishi, a senseless she-buffalo to satisfy her desires. In course of time, Leela took birth as a bizarre creature with the head of a she-buffalo and the body of a woman. She was very powerful because of her divine origin, but very dull-witted because of her buffalo nature. She did intense penance and propitiated Lord Brahma, who granted the boons she desired for, such as that powerful creatures very much like herself would emerge out of all her hair follicles whenever she wanted and that she could not be killed except by one who was born out of a union of Lord Vishnu and Lord Siva, which was thought to be an impossibility.

Having obtained this boon, she struck terror in the heavens, the abode of *Deva-s* (godly beings) and drove them and their king Indra away. She placed herself on the throne of Indra as the ruler of the heavens. The oppressed *Deva-s* prayed to Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva for their intervention. Thereupon, Datta, who had emerged out of the combined power of the Trinities as their partial manifestation, now assumed, as the result of an earlier curse of Leela, the form of a handsome buffalo, the Sundara-Mahisha. Consequently Mahishi fell in love with Mahisha. They lived together for some time in the heavens and then Sundara Mahisha lured her away down to the earth to live in the forests. This gave some relief to the oppressed *Deva-s*.

It was during this period, Sage Durvaasa, who was well known for his impulsive and vitriolic temper, cursed Indra and the *Deva-s*, who had enjoyed perennial youthfulness, to be subjected to old age, as Indra had offered the sage by not showing due respect to a garland presented to him by the sage. Their heads turned grey and wrinkles appeared all over their bodies. The panacea suggested for regaining youth was the drinking of a special nectar *Amritha* to be obtained by the churning of the Ocean of Milk (Ksheera-saagara). The *Deva-s* prevailed upon their arch enemies the *Asura-s* (demonic forces) for help to perform the herculean task of churning the milky ocean using a huge mountain as the churning rod. Several novel and astonishing things emerged from the ocean when the churning progressed and in the end when a pot with the precious nectar, *Amritha* surfaced, it was quickly snatched away by the *Asura-s*.

Seeing the plight of the *Deva-s*, Lord Vishnu assumed the form of a beautiful enchantress called Mohini and approached the *Asura-s*. Every one of them got infatuated with her. She asked them to close their eyes, agreeing to marry the one who would open the eyes last. While the *Asura-s* remained closing their eyes, Mohini left the scene carrying away the pot of *Amritha*, which she

handed over to the *Deva*-s. On seeing the enchanting form of Mohini, Lord Siva himself fell in love with her and from their union a son was born to Mohini. This was Dharma Saastha, who was destined to kill Mahishi, according to the boon given to her by Lord Brahma that only the one born from the union of Siva and Vishnu could kill her.

In several Puraana-s the story of the churning of the Ocean of Milk finds a place. But only in the *Bhaagavatha* and the *Skanda Puraana*-s there is a reference to a son, who was born out of a union between Shiva and Vishnu. *Skanda Puraana* gives the name of the son as Saastha. The story of Saastha is elaborated further in the *Boothanathopaakhyaanam*.

According to this Puraana the child thus born to Siva and Vishnu was destined to kill Mahishi and he was placed by the *Deva*-s on earth on the banks of the river Pampa, where Mahishi was living along with Sundara Mahisha. During this time, Raajasekhara, the king of a small kingdom Pandalam (in south Kerala), was engaging himself in a hunting expedition. When he was moving along the banks of the river Pampa, he saw a crying child in a secluded spot. He took the child to his palace and brought him up as his foster son. The child was named “Ayyappan”/ “Ayyappa”.

The child, who was named Ayyappan, grew up in the palace under the affectionate care of king Raajasekhara, who had no son of his own. The boy proved himself to be a genius and mastered the *Veda*-s and the martial science quickly. His spiritual power was expressed when he miraculously cured his Guru’s son who was born blind, deaf and dumb. The childless king was happy that he could find a worthy heir to his throne. Then, an unexpected turn occurred. The queen became pregnant and delivered a son.

The prime minister of Pandalam disliked the idea of the king installing Ayyappa as the heir to the kingdom. For, he considered the boy to be an orphan and also a potent threat to his authority. He tried several ways to do away with Ayyappa, but failed. At last he instigated the queen to feign a severe illness and the royal physician to prescribe that the only remedy was a certain medicine to be taken along with the milk of a leopard. The brave youth Ayyappa volunteered to go to the forests to fetch the leopard’s milk. The minister was certain that the helpless boy would never return and would be killed by the beasts.

During this period, Mahishi was living in the forests forgetting everything else, engaging herself in a lustful life along with Sundara Mahisha. Meanwhile, being deceived by Vishnu in the form of Mohini, the *Asura*-s were aghast and depressed. They rushed to Mahishi and implored her for help. They told her how she herself was enticed from the heavens by Sundara Mahisha, who was a creation of the three Divinities for that purpose. Meanwhile, Sundara Mahisha disappeared and rejoined the three Divinities. Realizing her folly, Mahishi became terribly furious and rushed to the

heavens with thousands of creatures like herself who emerged from her hair follicles. They devastated the kingdom of Indra.

It was then the boy Ayyappa reached the forests, to fetch leopard's milk for the queen. The *Deva*-s came down and took refuge at the feet of Ayyappa, because being the son of Siva and Vishnu; he alone could destroy the terrible Mahishi. Ayyappa accompanied them to the heavens. He caught hold of Mahisi by her horns, lifted her and hurled her downwards. She fell near the river, Azutha. Lying there incapacitated, and having had the divine touch of Ayyappa, she immediately recollected her original divine nature and sang in praise of him. As the compassionate glance of Ayyappa fell on her, there emerged out of her bizarre body an extremely beautiful Goddess, now worshipped as Goddess Malikappurath-amma in Sabarimala.

Thereafter, Ayyappa returned to the kingdom of Pandalam, riding a huge leopard and accompanied by a host of ferocious beasts. The people were flabbergasted at this incredible sight. The king, the queen and all others realized the divinity of Ayyappa and all of them prostrated before him. Ayyappa imparted to them spiritual wisdom about the meaning and destiny of human life. The king prayed to the Lord to bless them with his everlasting spiritual presence in a temple to be dedicated to him, for showering his Grace to millions for generations to come. That would be especially necessary in the present Iron Age (*Kali Yuga*) when people would increasingly tend to be self-centred and materialistic, bringing much disharmony to life. The king implored Ayyappa to bless all by assuming himself the aspect of *Kali-yuga-varada*, the spiritual power that would protect the people from the evil propensities of the Iron Age and guide them in their striving for spiritual liberation. Thereupon, the lord suggested a holy spot and advised the king to construct a temple there. The Lord assured him that the temple would ever be vibrant with his Divine Presence and then He disappeared.

Eventually the king constructed a temple in the deep forest of Sabarimala as suggested by the Lord. During the consecration of the idol there was the presence of great sages like Agasthya, Parasurama and others. It was sage Parasurama who installed the idol of Lord Ayyappa seated in the Yogic pose *Veeraasanam* and showing the mystic sign of *Chinmudra* by the right hand. This is the Puraanic version.

2.1.2 A Glimpse of History

Pandalam was a small kingdom between Chengannoor and Adoor in Kerala. The descendants of the dynasty, and the palace are still there. According to some historians the kingdom had its beginning around 904 A.D. when a scion of the declining Paandya kingdom of Madurai in

Tamilnadu took refuge in Kerala when attacked by the Chola-s, and established the kingdom of Pandalam.

Connecting the historical links, mainly derived from the *Ayyappan Paattukal*, old Malayalam songs on Ayyappa lore, it is said that Rajasekhara, the king of Pandalam, who probably lived around the 12th century A.D. went on a hunting expedition in the deep forests of the Sahya ranges. Hearing the cry of a child, the king went in search and saw in a secluded spot, a child and a Yogi nearby in deep meditation. As the king held the crying child in his hands, the Yogi opened his eyes. He advised the king to take the child to his palace. The childless king was very happy and named his foster son as 'Ayyappan'.

It was a period when a terrible brigand leader called Udayanan, had come with his hordes from the Tamil regions beyond the borders, and dominated the whole fertile region on the Kerala side of the valleys of the Sahya mountain ranges. There used to be flourishing trade between the Tamil region and these places in those days. The temple of Sabarimala, where Dharma Saastha was worshipped from the very ancient past was on the route along which these merchants had travelled. These traders and pilgrims used to frequent the temple for worship, and they bestowed many valuables as their offerings. Udayanan and his hordes plundered this temple and killed the priest. The son of the priest escaped. He wandered amidst the mountainous regions awaiting an opportunity to wreak vengeance upon Udayanan.

Udayanan, in one of his marauding expeditions, reached up to the kingdom of Pandalam. He attacked the palace, plundered it and abducted a princess. While the burglars with their booty were travelling through the mountain routes, the son of the priest and his followers made a lightning attack on them and set the princess free. He eventually married the princess and they settled in an inaccessible forest region near the present Ponnambalamedu, engaging in intense austerities and meditation. They earnestly prayed to Lord Dharma Saastha for a son who would be able to fight Udayanan, destroy him and liberate Sabarimala temple. Their prayer was answered and the child whom king Rajasekhara took away was the one thus born to them on the auspicious *Makara Samkrama* day when the Malayalam month of Dhanu gives way to the next month, Makaram (around January 15th). The Yogi who the king saw, at whose advice he took the child to his palace, was the father.

Ayyappa grew up in the palace. Even in childhood several extraordinary spiritual faculties became manifested in him. The childless king wanted to install him as his heir. However, when the queen delivered a son, the minister and the queen conspired to do away with Ayyappa. He was sent unguarded to the forest to fetch leopard's milk to treat a feigned illness of the queen. When he

returned riding a leopard, accompanied by a host of terrible beasts, his divinity was confirmed. Realising it, the king and others prostrated before him.

Now Ayyappa set out on his spiritual mission. Though only of fourteen years of age, he proved his mettle both as an accomplished warrior and a born Yogi. According to the old songs called *Ayyappan Paattukal*, Ayyappa went first to the nearby kingdom of Kaayamkulam and there he defeated Vaavar, described to be a Muslim and a pirate who along with his band used to plunder the sea-faring traders. Later Vaavar himself became an ardent follower and one of the chief lieutenants of Ayyappa during the war against Udayanan.

There is also a version that Vaavar was a medicine man who treated the soldiers of Ayyappa and followed him. For his army, Ayyappa organised soldiers from the small kingdoms of Kaayamkulam, Thekkumkoor, etc., and set out for Erumeli, a strategic point from where he would start his war mission against Udayanan and liberate Sabarimala temple. Udayanan had established formidable fortresses in inaccessible mountain terrains from where he could chase away all those who would venture to invade the regions he had usurped. For the Muslim soldiers led by Vaavar, Ayyappa established a place of worship and the present mosque in memory of Vaavar is believed to be located at that place.

Other chief lieutenants of Ayyappa were Kochu Kadutha and Valiya Kadutha. It was a well-organised army that was led by the three lieutenants. A warrior of Yogic stature, Ayyappa postulated certain spiritual disciplines for his army which would not only equip them with an invincible physical strength but also refine them for the fulfilment of the very destiny of human life spiritual liberation. And this discipline was not intended only for a particular set of people of a particular age, but for generations to come. These spiritual disciplines, of course, assume a greater relevance today in our tension-ridden times and millions of people follow them during the season of pilgrims to Sabarimala.

It was a spiritual discipline that extended for a period of 41 days before the auspicious *Makarasamkrama* day, when the Malayalam month Dhanu gives way to the month of Makaram. The army assembled at Erumeli ten days before the *Makarasamkrama* day. The soldiers carried the war materials, the provisions and also the needed materials for the performance of spiritual observances. Before setting out for war, an energetic and enthusiastic war dance, '*Petta-thullal*', with a spiritual orientation was conducted. It was the first ever *Petta-thullal*, which is followed every year as a relevant ritualistic dance. All the social and religious distinctions among the soldiers were erased by all of them wearing blue or black clothes and smearing their faces with charcoal.

Udayanan had established a few strong fortresses in the thick forests between Erumeli and Sabarimala, reinforcing his dominion over the whole area. The three main forts were at Inchippaara, Thalappaara and Karimala. Inchippara, located beyond the river Azutha was surrounded by deep trenches. On reaching the thick forests, Ayyappa and the army took rest at the place Kaalaketti and planned the strategies for the attack. While crossing the river Azhutha, all members of the army were instructed to carry a big piece of rock. By filling the trenches with these rocks they crossed them, and led by Vaavar made a surprise attack on the Inchippara fort, which was guarded by Udayanan's ferocious chieftain Puthussery Mundan and his band. He was defeated and killed by Vaavar. In a simultaneous attack, the Thalappaara fort was also conquered. Subsequently the soldiers led by both Vaavar and Kochu Kadutha entered the fort of Karimala where the formidable Udayanan and his men were camping. In a fierce battle they were routed and Udayanan was killed. The fort was smashed to the ground. Thus the whole region was finally liberated from the marauding oppressors, who swayed by egotism, believed that their physical might was supreme.

To celebrate the conquest of evil, a sumptuous feast was arranged on the banks of river Pampa and oil lamps were set afloat in the river symbolizing the triumph of light over darkness. This illumination called Pampa *Vilakku* is conducted even today as an important ritual connected with the pilgrimage.

Ayyappa and the soldiers now climbed the mountain Neelimala and proceeded to the holy shrine of Dharma Saastha in Sabarimala. On the way they left all their weapons under a banyan tree, for arms were no more relevant in the further striving to reach the spiritual dimensions within. They reached the holy shrine located on a hillock in the centre of a vast open space surrounded by the mighty peaks of the Sahya ranges. Hearing about the triumph over Udayanan many people including the kings of Pandalam and the Paandya kingdom had also reached there.

The whole atmosphere was charged with intense piety. It was going to be a historic moment, the great resurgence of a powerful centre of spirituality. The auspicious occasion for the consecration of the new idol of Dharma Saastha arrived and there appeared a great Yogi at that time. He was none other than the son of the priest of the temple (slain by Udayanan), who was the father of Ayyappa. The Yogi consecrated the new idol of Dharma Saastha on the pedestal. Then, as all the assembled were standing there with folded hands immersed in intense devotion, a flash of light emerged from Ayyappa's body and merged into the idol. And Ayyappa disappeared. Ayyappa became one with Dharma Saastha, merging with the Advaitic oneness of *Thaaraka Brahman*. Thus for all the devotees there is no distinction between Dharma Saastha and Ayyappa.

The caste system with its discriminative stance never had any place in the Dharma Saastha temple of Sabarimala. The reformatory ideas brought by Buddhism into Indian culture were also

suitably adopted by the Ayyappa concept. Its spiritual broadness even went beyond to include in its fold the religious systems that came from abroad as Islam and Christianity. Vaavar, a Muslim, is worshipped as a lieutenant of Lord Ayyappa and a Muslim priest distributes sacred ash to the pilgrims in the front of the Dharma Saastha temple. In Alappuzha district there is also a Christian church known as Arthungaal church of Veluthachan associated with the lore of Ayyappa.

Lord Ayyappa, in concept and worship, symbolizes the marvellous potential of Indian culture to maintain this spirit of Divine Universality, despite the tumultuous vagaries of history. It is not the mythology, history or the different religious approaches that matter here.

2.1.3 Significance of Sabari Temple worship

The unique feature of Sri Dharma Saastha temple in Sabarimala and the pilgrimage to the holy place, is the pre pilgrimage disciplines extending for 41 days. It provides an occasion for intensification of the life reinforcing Yogic attunement. The whole pilgrimage is designed in such a way that it gives one an occasion and opportunity for a harmonious cultivation of the spiritual dimensions, breaking away for a few days from the routine, ordinary set patterns, of everyday life.

2.1.4 The Pre-Pilgrimage Observances

Let us have a general view of the traditional pre-pilgrimage observances. The season of pilgrimage begins on the 1st of the Malayalam month Vrischikam (mid-November). This season has two phases. The first phase begins from the 1st of Vrischikam extending up to the 11th of the Malayalam month of Dhanu (around the 26th December), the day when the important rite, the *Mandala Pooja*, is performed. The *Uthsavam*, the temple festival also takes place during this first phase.

The temple is then closed for five days and will be reopened on the 1st January. The second phase of the pilgrimage begins thereafter and extends up to the 1st of the Malayalam month Makaram (around the 14th January) when the most important temple rite *Makara-Samkrama Pooja* is performed.

The austerities usually begin on the first Vrischikam and continue for 41 days. The completion of the austerities enables the pilgrim to reach the temple on the 11th of the month of Dhanu, the day when the *Mandala-Pooja* is performed. This was the practise in olden times. But, now as the number of pilgrims has enormously increased, many pilgrims visit the temple on earlier dates and complete their austerities after their return. But if one visits the temple on the Makara-samkrama day, during the second phase of the pilgrimage, one would be completing 60 days of observance in case the austerities were begun on the 1st of Vrischikam. However, now a days, the

pilgrims visit the temple the whole of the season, except for the five days when the temple remains closed between the two phases, many of them completing within that period, 41 days of spiritual observances. The temple will be closed after the concluding ceremonies on the 7th of Makaram (around the 20th January).

Other occasions for the pilgrimage to the temple are during the auspicious day of *Vishu* in the Malayalam month Medam (April), the day of *Thiruvonam* (August-September), and on the first of every Malayalam month when the temple is opened to perform Pooja-s for five consecutive days. Pilgrims reach the temple after the observance of the pre-pilgrimage austerities on these days also.

The Initial Rituals

Traditionally, austerities begin on the 1st of Vrischikam (mid November) with the wearing of a *Maala* (rosary) of *Rudraaksha* or *Thulsi* around the neck. The pilgrim going for the first time to Sabarimala finds out a *Guruswami*, a preceptor-guide, who has a few years of experience of going to Sabarimala, preferably eighteen years. A pilgrim receives the rosary with a metallic pendant with the figure of Lord Ayyappa engraved on it, either from the *Guruswami* or a temple priest. The wearing of the rosary is symbolic of the Pilgrim's spiritual training to identify himself with the Supreme Truth represented by the form of Lord Ayyappa. The *Mahaa-vaakya* (Great Saying) of the Rig-Veda: '*Thath Thvam Asi* - You are That Supreme Truth – boldly inscribed on the top of the temple reminds one, of this Truth.

It is an opportunity for the pilgrim to apply spiritual disciplines in life. After wearing the rosary, he is expected to make an effort to transcend the limitation of his personality and its restricting expressions and moods. People, even his parents, no more call him by name, but reverentially addresses him as Swami or Ayyappa. He addresses others also as Swami and he is supposed to consider not only man, but beasts, trees and everything else as essentially Divine. When he visits any temple or any place of worship, he chants- "*Swamiye Saranam Ayyappa*". He considers the Deity in any temple as a different form of Lord Ayyappa only. He is supposed to look at everything, whether living or non-living, as the manifestation of the one Truth-Lord Ayyappa. The donkeys that carry the goods up the mountains to Sabarimala temple, are '*Kazhutha Swami-s*' (*Kazhutha* means donkey).

During the austerities many pilgrims often do not stay a home, but prefer to stay in a hall adjacent to a temple or in special prayer halls called *Bhajana-madam-s* built for the purpose of group worship, singing devotional songs and so on. His food is called *Bhiksha* –alms. He should not entertain any worldly distinction of caste, creed, religion or occupation. For the time being, he becomes a recluse for all practical purposes. Although he is in the midst of society, he leads a very

different pattern of life, relaxed and transcendental, his mind mostly occupied with the thoughts of the Supreme Truth. He is like Yogi living in a solitary cave in the mountain fastness. During this period the pilgrim usually wears blue or black clothes with a shawl of the same colour over his shoulders. If he is working in an office, he wears the dress of a Swami after office hours.

The Vellam-kudi, a Group-oriented Ritual

The ascetic devotional efforts have both an individual and group orientation. Pilgrim groups guided by a *Guruswami*, engage in some group rituals during the period of austerities. *Vellam-kudi* which literally means drinking of water, is such a major ritual. The pilgrims assemble in the house of one of the pilgrims and the Pooja (ritualistic worship) is performed there.

The Padukka

Another major group-oriented ritual is known as the Padukka which involves elaborate performance of the *Pooja*. First, a *Padukka-pandal*, a temporary shed for the performance, is erected. The top of the *pandal* is covered with white clothes and the *Pandal* is decorated with mango leaves, betel leaves, flowers, fruit bunches of plantain, etc. Oil lamps are hung from the four corners, and placed on the ground also. In the centre of the *Pandal* there will be *Sreekovil* (sanctum sanctorum) where a picture or icon of Lord Ayyappa will be kept on an elevated platform. There will be symbolic representation of the 18 sacred steps of the Sabarimala temple and appropriate places for the accompanying deities. There will also be an *Aazhi*, the heap of smouldering embers of sacred fire.

The Aazhi-pooja

Aazhi-pooja is another major group-oriented ritual performed near the *Padukka-pandal* during these days of austerities. The Guruswami begins the *Pooja* in the Brahmamuhortham, the auspicious hours in the early morning around 4 a.m. In the evening all the pilgrims in the group offer prayers in a nearby temple, during the *Deepaaraadhana*, the ritualistic worship by the rhythmic waving round of oil or camphor lamps. From there they return to the *Padukka-pandal* and the *Guruswami* conducts the *Deepaaraadhna* at the *Sreekovil* there. After that, the *Guruswami* and the pilgrims, go to a specially arranged place near the *Padukka-pandal* to set up an *Aazhi*, a big heap of smouldering embers of sacred fire.

The Kettunira Ceremony

On the day fixed by the Guruswami, the pilgrims prepare themselves for the sacred journey. The most important rite just before starting the pilgrimage is the *Kettunira*, also known as

Kettumurukku. It is the filling in of the sacred package, (*Kettu* means package and *Nira*, filling in), which the pilgrim reverentially carries on his head. For this purpose a blue or black bag with two compartments, which is known as *Irumudi*, is used. This ritual is performed by the Guruswami on the day for the pilgrimage fixed by him. This filled package is known as *Irumudikettu*. Only those who carry the *Irumudikettu* on the head would be allowed to climb the 18 sacred steps to the temple, as they are the ones considered to have observed the austerities and thus eligible to climb the holy steps. Other devotees have to resort to a different passage to reach in front of the sanctorum for worship.

The Kettunira Ritual and the Significance of Irumudikettu

During the *Kettunira*, after the initial prayers, the sacred offering of ghee (clarified cow's butter) is filled inside a coconut, the fibrous covering of which is removed. The draining of the water within the coconut through a small hole on the top and filling it with ghee is a symbolic act. It signifies the draining out of worldly attachments from the mind and filling it with spiritual aspirations. Coconut is called *Thenga* in Malayalam and now the ghee-*thenga* coconut, an offering for Lord Ayyappa, is known as the *Nei-thenga*. First, the first compartment of the bag will be filled in with the *Nei-thenga* and other sacred offerings to Lord Ayyappa and the accompanying deities. The front compartment is now closed by tying it with a string. The filled-in front compartment is believed to be vibrant with spiritual power. Then the other compartment is filled with a few coconuts to be broken at various holy spots enroute, and also with the provision necessary for the preparation of food for the pilgrim.

The Significance of the Nei-thenga

When the *Kettunira* is over, the *Irumudukettu* will be a compact package that can be conveniently carried over the head and the sacred package is handled with great reverence. Before taking the *Irumudikettu* on the head, there is a function called *Sarvapraayaschitha*, in which the pilgrim prays to the Lord for forgiveness for all wrongs and lapses he has committed knowingly or unknowingly during the period of austerities. He prays for Lord's Grace for an unhampered pilgrimage, through dense forests and mountain peaks inhabited by wild beasts, till he climbs the 18 steps of the temple for the blissful vision of the Lord's glorious idol emanating divine splendor. He also prays for constant guidance in leading a life of righteousness and spiritual expansion even after his return.

The journey

After the *Sarva-prayaschitha* the pilgrim turns to the east, and the *Guruswami*, with his mind surging with devotion to Lord Ayyappa, places the *Irumudikettu* on the head of the pilgrim. The pilgrim then, with prayers to the Lord breaks a coconut by hurling it on a stone, symbolising the shattering of impediments for a smooth pilgrimage. He now starts the journey in the company of the team led by the *Guruswami*.

Formerly the pilgrims had to travel about 56 kms through forests and mountains to reach the sacred shrine. Today he can reach up to Pampa, on the banks of the river, Pampa, in a vehicle; and from there he has to make only a 6 km climb of one mountain only, called Neelimala to reach the shrine. However, even today many pilgrims prefer to go by the traditional forest route after reaching Erumeli, a holy place associated with Sabarimala pilgrimage. From there they would walk about 50 kms through forests and mountain peaks to reach Pampa and then climb the mountain, Neelimala. There are many pilgrims who reach the holy spot from such far away places as Mumbai, Andhra Pradesh, etc. covering hundreds of kilometres on foot, camping and praying at several temples on the way.

From Erumeli there are three ways to reach Pampa. By two routes, the pilgrims can reach Pampa in vehicles- one by Erumeli-Ranny-Plappilli road (89kms) and the other by Erumeli – Mukkottuthara-Plappilli road. And the third, as mentioned about is the traditional forest route of 50 kms to be trekked by foot up to Pampa. After road transport was extended up to Pampa, there was much reduction in the number of pilgrims going through the traditional route. However, the latest trend indicated that the pilgrims who prefer to reach the holy place walking bare foot through the forest path, are on the increase.

The Petta-thullal at Erumely

At Erumely there are three sacred spots, which the pilgrims visit. They are the two shrines of Lord Dharma Saastha, the Kochambalam (small shrine) and the Valiambalam (bigger shrine) and the mosque of Vaavar (Vavar muslim palli). The pilgrims who go to Sabarimala via Erumely reach this place in vehicles and after participating in a ritualistic dance called *petta -thullal* and worship at the shrines either proceed to Pampa in vehicles or by foot through the forest path. (There is also a road leading direct to Pampa without touching Erumely).

Erumely wears a festive look during the whole pilgrimage season. Especially, a week before *Makara-samkrama pooja*, the most important *Pooja*, takes place in Sabarimala temple, Erumely

becomes an unforgettable scene of thousands of devotees clad in blue or black clothes in devotional abandon.

Petta-thullal, a devotional dance, performed by the pilgrims in Erumely, is an important ritualistic custom of the pilgrimage. According to the Puraanic view, the *Petta-thullal* is a re-enaction of the joyful dance of the people on knowing that Ayyappa had slain the terrible Mahishi, the demoness having the form of a she-buffalo. It is believed that the place derived its name 'Erumely' from the Malayalam word 'Eruma kolli'. (Eruma means she-buffalo, and kolli, the place of killing). Of course, the slaying of the buffalo here has a deeper connotation, that of eliminating or transcending the lower mental propensities for the evolution of human consciousness. Mahishi, the she-buffalo, symbolises the underdeveloped stage of consciousness in animals, with its uncontrolled impulsive trends, which still hold a sway over human consciousness also.

According to the historical perspective, *Petta-thullal* was a part of the spiritual discipline evolved by Ayyappa before embarking upon his war expedition against the despotic Udayanan to liberate Sabarimala temple from his hold. It was intended to erase the sense of all social and religious distinctions from the minds of the participants and to integrate them into a dynamic whole. All of them wore blue or black clothes and smeared their faces with charcoal and other colours. They danced in abandon in a state of forgetfulness of their individual distinctions while making a conscious effort to fix their attention on the divinity of Ayyappa, whom they considered as the manifestation of the Supreme Reality. While dancing, they uttered aloud '*Ayyappan thinthakathom, Swami thinthakathom*'.

The preparations for the *Petta-thullal* of a group, according to tradition, is to be arranged by the *Randaam-kanni-swami-s* (those who undertake the pilgrimage for the second time) as instructed by the Guruswami. One who is going for the first time is known as a *Kanni-Ayyappan*. According to the tradition during the *Petta-thullal* the *Kanni Ayyappa* holds a symbolic arrow. It is customarily stipulated that the *Kanni-Ayyappa*, the first timer, should participate in the *Petta-thullal*. Others may or may not. However, for the thrill of devotional abandon and for the joy that is derived from thus transcending the egoistic trends and to directly experience at least a certain touch of Divine Consciousness of oneness with everything many pilgrims enthusiastically take part in the ritualistic dance.

Before *Petta-thullal* begins the pilgrims go to the market (*Petta* means market and *Thullal*, dance) and buy small arrows for ritualistic purpose, provisions as cereals, vegetables etc. All these items of a group are placed in a blanket and then tied up into a bundle. The bundle is carried suspended on long poles, the ends of which rest on the shoulders of a pair of pilgrims.

The pilgrims with the face and body smeared with charcoal and other colours go to the Kochambalam, the small shrine of Dharma Shaastha, from where the *Petta-thullal* begins. After worshipping at the shrine, the pilgrims start the dance to the accompaniment of instrumental music, like drumming and Naagaswaram. *Petta-thullal* is performed with devotional fervour, many of the pilgrims holding green twigs and uttering aloud: “Ayyappa thinthakathom, Swami thinthakathom””

From the Kochambalam, the dancing pilgrims move first to the mosque of Vavar, and circumambulate it. They render their offerings and receive the sacred ash from a Muslim priest. It is a remarkable scene of a practical demonstration of the spirit of India’s all embracing spiritual heritage that sees the diverse religious pursuits as just different paths to the same spiritual goal. According to Ayyappa lore, Ayyappa himself set up a special place of prayer for his Muslim lieutenant Vavar and his followers. There now stands the mosque of Vavar. During the annual festival (*Chirappu Mahothsavam*) of the Dharma Saastha Temple at Erumely, the Hindus make offerings by going in procession to the mosque of Vaavar. And during the Chandanakudam festival of the mosque, the Muslims go to the Dharma Saastha temple and make the offerings. Irrespective of the religious differences, for the people of this locality, these are great occasions for religious co-operation.

After coming out of the mosque the dancing pilgrims move towards Valiambalam, the bigger temple of Dharma Saastha, about a kilometre away on a riverbank. On reaching Valiambalam, the pilgrims throw the green twigs over the roof of the temple and after circumambulation and worship, conclude the *Petta-thullal* by lighting camphor in front of the temple. Then they take bath in the river. *Petta-thullal* is a symbolic hunting dance.

The Appearance of the Auspicious Eagle, Krishna Parunthu

Although the *Petta-thullal* of pilgrims reaching Erumely from various places, takes place on all days during the pilgrimage season; according to age-old tradition, the *Petta-thullal* of two major groups of pilgrims, one from Ambalapuzha and the other from Alangad, will be performed only on the 27th of Malayalam month, Dhanu (around the 11th January). These groups represent the two major militia of warriors from Ambalapuzha and Alangad (a place near Kodungallur) who had accompanied Ayyappa during his confrontation with the brigand chief Udayanan.

The *Petta-thullal* of the Ambalapuzha group takes place in the morning. They would assemble in front of the Kochambalam with caparisoned elephants, various musical instruments and other paraphernalia suited to the occasion ready for the *Petta-thullal*. However, the ritualistic dance would start only if a special phenomenon occurs. This may appear strange to a rational mind. But every year, the group would, in all preparedness wait for the appearance of a bird known in Malayalam as *Krishna Parunthu*, which is a variety of eagle with a white patch under the body and

held sacred as the auspicious mount of Lord Vishnu. Only after sighting the bird they would start the *Petta-thullal*

It is a very colourful event with three caparisoned elephants carrying the idols of the Deities. As a custom, one of the caparisoned elephants and the pilgrims in the procession enters the mosque of Vaavar, as the Muslims from the top of the mosque showers flowers on them. The elephant and the pilgrims then circumambulate the mosque. Emerging out, the *Petta-thullal* proceeds to the Valiambalam to end there.

Another major *Petta-thullal*, which is conducted by the group of pilgrims from Alangad, takes place the same day afternoon. And on this occasion, many have witnessed as every year, a star will be visible in broad daylight.

During the pilgrimage season Erumely witnesses memorable scenes of abounding devotion, colour and festivity. Thousands of pilgrims on reaching here either proceed to Pampa by vehicles or take to the forest route by foot to reach there.

2.1.5 Route to Sabarimala:

(i) The Traditional Forest Route

Pilgrims going through the forest route are comparatively less during the first phase of the pilgrim season, that is, during the *Mandala Pooja* season, between the 1st Vrischikam (mid-November) and the 11th Dhanu (end of December); but during the *Maka-samkrama* phase beginning from the 1st January, a large number of pilgrims go by this route.

Till about two decades ago, the pilgrims taking to the forest route used to step directly into the forests immediately after Erumely, but now he has to walk at least 4 kms through public roads before entering the forests. On the way there is a broad stream called Peroorthodu, once considered the boundary that separated the inhabited land from the forests. But now villages extend from here up to a place called Irumpoonnikara, 3 kms eastwards. At Irumpoonnikara there are three temples, dedicated to Lord Shiva, Sri Subrahmanya and Goddess Balabhadra Devi.

Immediately at Irumpoonnikara, the pilgrims enter dense tropical forests. Many prefer to walk bare foot through the holy mountain ranges, considered to be the *Poonkaavanam*, the blooming grove of Lord Ayyappa.

After about 3 kms walk, crossing some of the gentle forest streams, the pilgrim reaches a place of rest known as *Arasumudikotta*, where it is believed that Ayyappa and his soldiers took rest for some time. It is a place of worship of the Guardian Deities of the forests and there is a small

shrine for them. Then the pilgrim proceeds ahead through a forest path that lies along the side of a river called Paarathode.

The traditional forest route to Sabarimala covers the following places. (1) Erumely (2) Peroorthodu, (3) Irumponikkara (4) Arasumudikotta (5) Kalaketti (6) Azhutha (7) River Azhutha (8) Kallidumkunnu (9) Inchippara (10) Mukkuzhi (11) Kariyilamthodu (12) Karimala peak (13) Valiyanathavalam (14) Cheriyanathavalam (15) River Pampa.

An important centre of pilgrimage in the forests, after leaving Erumely, is a place called **Kalaketti**, about 11 kms from there. After climbing one or two hill slopes the path to Kalaketti is rather even. It is a sacred spot and there is a temple of Lord Siva. In the vast space around the temple, the pilgrims take rest under the big forest trees.

Azhutha, which is on the bank of a river known by the same name, about 2 ½ kms from Kaalaketti, is another major resting place of the pilgrims. The river, Azhutha is a tributary of the river Pampa. Many of the pilgrims camp at the place during night, and there are a number of temporary sheds that provide accommodation. In Azhutha there is a temple complex of various Deities. A special ritualistic ceremony performed here is *Aazhi-pooja*, which is a prayerful walking around a huge pile of fire, chanting aloud “*Swamiye Sharanam Ayyappa*”.

The holy bath in the river Azhutha is a part of the pilgrimage. While making a dip, the pilgrim, as a ritualistic custom, takes a pebble from the river which he later drops on reaching a place called Kallidumkunnu, which literally means the hill where the stone is dropped, on the top of a mountain to which the pilgrim climbs next.

Walking through the rather shallow river, the pilgrim reaches the other side and makes about a 3 kms climb of a mountainside called Azhuthamedu. This is one of the three major steep climbs of the pilgrimage.

The Azhuthamedu climb culminates at **Kallidumkunnu and Inchippara**, a little way from Kallidumkunnu. At Kallidumkunnu the pilgrim reverentially drops the pebble that he had picked up from the river Azhutha.

According to the Puraanic lore, it is believed that Kallidumkunnu is the place where Mahishi's body lay buried. The historical point of view evolved from the old *Ayyappan Pattukal*, the ballads on Ayyappa, says that there were deep trenches that protected Udayanan's fortress at Inchippara, and Ayyappa's soldiers, who carried stones from and around the river Azhutha, filled up these trenches. The ritual of dropping the stone seems to commemorate that event.

Walking a short distance from Kallidumkunnu over level ground, the pilgrim reaches Inchippara. There is a temple for the Guardian Deity Sri Inchippara Mooppan. This is a place of rest for the pilgrims who take refreshments or cook food.

Now the pilgrim has to climb down a steep mountain slope that ends in a valley called **Mukkuzhi**, another ideal resting place. At Mukkuzhi there is a temple of Divine Mother.

There is now an 11 kms, trek through thick foothill forests to reach the lofty mountain, Karimala. On the way there are a few places for rest and some temporary catering sheds where Kanji, the rice gruel, boiled tapioca with salad, tea etc., are available. These deep forests are ordinarily the regions where the denizens of the wilderness freely roam about, but they discreetly keep away when man dominates their havens once in a year for a few days. The pilgrim can see the droppings of wild elephants and other animals on the way. The blooming forests are a feast to the eyes.

Eventually the pilgrim reaches the banks of the stream Kariyilaamthodu in the valley of the mountain **Karimala**. If he had started from Azhutha about 7 A.M he would be reaching Kariyilaamthodu by 1 P. M. There are temporary sheds where the pilgrims can take rest. Many of them take bath in the forest stream, cook food or have it from the catering sheds.

Then the pilgrim crosses Kariyilaamthodu and walks about 3 kms through dense forests of the valley of Karimala. Then starts one of the most arduous climbs of the pilgrimage to reach the mountain top. While the Azhuthamedu involves almost one straight stretch of climb, the mountain of Karimala has to be climbed in seven stages.

It is said in the Ayyappa lore that atop Karimala there was a formidable fort of the brigand chief Udayanan and by conquering the fort and destroying Udayanan and his hordes, the ultimate aim of Ayyappa's expedition was achieved – the liberation of the temple of Sri Dharma Saastha of Sabarimala. In Karimala, there are places for the worship of the deities Vana Dur ga, Karimalanaathan and Kochu Kadutha, who was one of the chieftains of Ayyappa. There are two ancient wells on the top of Karimala. It is believed that Ayyappa and his soldiers quenched their thirst from these wells.

Reaching the top of Karimala, the pilgrim takes rest for sometime and then starts the adventurous climb down through very narrow and zigzag paths flanked by dense forests. At last, stepping into the valleys of Karimala the pilgrim reaches a plain grassland interspersed with shrubs and the place is known as **Valiyaanavattam**. At the southeastern corner of this place there is a raised platform which is the resting place for those who carry the *Thiruvaabharanam*, the ornaments,

brought from the palace of Pandalam to adorn the idol of the Lord, during *Makara-Samkrama Pooja*. Moving further the pilgrim reaches a spot called **Cheriyaanavattam**, another place with tall forest trees. Now the pilgrim walks along the banks of a tributary of the river Pampa.

The pilgrim reaches then the extensive area of the **Pampa** river bed. The region is also known as Pampa. The Ayyappa lore has it that king Rajasekhara of Pandalam found the child Ayyappa on the banks of this river. Here, there are hundreds of camp sheds for the pilgrims to stay. Some of the pilgrims would stay for two or three days in this pious atmosphere on the banks of Pampa forgetting all their mundane affairs and immersing themselves in reading holy texts, prayer and mediation.

On reaching Pampa, the pilgrims, after setting their camps, take a holy dip in the river, Pampa. Many of them perform the rite *Pithrubali*, the propitiatory rites for the ancestors, expressing their love and regard for those who had passed away.

An important function which the pilgrims, who come in groups, arrange here is the ritualistic feast called **Pampaa-sadya**, a sumptuous feast commemorating the feast Ayyappa and his soldiers arranged at the banks of Pampa to celebrate the liberation of Sabarimala temple. The pilgrims believe that there will be the presence and participation of Lord Ayyappa as an unseen guest in the feast.

There is a festival of light on the banks of Pampa a day before the most important *Makara-samkrama pooja* called **Pampa Vilakku**. This also commemorates the victory celebration on the banks of Pampa conducted after the defeat of Udayanan. Innumerable camps of pilgrims are illuminated with oil lamps and candles on this occasion.

Climbing the mountain **Neelimala** is the next phase of the pilgrimage. At first the pilgrim climbs the steps to reach the shrine of Sri Ganesha at the foot of the mountain and worships there before climbing Neelimala. This is the third steep climb of the pilgrimage, when the pilgrim takes to the traditional route. But for those who reach Pampa by vehicles, this is the only climb. (There is another route to be trekked by foot via Vandiperiyar that directly reaches Sabarimala without touching Pampa). From Pampa, Sabarimala is about 6 kms away. The pilgrims who are unable to climb, engage Dollies, the special carriers borne by a team of four persons. Near Sri Ganesha temple there is a camp of the king of Pandalam, the descendant of the foster father of Ayyappa, who stays there for a few days during the pilgrimage season. The pilgrims receive sacred ash from the king.

On the top of Neelimala there is a spot called **Appaachimedu**, on both sides of which there are very steep gorges. Appaachimedu is considered to be the seat of evil spirits and the pilgrims propitiate them by throwing offerings of rice-powder balls into the gorges.

Now the great climb is over. The pilgrim is getting closer to his destination. Walking a short distance from Appachimedu, he reaches a level ground and there is the sacred spot, **Sabaripedam**. Therefore, the whole region including the location of the sacred shrine of Lord Ayyappa is known as Sabarimala, the Hill of Sabari. The pilgrims make offerings and worship at the holy spot.

About a kilometre from Sabaripedam is another sacred spot known as **Saramkuthiyaal**, which means the banyan tree under which the arrows are to be dropped. This is a spot, where, it is believed, Ayyappa and his soldiers discarded their weapons after the liberation of Sabarimala temple from the domination of Udayanan.

The pilgrim has now come very close to the temple at Sannidhanam and the whole region is vibrant with loud chanting of the pilgrims and the explosion of the fire works offerings in the shrine.

Sannidhanam - the Presence

With an overwhelming sense of fulfillment, the pilgrim speeds up his pace and beholds from a distance the eighteen sacred steps, the shrine and the golden flagstaff. A divine thrill overwhelms his very being. The temple is located on a hillock in the midst of a vast valley surrounded on all sides by the mountain ranges covered with lush forests.

The pilgrim has to climb eighteen sacred steps, the *Pathinettaampadi*, to reach the *Sannidhanam*, the Presence of Lord Ayyappa.

Only those who have observed forty-one days of austerities and carry the *Irumudikettu*, the sacred package of offerings, on the head are supposed to climb the se sacred steps. Those who do not carry the *Irumudikettu* are not allowed to climb them. They can use the flight of steps at the northern side to reach the temple precincts.

Sannidhaanam, the Divine Presence

Climbing the Sacred steps, the pilgrim reaches the focussing point of his austerities, the very goal of his pilgrimage – the Presence (Sannidhanam). He stands immersed in Bliss in the glorious Presence of Lord Ayyappa vibrant with Divine Grace. The doors within open to Eternity and the reassuring Grace Divine, which makes him more free, harmonious and peaceful.

Now the pilgrim moves towards the shrine of Lord Karthikeya, for worship. Then he proceeds southwards to worship the Divine Mother, Maalikappurathamma, whose shrine is located a little away towards the left side of Lord Ayyappa's shrine. The main offering here is the rolling of the coconut around the shrine. Behind the shrine of Malikappurathamma, a little away towards the east is a structure called *Manimandapam*, where the representative of the king of Pandalam takes rest

on his arrival in Sabarimala. On its left is the seat of the Deities, Kochu Kadutha Swami and Karuppa Swami. There are also places of worship of the Divine Serpents and the nine Planetary Deities. Towards the south-west corner is a compartment within which is a sculptured figure of a goat and an inscription '*Shiva-thejomayam*'.

After the worship, the pilgrim prepares for a symbolic pouring of his love and his very being into the Supreme Source of all existence, represented by the splendours idol of Lord Ayyappa, by the libation of it with the ghee contained in the *Nei-thenga* that he has brought. This is called *Nei-abhishekam*.

The pilgrim settles at a convenient place in the sacred precincts and opens the *Irumudikettu*. The coconut filled with ghee is taken out from it. He breaks the coconut and drains out the ghee into vessel. Carrying this vessel, he joins a separate queue meant for *Neyyabhishekam*.

The spiritual disciplines during the austerities, the journey through mountain terrains breathing fresh air and the mind absorbed in thoughts on the Lord, reinforces the whole being of the pilgrim. The experience gives him a deeper vision about life. And if he intensifies this awakening through further spiritual expansion, it will bring about profound evolutionary transformation of life. Every pilgrim will certainly gain a cultural and spiritual refinement, which may of course, vary with different individuals according to the range of receptivity.

(ii) Other routes to Sabarimala

Pilgrims going to Sabarimala from different parts reach Plappally; from there, there is only one way to Pampa.

From Kottayam to Pampa: There are the following routes: [1] Changanacherry-Thiruvalla-Pathanamthitta 127 kms [2] Changanacherry-Thiruvalla-Kozhencherry-RanniBlockpadi-Vadasserikkara-Pampa 119 kms [3] Kodungoor -Chamampathal-Manimala-Placherry-Chethomkara-Athikayam-Perunad-Pampa 105 kms [4] Kangazha -Pathanad-Manimala-Placherry-Chethomkara-Athikayam-Perunad-Pampa 104 kms [5] Karukacha-Manimala-Mukkada -Edamon-Athikayam-Perunad-Pampa 100 kms [6] Ponkunnam-Erumely-Mukkottuthara-Pampavali-Plappally -Pampa 90 kms.

Erumely to Pampa: [1] Karimkallummyzhy-Thulappally -Plappally -Pampa 56 kms (Because of the steep ascent, this route is not suitable for heavy vehicle s) [2] Mukkuda -Athikkayam-Perunad-Pampa 64 kms [3] Vechuchira-Athikayam-Perunad-Pampa 57 kms [4] Erumely-Placherry-Chethornkara-Athikayam-Perunad-Pampa 69 kms. From the north, pilgrims can reach Pampa via Erumely without touching Kottayam by taking the route via Ettumannor -Pala -Ponkunnam-Erumely -Chethomkara-Athikayam-Perunad-Pampa 153kms.

Many Pilgrims from Ernakulam region take the route via Alappuzha-Changanacherry-Thiruvalla-Pathanamthitta-Mannarakulanji-Vadasserikara-Perunad-P lappalli-Nilackal-Chalakayam-Pampa 69 kms.

Chengannur to Pampa: [1] Aranmula-Thekkamala-Pathanamthitta-Vadasserikkara-Pampa 93 kms. [2] Aranmula-Ranni Blockpady-Vadasserikkara-Pampa 69 kms. Chengannur is the nearest railway station to Sabarimala.

Pandalam to Pampa: Kaippattur-Omallur-Pathanamthitta-Vadasserikkara-Pampa 84 kms.

Thiruvananthapuram to Pampa [1] Ayoor-Punalur-Pathanamthitta to Pampa 184 kms [2] Kottarakkara-Adoor-Pathanamthitta and onwards 179 kms.

2.1.6 Important Temples

The following are the important temples on the way to Sabarimala - Erumely, Pandalam, Aranmula, Ayur, Puthiyakavu, Ranni, Perunad, Nilackal and Pampa.

2.1.7 Base Camps

The main base camps are Pandalam, Aranmula, Pathanamthitta, Erumely, Kalaketty, Nilackal, Vadasserikkara, Ranni, Kanamala and Perunad.

2.1.8 Stakeholders in Sabari Pilgrimage

In the Pilgrimage mainly there are four stakeholders – the local people, the Pilgrims, the authorities/ agencies and the ecology.

Section - B

2.2.0 Erumely Grama Panchayat and Sabari Pilgrimage

This section contains Erumely Panchayat at a Glance, Social, Cultural and Historical background of the Erumely Panchayat, Profile of Erumely Grama Panchayat, Role of Erumely in Sabari Pilgrimage, Erumely: Scenario During Pilgrim Season, Problems faced by Sabari Pilgrims at Erumely, Eco system at Erumely, Economic and Social aspects of Pilgrimage, Sabari Pilgrimage and Households, Pilgrimage and Business People, Agencies Involved in Sabari Pilgrimage, Costs & Benefits, Pilgrimage and Voluntary Service Organisations and ‘Sabarimala Pilgrimage and Erumely’ a Swot Analysis.

2.2.1 Erumely Panchayat at a Glance

Name of the Panchayat	-	Erumely Grama Panchayat
Village	-	Erumely South
Block	-	Kanjirappally
Divisions	-	Mukkoottuthara, Erumely
District	-	Kottayam
Taluk	-	Kanjirappally
Assembly Segment	-	Kanjirappally
Area	-	119.3 Sq. K. M.
Population	-	52328 (2001 Census)
Scheduled Castes	-	9022
Scheduled Tribes	-	1942
Number of Wards	-	20
Literacy	-	83.25 percent
Date of Existence	-	15 th August 1953 with 12 Wards
Important Rivers	-	Pamba, Manimalayar, Azhutha.

Source: Erumely Panchayat Integrated Development Document P.10.

2.2.2 Social, cultural and historical background of the Erumely Panchayat

The name Erumely is the modified version of the primary name of Erumakolly, which means the killer of the Eruma or the killer of Buffalo. The Asura or the Demon King Mahisha had a demon wife Mahishi. Both being the very embodiment of Evil as the Mythology goes Ayyappasamy killed the female demon. The Petta Thullal is the very victory dance of the Devotees over this victory of Good over Evil. There is a pond said to be older than the temple, now situating in the temple school

premises, this pond is known as 'Athirakulam'. The story runs that the Lord washed himself clean after the slaying.

This land is unique and many noteworthy features are there. This is an important place for rituals on the pilgrimage and this land is the model for Religious amity.

The 'Petta Thullal' commences from the Kochambalam (minor temple) with all rituals accompanied by instrumental music, winds its way to Vavar's Mosque, where offerings are made, then snakes its way to the Valiambalam or Big temple.

This temple historically belonged to the Meppazhayoor Manor (Mana in Malayalam) The temple owned the 4800 acres of land extending from Erumely to River Aruda (Azhutha). The farmers of the neighbourhood Hindu, Moslem and Christian cultivated paddy and other crops in the temple lands. Only a portion of the Manorial share was given to the temple trustees. The share was not sufficient for the temple rituals and upkeep. Therefore the trusteeship was transferred from the Ranny Lords to the family of Mattakkattu. They arranged for the direct levy of the Manorial share directly from by the Kanjirappally Village officer in the service of the Dewaswom. Subsequently, in a survey it was found that, the tenants had only 1512 acres of land under cultivation. Therefore, the remaining land was declared the forest property of the Government.

The old land deeds speak of Erumely as Muri (Furkka) in the Kanjirappally South Division of Changanacherry Taluk. When Changanacherry Taluk was bifurcated into two Taluks, Erumely fell in the Kanjirappally Taluk. The Kanjirappally south division became Erumely village, which was again bifurcated into two villages—Erumely North and Erumely South. The Village Panchayat is in the Erumely South.

2.2.3 Profile of Erumely Panchayat

The basic information is based on maps, reports of study tours, records of the Ministry of Revenue and Agriculture. Geographically the Panchayat consists of three types of land – High land Plateaus, Lowlands and Mountainous lands. The highland plateaus have very little topsoil and they constitute 3 percent of the total lands. Lowlands constitute 10 percent of the total area. The rest are mountainous gradients. The climate is a mixture of seasons with 4 months of South West monsoon, 3 months of North East monsoon and summer showers. The hot summer lasts for about 45 months commencing from January and ending with mid-May.

The major natural cash crops are Rubber, Coconuts, Areca nuts, Cocoa and Black Pepper. The food crops are Cassava, Corn, Yam, Elephant yam, Plantain and the like annual crops.

Water Availability

The rains are plenty but the laterite soil does not hold water for long and the steep sides of mountains doesn't help storage either. During Monsoon the water is ubiquitous but during the hot summer paradoxically waterless. The scarcity is acute as water is not naturally stored.

Streams and rivers like ponds and wells are the sources of water, which is soft and sweet. The soil is mostly black and fertile. Some areas have red earth and some areas are katti (rock).

In Erumely Panchayat, 60 percent of the households have their own wells. Those who have no wells depend on public taps and other sources. In majority of wells, water supply is available for 8 months. The water availability in many of the tube wells is not sufficient and also the quality of water available from this source is not satisfactory. The storage capacity of the water tank is limited. The supply of water through public taps is irregular and the water supply system is defective. There is a lot of misuse of water.

The drinking water problem is aggravated due to the flow of wastewater to the river from nearby rubber factories. The waste materials produced from nearby hospitals and toilets are deposited in the rivers. The water scarcity is a grave problem during summer, especially in the pilgrim season. Pollution during the season makes matters still worse.

Land Use

Exact documents are not available for the actual land use. About 3.74 percent lands are forest areas worthy of cultivation. About 50 percent lands are developed haciendas (farms called Purayidoms).

Human Resources

2001 census documents show a total population of 52328 with 25118 males and 27210 females. The density of population is 460 per sq.km.

Agriculture

History of Erumely shows that the region between Azhutha and Erumely was largely cultivated. There is evidence that, 1512 acres of temple lands were under cultivation, carried on by sharecroppers. About 100 years ago, farmers migrated to this area and began cultivation. Then the Irikkattu estate, now Harrison Malayalam, was a tea estate to begin with. Later the estate developed rubber too. After the Second World War, there was a universal food scarcity. The Government of Travancore initiated what is called Grow More Food scheme, and allotted to different associations areas for cultivation of foods. These areas were in the forest region beyond Mukkoottuthara. Thus an

impetus was given for the production of foods like Paddy and Cassava. After the independence the pattern shifted in favour of cash crops as these yielded better returns. Food production suffered and became nominal only.

Today the Panchayat has 3547 hectares under rubber, 600 hectares under pepper vines and 250 hectares under plantain cultivation. The productivity of food crops is below the State average, while in the case of Rubber it is above the State average.

Prices and Marketing

The main centres of marketing are Erumely and Mukkoottuthara towns. It is done by private agencies; co-operative sectors have a minimal role here.

Employment generation

Only 30 percent of the farmers are self-employed as the region is rubber intensive and estate owners employ workers to tap the latex. There are 4605 small-scale farmers owning 1 hectare or less: there are 2465 owners having 2 hectares of rubber plantation. Only 793 owners have more than 2 hectares under rubber cultivation.

Transport

There is a wide network of roads in this Panchayat, but the roads are not in the best of conditions. Uneven roads, narrowness of them, lack of drains to draw off water, absence of culverts, public apathy, and lack of funds, all these worsen the situation. Statistics show that mud roads account for 123.6 kms, and tar roads account for 29.4 kms, district roads account for 18.2 kms and village roads account for 134 kilometers.

Industry

There are only 37 small-scale industrial units and one plantation industry in this Panchayat. 132 employees are working in three industries; 40 in toddy extraction practices; 125 in bamboo industry; 30 in hollow bricks manufacturing units; 110 engaged in repairing works; 5 in plastic industries and 860 are working in estates.

Energy

The first electrification in the Panchayat was taken place during 1956. There are 28 transformers, 6238 house connections; 1183 business connections; 59 industrial connections and 10 agricultural connections. Large-scale temporary connections are taken place during the pilgrim season. Low voltage is a natural phenomenon especially during the pilgrim season.

Public Health

The Panchayat records reveals that, only 55 percent of the families have sanitation facility at home, but the problem of wastewater flow remains. Drains are not made permanently. The habit of destroying the waste from the houses is limited to 20 percent families, thus the provision for drainage is a serious problem. There is a community health centre run by the Government, and sub centres at Kalaketty, Eruthuapuzha, Idakadthy, Muttappally, Peroorthode, Paakkanam, Kanakappalam and Chenappady. In addition to this there are homeopathic and ayurvedic dispensaries. There are also four private hospitals; estates have their own company run dispensaries. The availability of staff at these health care units are not sufficient and their services are not available during the night.

Education

The first formal school 'The CMS School' was established in 1923 at Kanakapalam, another under the name St. Thomas L. P. School was established in the year 1926. At Kanakappalam another school came into existence under the name N.M. Primary School in the same year. St. Thomas primary school became a middle school in 1937; an English medium school was also established here. A total of 29 educational institutions do function in this Panchayat of these, only one is a college and seven are high schools. There are 6 U.P schools, 14 L.P. schools and one I.T.C.

Housing

The statistics (1995-96) shows that, there are 11385 houses in Erumely. There are 107 houses having more than one floor, 498 concrete houses and 2476 thatched houses, in addition to this there are 8304 houses, which come under the category of other houses. In the Panchayat there is a wide gap between demand supply of houses. The houses in the housing colony are not in good condition.

Womens' welfare

The census of 2001 shows that, the scheduled caste women are 4210 and the scheduled tribe women are 988. In the petty farming communities, women do the household chores and work in the government or quasi government institutions. Most women do not have a permanent income or permanent job to do. Those who work in the timber business or do odd jobs in the construction field or rubber tapping are unorganised.

There is clear gender discrimination in all the fields of employment and wages except in the public sector. The women belonging to the BPL families do not get the opportunities for higher education. The participation of women in the fields of social work is very negligible.

Culture

The people render all sorts of help to the devotees in their rituals starting from the obsequies at the Kochambalam, moving to the veneration of the Vavar Swamy and offerings there at and on the procession at the Ayyappa temple and in the onward journey to the divine presence. People participate in the various festivals, like Petta Thullal at Ambalapuzha, the Moslem festival called Chandanakudom at Erumely, the feast at the Forane Church, the great festival at the Mukkoottuthara Thiruvampady temple and the procession of the holy icon at the at the Propos Estate Church. This is symbolic of the tolerance and respect for other religions and their rites.

Cooperative Sector

In this sector, banks are the major operators. The 'Erumely Service Co-operative Bank' was established in 1960. At present, 8910 members own its stock. The next note worthy establishment is the Kanamala Service co-operative bank, there is yet another co-operative venture by name Muttappally Scheduled Caste Co-operative Society, it runs a consumer store. At Mattannoor there is a marketing society with limited operations. Ponkunnam Rubber Marketing Society operates a well-run branch at Mukkoottuthara. Similarly, the Meenachil Urban co-operative Bank and the Kottayam District co-operative Banks also have branches here.

Tourism

Sabarimala has the distinction of being the biggest tourist center of entire south India. Erumely is geographically connected to it. More over it has other potentials like being on the shortest transit route from Thiruvananthapuram to Thekkady. It is the gateway to both Thekkady and Sabarimala. But the sleepy village lacks the facilities for this big role of a tourist centre.

The big attractions are the mountainous terrain and evergreen forests with their wealth of flora and fauna. Crickets and rare birds like the racquet tailed drongo, the great Malabar Squirrel, cycas and bamboo, sweet water streams and petty water falls and what not! This place is far away from anywhere and is the best get away in the world. It will make economic sense to make huts in the forest and offer them to tourists. The Uthirakulam may be renovated for it tells of the glory of Erumely in days of yore.

Statistics show a mind-boggling number of 22.5 million devotees of Sri. Ayyappan flocking annually to the sylvan abode of the lord. Of these, not less than 60 percent firstly reach Erumely town, then visit the Moslem durga of Vavar, make offerings to him, and then join the ecstatic mass dance called Petta thullal and proceed towards the forest shrine of Lord Ayyappan. This unique phenomenon of Hindu devotees paying offering to a Moslem saint is a model of religious amity for the whole world,

and particularly the India of these troubled times. This Annual congregation of devotees can be exploited for economic growth through the development of pilgrim tourism, which is also intrinsically connected to eco-tourism. The two rivers flowing through Erumely, Pampa and Manimala the arboreal canopy that practically shut out the rays of the Sun, the bio-wealth of the region, the unique society of the local people and the like are conducive to tourism. The development of Erumely depends upon the development of tourism.

2.2.4 Role of Erumely in Sabari Pilgrimage

It is a historical place, which has an integral role to play in the legend of Sabarimala pilgrimage. Erumely is the major transit point of Sabari pilgrimage. The devotees, on their way to Sabarimala, visit the mosque (vavarpalli) situated near the temple, “Kochambalam” and pay tribute Vavar. It is customary that every Kanni Ayyappa (maiden devotee) should visit Erumely and participate in the “Pettathullal”, the famous ritualistic ceremony associated with Sabarimala pilgrimage there. Pettathullal is a symbolic representation of the victory of good (Lord Ayyappa) over evil (Mahishi).

Nearly 60 percent of the devotees on their way to Sabarimala pilgrimage visit Erumely every year. It is estimated that during the pilgrim season nearly 90 percent of the devotees who visit Erumely are from outside Kerala. They are from Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Maharashtra. Majority of the devotees from Kerala hail from the northern part of Kerala. It is estimated that during the last pilgrim season about 1,45,000 vehicles arrived at Erumely.

The history of Erumely is associated with the history of Sabari pilgrimage. Erumely is a place well known for its religious harmony. Again, what happens to the environment of Erumely has its impact on the neighbouring districts, namely Alappuzha and Idukki.

2.2.5 Erumely: Scenario During Pilgrim Season

Congregation of large number of pilgrims in a small town like Erumely for a short duration is imposing much pressure on environment. In spite of painstaking efforts by the temple authority (Travancore Devaswom Board), the State Government and voluntary organisations like Ayyappa Seva Sangam, the basic facilities such as drinking water, sewage disposal, garbage disposal, transportation, food and accommodation remain inadequate to meet the basic minimum needs. As a result, the environment is put to much stress resulting in water pollution, land pollution, air pollution and consequent ill effect on the health of the people.

2.2.6 Present Environmental Settings

It is estimated that during the pilgrim season about one crore pilgrims visit Erumely for a period of just sixty-seven days, which means about more than thirty thousand pilgrims arrived at Erumely every day. Again it is believed that, one lakh forty five thousand vehicles passes through Erumely during this period. The gross inadequacies at Erumely and enroute for accommodation, sanitations, transportation and communication have led to water pollution, land pollution, traffic congestion and parking congestion. The pilgrims have to stay at least one day at Erumely. Pilgrims from out side the State may stay more than one day. Due to the inadequacy of sanitary facilities, many resort to open defecation. The present environmental problems at Erumely are narrated in the succeeding paragraphs.

Accommodation Facility

During pilgrim season 0.42 percent pilgrims uses Govt. rest house as the place of accommodation, 10.42 percent resort to private hotels, 20.83 percent hired open place, 0.42 percent paying guests, 0.83 percent accommodation with friends and relatives, 58.33 percent in free-open place, 8.75 percent in nearby schools.

But facilities available for accommodating the pilgrims are not at all adequate. The inadequacy of facilities for the pilgrims especially those hailing from outside the State has to fully depend on the Pampa for their sanitation purposes and this is fouling up the water of Pampa River. This results in environmental degradation at Erumely.

Facilities provided by the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) for accommodating 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. The temporary sheds set up at Erumely every year is for short of requirement.

Drinking Water Supply

At present, the raw water pumped from the Koratti River is being supplied after chlorination. There is no full-fledged treatment facility for the water supplied. The water intake pond is very near the bathing ghat and there is chance of coliform bacteria as well as wellas pathogens entering the intake water.

Sewage Disposal

Facilities provided at Erumely for the collection, conveyance, treatment and disposal are grossly inadequate. At Erumely, most o the toilets are of on-site trench type (temporary) and are

being constructed near the river and hence the leachate from the latrines reaches the river. Unscientific disposal of sewage is causing severe water pollution problem.

Due to inadequacy in number of latrines provided at Erumely open defecation is common. This is causing unhygienic and unrightly condition and water and air pollution. The problem becomes all the worse when coupled with waste water from hotels and other commercial establishments.

Garbage Disposal

Solid waste consisting of mainly the food waste generated at Erumely is being discharged in a haphazard manner in to the Valiyathodu, a tributary of Manimala River. Solid waste generated at Erumely is being disposed near the river; the decayed garbage is washed off during the rains in to the Manimala River. The solid waste management at Erumely is also not satisfactory.

During the recent years, solid waste collection at Erumely has improved significantly due to the activities of “Visudhi Sena”. But onsite storage facility of solid waste transport, segregation, processing and safe disposal facilities are lacking. Till recently the solid wastes collected are dumped into the forestland haphazardly creating environmental pollution. But due to the establishment of an incinerator facility costing Rs.21 lakhs, the Panchayat was partially successful in the waste disposal now a days.

Transport Facilities

Existing network of roads in Erumely is quite inadequate to meet the ever-increasing needs of the pilgrims, especially during the festival season. Due to traffic blocks the pilgrims have to wait long hours at Erumely for their vehicles to reach their boarding point. In addition to road network, the public transport is also inadequate.

Parking Facilities

Parking facilities provided for private vehicles at Erumely is not adequate. Traffic area block of vehicles entering and leaving the parking area and is frequent causing hardships 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 Erumely.

2.2.7 Problems Faced by Sabari Pilgrims at Erumely

There are lots of problems faced by the Sabari pilgrims. 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 to Pampa. The special buses run by KSRTC, will start only after being filled up with pilgrims. When the pilgrims reach Erumely they had to face heavy traffic problems. The pilgrims have to face the problems of 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 dust and flies. 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.

Problem of Drinking water

Drinking water is an important problem faced by the pilgrims. There is no sufficient drinking water to the pilgrim's i.e. adequate pipe connections are yet to be implemented. The present supply of water from "Manimala River" which is a joint venture undertaken by TDBS water authorities in Erumely. 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.

Parking Problem

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 Pampa and Erumely.

Lack of Accommodation

The accommodation facilities available to pilgrims are insufficient when compared to the number of pilgrims.

Language Problem

Above 70 percent 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 Hygiene Problem

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.

Postal and Telephone Problem

We are living in a technologically advanced scientific era. Day by day the distance between places are shortened as a result of tremendous development in science and technology. Proper communication facilities are not available during the season in and around Sabarimala.

Lack of Toilet Facility

Lack of the toilet facility is another curse the pilgrims have to come across during the season at Erumely. 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, river and its surroundings become dirty and filthy due to lack of sanitation facilities.

2.2.8 Eco System at Erumely

The pilgrimage to Sabarimala is in the twin seasons of Mandalam and Makara Jyothi that last a total of 67 days. At these times not less than 10 million devotees and thousands of ordinary travelers pass through Erumely. This is in addition to the normal traffic in the Moovattupuzha – Punaloor Highway. For an ordinary small town like Erumely, this traffic is beyond its capacity of tolerance. And to make matters difficult, the pilgrims have to stay at Erumely for more than a day to perform the traditional rites.

Tributary of Manimala known by the name Valiyathodu passes through Erumely. The region in and around Erumely is the catchment area of the River Manimala. This river in fact stretches to 90 kilometers to join Pampa River at Valavjavattathu. Another tributary known by the name Achankoil River also joins Pampa at Viyapuram near Haripad. It is the Pampa river systems with its tributaries that make the central part of Kerala green and beautiful. The Kuttanad Lagoon, veritably the breadbasket of Kerala, and a pristine ecosystem with a unique bio-diversity, is the creation of the Pampa system. What touches Pampa touches Kuttanad. When Pampa suffers, Kuttanad wilts. The

Kuttanad waters drain into Vembana tu Lagoon. The ecological imbalances at Erumely are certain to affect the whole of Kuttanad and Vembanad immediately.

When millions of people stay in place for a limited number of days, the impact is enormous, for the eco system. The town ship of Erumely cannot accommodate millions of tourists. It can provide for a few thousand at the best of times for their personal hygiene.

Some Statistical Data

There are 225 toilets owned and operated by the Devaswom Board (Temple Trustee ship) in addition, there are 142 privately operated toilets, about 100 temporary toilets are also made available every year. The Kerala Tourism Development Corporation has established a Pilgrim Service Centre with 100 toilets, worth Rs.1.5 crores. These numbers do not add up much for the 10 million people who throng the township. Hence it is natural for the pilgrims to resort to Al fresco defecation. All the tanks of the latrines empty into the Koratti River. It is a pity that there is no mechanism to treat the human waste at all.

The whole place becomes, in the pilgrim season a single open air latrine. Even the wastes removed from the township are left untreated in the open places or the rivulets. In a short time these find their way into the soil as decayed materials and in the next stage into water bodies. The air is filled with a stench and mosquitoes and flies abound. The ecological catastrophe is annually re enacted with increasing vigour as the number of tourists swells.

As the stench pervades the surrounding areas, the effluents finally reach the river Pampa it may be seen that the river is the river of life for the three districts of Pathanamthitta, Alleppey and Kottayam, giving them water to drink and water to bathe and water for other purposes.

It is well known that the water ceases to be potable if the coliform content exceeds 500 in 100 milli litre of water. And to be sure it does exceed this level.

Table 2.1

The Pollution Level in the Pampa and Manimala River systems in the 2001-2002 Season

Date	Test area	ph	BOD Mg/L	Dissolved Oxygen. Mg/L	Coliform C/100 ML
14-12-01	Erumely	6.60	0.6	6.4	12100

12-01-02	Erumely	6.80	1.2	6.2	7000
13-12-01	Neerettupuram	6.70	1.4	5.3	6100
11-01-02	Neerettupuram	6.70	0.9	5.2	6000
06-12-01	Edathua	6.60	1.5	6.4	16000
11-01-02	Edathua	6.70	1.4	3.3	5000
06-12-01	Thakazhi	6.80	0.9	6.5	12000
11-01-02	Thakazhi	6.60	1.0	4.7	3500

Indian Standard Central Pollution Control Board

Water Class A	6.5 - 8.5	2 Max	6 Min	50 Max
Water Class B	6.5 - 8.5	3 Max	5 Min	500 Max

Note: Class A Drinking water with out any conventional treatment but after disinfections.

Class B - Out door bathing.

Source: KSPCB

When effluent sewage is let out into a river, the level of phosphorus and nitrogen increases beyond toleration limits and it triggers utrification leading to depletion of oxygen in the water.

Yet another health hazard is the depletion of sand in the riverbeds due to sand mining. This apparently harmless situation is not harmless. Sand is a natural mechanism for filtering the water. There are 14 drinking water projects in the Manimala River between Erumely and Thiruvalla. There is not a single purification process at any pumping stations. The water is used for drinking purposes. One can imagine how this water causes problems to people who consume it. Fish has died and floated in several places in Kuttanad. In this God's own land, ubiquitous water has been a divine blessing. Humans have mindlessly turned it into a curse.

2.2.9 Economic and Social Aspects of Pilgrimage

Sabarimala is an important centre of pilgrimage in South India, comparable to Thirupathy in Andhra Pradesh. More than 20 million devotees throng the forest temple to have Darshan of the Lord Ayyappa, for historical, mythological and ritual reasons, sixty percent of them first reach Erumely. There they enter a trance and dance en masse. This mass congregational dance is called "Petta Thullal".

Most of the devotees hail from states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. From other states too devotees arrive in large numbers. It is estimated that devotees from the different parts of Kerala constitute just 17% of all. Most of them travel in private vehicles or omnibuses. Others travel by trains up to Kottayam or Thiruvalla and thence by private vehicles or public transport buses. All first ever pilgrims (kanni ayyappans) would go first to Erumely for petta thullal and other rites before going to Sabarimala.

This mass exodus in a short duration of time especially when the forest temple is open during the Mandala Pooja and Makara Jyothi has enormous economic consequences. The temple is open for about three months: the rest of the times it remains closed. The devotees are focused on matters divine, for the local populace it is an opportunity to serve and exploit them for lucre. Farmers, daily wage earners and petty traders set their normal work schedules and engage in the pilgrimage related activities. For them this is the time of the year to earn and it is calculated that their income during the season is greater than the rest of the year. Consequently this seasonal burst of work creates scarcity for workers in the construction and agricultural fields and brings these activities to a stoppage. But the stoppage of routine activities are not felt in all parts of Erumely. The sudden shift of activities is felt along the routes that pilgrims take. This is because of the “sales opportunities” along the pilgrim routes. In and out of Erumely town, petty traders flock to other areas like Sabarimala, Pampa, Koroothode and Aruda. The opportunities invite people of other states too.

Thus the tourist centre gets another face, that of a temporary commercial centre, and all its attendant evils and benefits. There are also do-gooders who serve the pilgrims with free service like providing drinking water, parking facilities for the vehicle, lodging etc. gratis.

Seasonal Employment potential at Erumely

The 40 families of the Mattannoor colony are totally engaged in the preparation of artifacts of “Petta Kettu”. The most important of these is the making of Sharakkol (the arrow stick). For the ‘Petta Thullal’, which is a congregational dance-in-trance, artifacts like sword, mace, arrows, armour are made here in huge numbers.

The bulk of stick is brought from the Kanakappalam forest area. They are the stems of a bush called ‘communist patcha’. One-foot long sticks are cut and peeled before leaving them to dry, once they are dried, the sticks are painted and feathers are fixed to one end to resemble them as arrows. They are bound in bunches of thousand numbers, and they get transferred to city for sale. The price of each stick is 10 paise. It is the duty of the women folk to make the Katcha (cloth) armour for the first ever pilgrim. The pilgrims who prepares to have darshan of Lord Ayyappan must be accosted

Ayyappa (for they see the Lord in him). The making of swords and mazes are time consuming, the logs for these come from murrikku, a soft wood tree, available easily. They are shaped with the help of axes and choppers. Now each household has piles of swords and mazes. One hundred of them fetch Rs.30/-. The people of the colony do not go out for other work during the two-month period prior to the season.

2.2.10 Sabari Pilgrimage and Hoseholds

Households in Erumely Panchayat involved in plgrimage in two ways – directly (preparation of artifacts for the pettakettu, supply of ritual articles, involvement in seasonal business activity, provision of toilets, virivakkal etc.) and indirectly (providing space for parking, business etc). There are certain of the category of households who provide service free of cost like virivakkal, toilet, drinking water etc. Yet another category of households who are not at all involved in pilgrim related activities in any way.

2.2.11 Agencies Involved in Sabari Pilgrimage

The following are the important agencies involved in Sabari pilgrimage at Erumely.

Grama Panchayat

Erumely Grama Panchayat is one of the important institutions that provide various facilities to pilgrimage. The functions that are provided by the Panchayat:

- a) Infrastructure creation
- b) Provision of drinking water
- c) Toilet facilities
- d) Waste disposal etc

Devaswom Board

The main functions given by the Devaswom Board are given below:

- a) Provision of drinking water
- b) Parking facilities
- c) Toilet facilities
- d) Waste disposal

e) Disinfection facilities

Devaswom Board gets benefit in the form of rent for providing various facilities to pilgrimage.

Juma – Ath

Juma – Ath is another important agency for providing service to pilgrimage. The following are the important functions of this agency.

- a) Providing ritual facilities
- b) Virivakkal facility
- c) Parking facility
- d) Toilet facility
- e) Shopping facility

Schools

In Erumely the educational institutions such as schools are providing service to Sabari pilgrimage. They are in the form of parking facilities and virivakkal facilities. The services provided by schools are in the form of paid services.

Police Station

The Police station in Erumely is also providing services to Sabari pilgrimage. The main function that is performed by the police authority is the maintenance of law and order. Police authorities are also working for the awareness creation to Sabari pilgrimage. There are 50 numbers of police personnel in Erumely Police Station, during the pilgrimage season more than 300 police personnel's services are utilised.

Water Authority

Drinking water is an important problem faced by the pilgrims. The Water Authority in Erumely undertakes the present supply of water from "River Manimala". They are providing adequate pipe connections for creating a smooth flow of water in Erumely area.

Electricity Board

Electricity Board is another important governmental agency that provides services to Sabari pilgrims. The main functions of the Electricity board are providing power supply. In order to provide this function they should arrange streetlights at various places of the Erumely Grama Panchayat.

K.S.R.T.C.

Kerala State Road Transport Corporation provides transportation facilities to Sabari pilgrims. In Erumely the K.S.R.T.C has a sub-depot with 13 buss and 11 schedules. During the pilgrim season a number of buses from other depots conduct service as the requirement goes up and additional bus services are conducted to various places in Kerala.

Movie Houses

Movie house also participate in the pilgrim related activities. In Erumely Grama Panchayat there is only one theatre in the name of “Sree Ayyappan” The main function of the movie house are:

- a) Providing Parking facility
- b) Virivakkal facility
- c) Providing entertainment facilities
- d) Waste disposal

Hospital

Hospital in Erumely Grama Panchayat should also provide medical facilities to Sabari pilgrims. Throughout the pilgrim season the service of one mobile unit from the Kottayam Medical College is very helpful in creating healthy condition in Erumely. The primary health centre and various clinics in Erumely are also participating in providing medical facilities to pilgrims and local people.

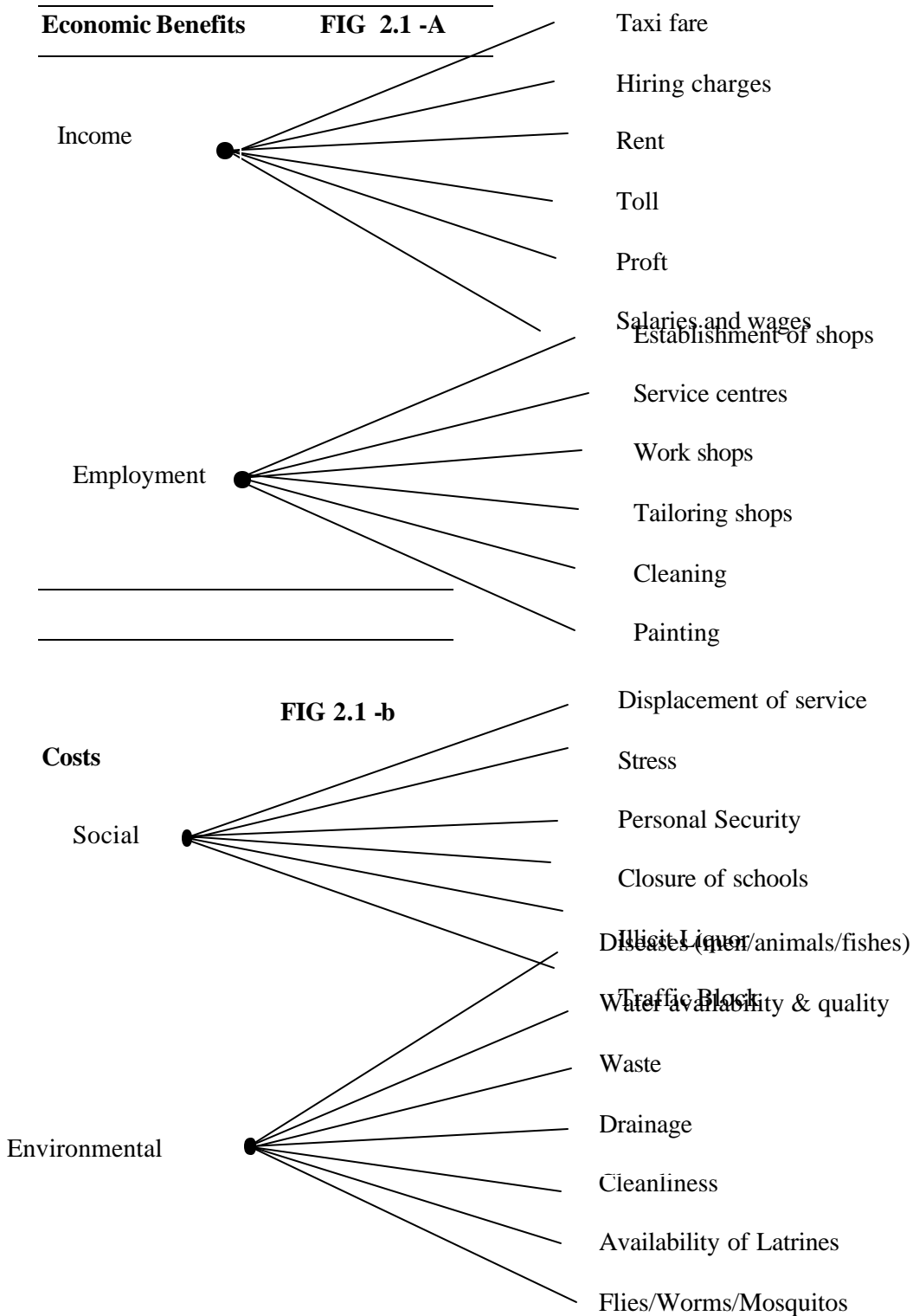
P.W.D.

Road construction is one of the major area in infra structure creations. In Erumely Grama Panchayat, major roads are in good condition and these are constructed by P.W.D. The maintenance work of these roads will be completed before the commencement of the pilgrim season in Erumely.

Ayyappa Seva Sangam

Ayyappa Seva Sangam is one of the important agencies for providing various services to Sabari pilgrimage. The important functions are: Supply of ritual articles, Providing Virivakkal facilities, etc.

2.2.12 Costs & Benefits



2.2.13 Pilgrimage and Voluntary Service Organisations

Erumely is the most important base camp for Sabarimala Pilgrims. But the place lacks basic facilities for human habitation. It is imperative to provide such facilities for the pilgrims. But this is not an effortless task and it requires the cooperation of the Governmental and Non-governmental agencies. The service rendered by the Ayyappa Seva Sangam hitherto is note worthy. The Erumely Development council also has rendered yeomen service to the Pilgrimage centres. Non Governmental Organisations have been able to cooperate with Erumely Panchayat in the construction and preservation of Erumely – Chalakkayam Road and also the parallel roads in the Panchayat.

2.2.14 Sabarimala Pilgrimage and Erumely: A Swot Analysis.

Strengths

- ⌘ New opportunities for business and work.
- ⌘ Escalation in the value of land.
- ⌘ Growth in basic infrastructure like roads, bridges and electric supply.
- ⌘ Growth in the standard of living of the population.
- ⌘ Public awareness of Erumely as a living example for religious harmony.

Weaknesses

- ⌘ The gulf in the availability of basic facilities and the need for them.
- ⌘ Insufficiency of waste removal and recycling facilities.
- ⌘ Supply of inferior quality goods and services.
- ⌘ In adequate health care facilities.
- ⌘ Exploitation of pilgrims.
- ⌘ Social evils consequent to pilgrimage.
- ⌘ Lack of co-ordination between government agencies.
- ⌘ Mass unemployment during off-season.

- ⌘ Inadequate availability of basic information for tourists.
- ⌘ Inadequate supply of potable water.

Opportunities

- ⌘ This situation can be a spur to the development of Erumely as a model centre for eco-tourism and pilgrim tourism.
- ⌘ Investment opportunities for businessmen.
- ⌘ A highly conscious and educated public.
- ⌘ Potential of employment potential through tourism.

Threats

- ⌘ Absence of a blue print for development.
- ⌘ Lack of vision of potentials.
- ⌘ Tourists return with the memories of sufferings due to inadequacies and the State gets a bad image.
- ⌘ The unbridled growth in the influx of people creates traffic jams, scarcity for food, water etc. it also adversely affect the fragile ecosystem.
- ⌘ There can be threats to religious amity, emerging from outside growth in social evils.

CHAPTER III

Economics of Sabari Pilgrimage

During a short span of 3 months about one crore devotees visits Erumely on their way to Sabarimala pilgrimage. It is believed that each devotee spends at least Rs.100/- in Erumely by way of Pettakettu expenses, bathing, toilets and food items. Besides these each and every devotee spend a considerable amount by way of offerings to the temple and vavar's mosque. Thus, pilgrimage brought forth a sizeable amount to Erumely every year. The beneficiaries include households, business people and agencies. This chapter contains five sections; Section – A: Pilgrimage and Business People, Section –B: Economics of pilgrimage and households, Section – C: The perceptions of households about the Sabari pilgrimage and the last section, Section – D deals with Pilgrimage and Agencies.

Section –A

3.1.1 Pilgrimage and Business People

Pilgrimage brings forth benefits cost to the different category of business. For example, there is considerable increase in the business activities of wholesalers, service points like STD booths, studios, photostats, medical shops, banks, hotels, textiles, bakeries, financiers, vegetable shops, electrical shops, petrol pumps, distributors, auto spare parts, etc. It is believed that at least 15 – 20 percent increases in the volume of business and profit taken place during the season.

There are other category of Business People such as rubber dealers, grocery shops, flower shops, egg stores, hiring services and cold storages, whose business income declines to a sizable amount, i.e. 15 – 20 percent. Where as in the case of ladies/fancy stores, foot wears, hardware/sanitary ware, gold, fish stores, coir mats, printers etc there is no remarkable difference in the volume of business or profit during pilgrim season.

Table 3.1

Details of Business People in Erumely

Nature of Business	No. During the season	No. During the season
Rubber Dealers	13	13
Grocery Shops	22	18
Ladies/Fancy Stores	30	30
Service Points (Studio, Photostat, STD booth)	45	25

Medical Shops	14	14
Bunks (cool bars)	42	35
Foot wears	7	7
Hotels	36	14
Distributors	1	1
Auto spares	6	6
Hardware/ Sanitary wares / Glass house	13	13
Textiles	21	14
Gold	5	5
Bakery	10	10
Vegetable shops	16	10
Electricals	6	6
Theatre	1	1
Coir mats	4	4
Flower shops	2	2
Egg stores	2	2
Hiring service	3	3
Printers	3	3
Grocery Wholesalers	6	6
Petty shops	30	-
Total	358	250

Source: Primary data

Table 3.2

Business increase of a Wholesaler

Items	Season (3 Months)	Off-season (9 Months)
	Rs. In lakhs	Rs. In lakhs
Tobacco Products	15,00,000	7,50,000
Cosmetics	4,50,000	9,00,000
Torches/ batteries	5,00,000	4,50,000
Biscuits, confectioneries/	2,50,000	1,35,000
Bakery items Glucose	85,000	-
Mineral Water	32,000	-
Cough syrup	1,00,000	40,000
Agarbathis/ Pooja goods	50,000	10,000
Stationery items	35,000	45,000

Source: Primary data

The table reveals that the increase in turn over is due to inclusion of new item during the season and increase in the volume of business; but the profit margin remains almost equal during season and off-season.

Section –B:

3.2.1 Economics of pilgrimage and households

The economic aspects of the Sabari pilgrimage is analysed in the ensuing pages on the basis of the observations and opinions of the sample respondents. They are grouped in terms of their ward, location, religion, size of the family, age and educational status.

The following tables give a summarized picture of the profile of the sample respondents.

Table 3.1

Classification of house holds based on wards

Ward	No. of families	Percent
VI	45	47.4
XVII	50	52.6
Total	95	100

Source: Primary data.

As shown in the table 47.4 percent of the respondents belong to ward VI of Erumely Panchayat while 52.6 percent are from ward XVII.

The table 3.2 given below shows the classification of the respondents on the basis of their dwelling location in the Panchayat.

Table.3.2

Dwelling locations of the sample respondents

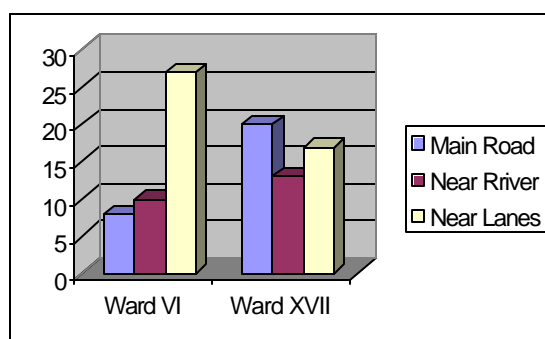
Location	Ward VI		Ward XVII		Total	
	No. of Families	%	No. of Families	%	No. of Families	%
Near main road	8	17.8	20	40	28	29.5
Near river	10	22.2	13	26	23	24.2
Near bye-lane	27	60	17	34	44	46.3
	45	100	50	100	95	100

Source: Primary data.

As depicted in the table 60 percent of the sample respondents of ward no. VI resides near by lanes while 22.2 percent are from near river and another 17.8 reside near main roads. At the same time 40 percent of the respondents from ward XVII are selected from near main roads, 26 percent from near river and 34 percent from nearby lanes.

Figure 3.1

Dwelling locations of the sample respondents



Of the total respondents 29.5 percent are from nearby main roads, 24.2 percent from near river and 46.3 percent from near by lane. Such a sample selection is done with the purpose of ensuring uniformity in sample selection and also to ensure that the sample adequately represents the population in all respects.

It is really important to see the correlation between different economic implications of the sabari pilgrimage and the religious classification of the beneficiary groups. Hence the sample respondents are classified in table 3.3 on the basis of their religion.

Total number of families in Erumely Panchayat are 8082. (3924 Hindus, 2524 Christians and 1634 Muslims).

Table 3.3.

Classification of the respondents based on religion.

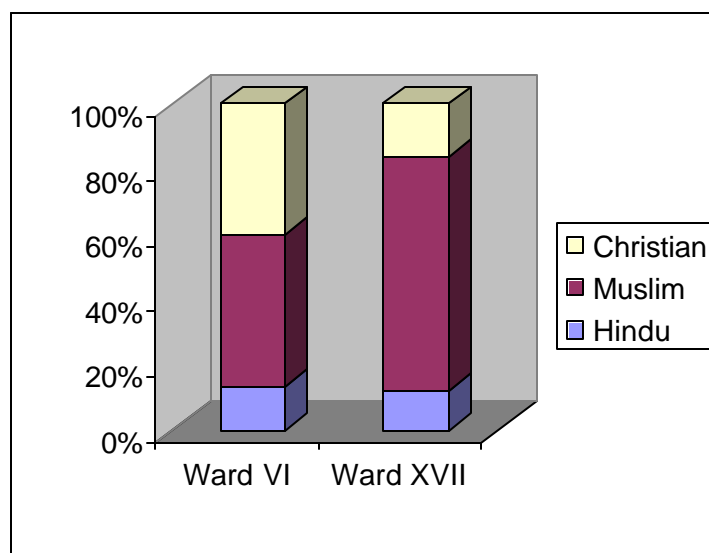
Religion	Ward VI		Ward XVII		Total	
	No. of Families	%	No. of Families	%	No. of Families	%
Hindu	6	13.3	6	12	12	12.6
Muslim	21	46.7	36	72	57	60
Christian	18	40	8	16	26	27.4
	45	100	50	100	95	100

Source: - Primary data

The table shows that it is the Muslim community which makes maximum benefit from the trading activities in connection with the sabari pilgrimage. This is really wonderful and eye opener in the light to the communal disputes and riots in different parts of the country. The following figure shows a better picture of the situation.

Figure 3.2

Proportion of communities of the sample respondents



It is relevant to observe the relationship between the number of members in families and the number of members from the families involved in the pilgrim related activities. Table 3.4 gives the details.

Table 3.4 Number of members in the family and proportion of beneficiaries

No. of Members in the Family	Beneficiaries		Non-Beneficiaries	
	No	%	No	%
1	-	-	-	-
2	1	50	1	50
3	1	33.3	2	66.7
4	1	25	3	75
5	2	40	3	60
6	4	0	2	100
7	7	100	0	0
8	6	75	2	25
9	5	55.5	4	45.5
10	8	80	2	20

Source: - Primary data

Pearsons correlation co efficient $P = -.2287$

As evident from the table the proportion of beneficiaries of Sabari pilgrimage increases with the number of members in the family. In other words families with more members are benefited more than the families with comparatively less members. There are certain families where all the members are benefited directly or indirectly from the pilgrimage during the seasons. It also implies the intensity of unemployment of such families during off seasons. There are cases where even the distant relatives and friends join together to tap the opportunities of the season.

Age wise distribution of the sample respondents

Age wise distribution of the sample respondents is also important to see the age levels of the beneficiary groups which will give clear indications in this respect. Table given below gives the details.

Table 3.5

Age wise distribution of the beneficiaries.

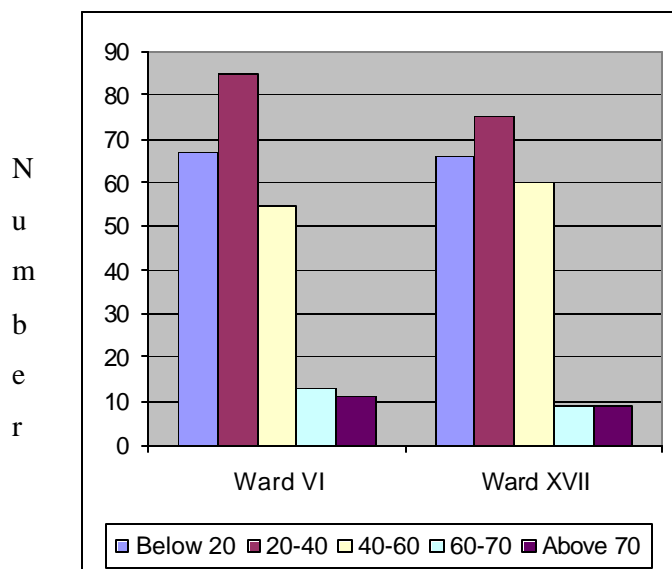
Age group	Ward VI (Number of persons)		Ward XVII (Number of persons)		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Below 20	67	29.0	66	30.1	133	29.6
20-40	85	36.7	75	34.2	160	35.6
40-60	55	23.8	60	27.3	115	25.6
60-70	13	6.0	9	4.1	22	4.9
above 70	11	4.5	9	4.1	20	4.3
	231	100	219	100	450	100

Source: - Primary data

The table clearly shows that the respondents belonging to the age group of 20-40 are the prominent group among the beneficiaries followed by below 20 age group. Statistics of both the wards reveal more or less same result. It is evident from the above table that the sabari pilgrimage is highly helpful to alleviate the unemployment problem in the region, to a great extent, though the benefit is seasonal.

Figure 3.3

Age wise classification of the respondents



However the economic benefits of the Sabari pilgrimage are mainly concentrated among the low education group which is very clear from table 3.6 given below.

Table 3.6

Classification of the sample beneficiaries on the basis of the level of education

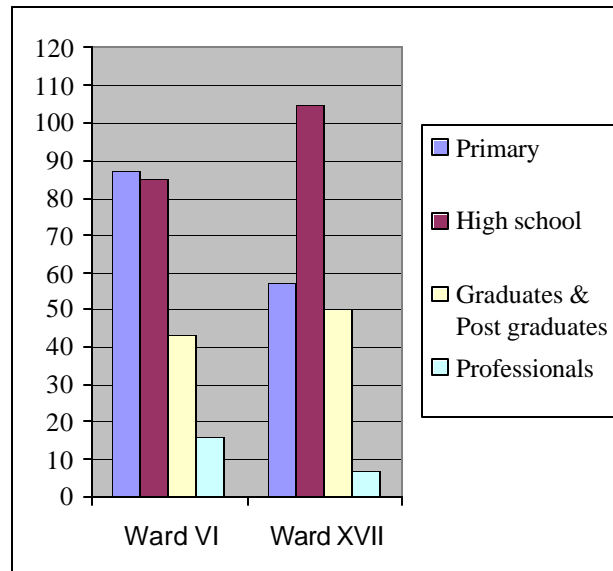
Educational level	Ward VI (Number of persons)		Ward XVII (Number of persons)		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Primary*	87	37.8	57	26.2	144	32
High school	85	36.7	105	47.9	190	42.2
Graduates & PGs	43	18.6	50	22.8	93	20.7
Professionals	16	6.9	7	3.1	23	5.1
	231	100	219	100	450	100

* Includes children having no formal education.

Source: - Primary data.

Figure 3.4

Level of education of the sample



As depicted in the table 32 percent of the beneficiaries are of primary education only while 42.2 percent have high school education only. The percentage of beneficiaries with graduation, post graduation or other professional qualifications is comparatively very low. This gives a clear indication that the unskilled people only are getting the benefits of sabari pilgrimage. The same date indicates the intensity of child labour in the region during the pilgrim season is a major social issue which is ignored altogether in the shadow of economic benefits from the process.

Economic status of households

It is essential to compare the economic status of the households of the beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of sabari pilgrimage. Type of roofing and flooring of the dwelling house, sources of drinking water, ownership of land and possession of household amenities etc. are the parameters taken for analyzing the socio economic status of the sample respondents. The following tables give a summarized view of the same.

Table 3.7**Type of roofing**

Type of roof of the house	Beneficiaries		Non beneficiaries	
	No of house holds	Percentage	No of house holds	Percentage
Concrete	22	37.9	7	18.9
Tiles	23	39.1	15	40.5
Asbestos sheets	11	19	10	27.1
Tin sheets	2	4	5	13.5
	58	100	37	100

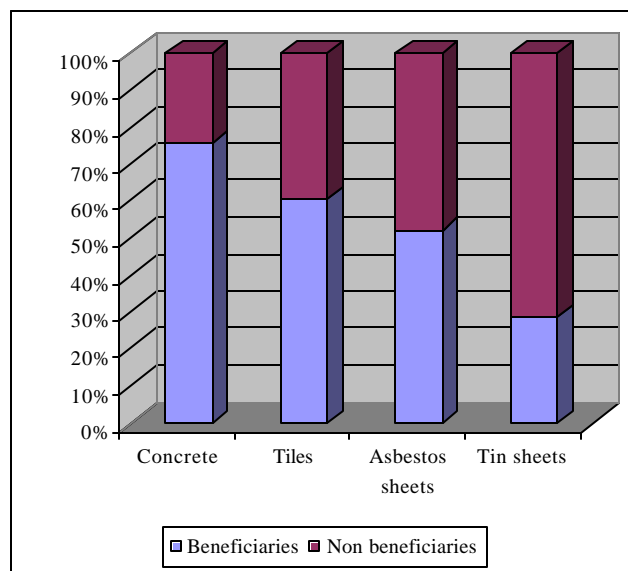
Source: - Primary data

It is very evident from the above data that the beneficiaries of sabari pilgrimage living in comparatively better houses because 37.9 percent of them have concrete roofing for their houses while only 18.9 percent of the non-beneficiaries have concrete roofed dwelling houses. Similarly 39.1 percent of the beneficiaries have tiled houses as against 40.5 percent of the non-beneficiaries. Further 19 percent of the beneficiaries have Asbestos sheet roofing when 27.1 percent of the non-beneficiaries have Asbestos sheets for their houses. Since the percentage of concrete roofing is more among the beneficiaries it can be inferred that the beneficiaries are better placed in terms of the dwelling houses.

The observation is further evidenced from the fact that percentage of beneficiaries having tin sheet roofing is less than the non-beneficiaries with the same roofing. Only 4 percent of the beneficiaries have tin sheet roofing for their houses while 13.5 percent of the non-beneficiaries have tin sheet roofing.

Figure 3.5

Type of roofing



Flooring of the house is another important aspect of dwelling house leading to logical conclusions about the economic status of the people. The sample data grouped on the basis of the flooring of the houses of the sample respondents give the following table.

Table 3.8

Classification on the basis of flooring of houses

Type of flooring of the house	Beneficiaries		Non beneficiaries	
	No of house holds	Percentage	No of house holds	Percentage
Marble	11	18.9	3	8.1
Tiles	16	27.6	11	29.7
Cement	24	41.4	15	40.5
Cow dung	7	12.1	8	21.7
	58	100	37	100

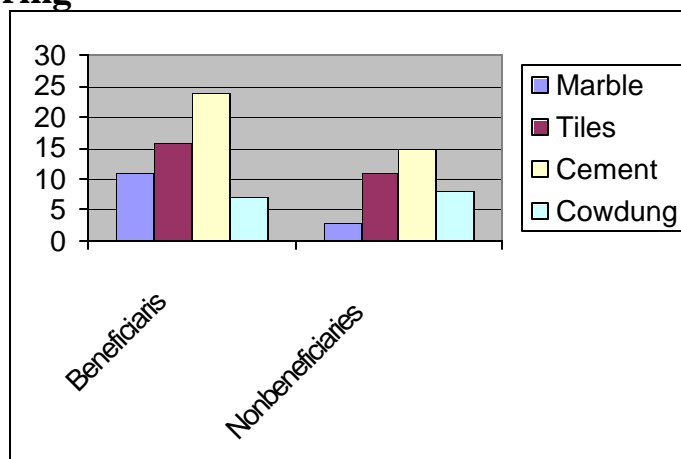
Source: - Primary data

As depicted in the table the beneficiaries of Sabari pilgrimage have better dwelling houses because 18.9 percent of them have marbled flooring for the ir houses while only 8.1 percent of the non-beneficiaries have the same. On the other hand 21.7 percent of the non-beneficiaries have only mud houses with cow dung pasted flooring when only 12.1 percent of the beneficiaries have houses with cow dung flooring. Further the percentage of respondents with cemented flooring is more

among beneficiaries than that of the non-beneficiaries because the percentage is 41.4 and 40.5 respectively.

Figure 3.6

Type of flooring



Sources of drinking water

Table 3.9

Classification on sources of drinking water

Source	Beneficiaries		Non beneficiaries	
	No of house holds	Percentage	No of house holds	Percentage
Own well	25	44	13	35
Neighbour's well	13	22	14	38
Tube well	6	10	3	8
Public tap	14	24	7	19
	58	100	37	100

Source: - Primary data

The above table also reveals a slight advantage of the beneficiaries of Sabari pilgrimage than the non-beneficiaries in the matter of sources of drinking water. Approximately 44 percent of the beneficiaries have own well while only 35 percent of the non-beneficiaries have own well. It is further evident from the fact that 38 percent of the non-beneficiaries are resorting the neighbours for drinking water. Further 10 percent of the beneficiaries have tube well while only 8 percent of the non-beneficiaries have tube well. However it is paradoxical that 24 percent of the beneficiaries are using public taps while only 19 percent of the non-beneficiaries have accessibility to public taps.

Household amenities

Household amenities are powerful indicators of the socio economic status of the people of a region. Hence the survey data obtained from the sample respondents have been grouped and presented in table 3.10 which gives some clear indications about the economic impacts of sabari pilgrimage on the people of the sample Panchayat.

Table 3.10

Classification of the respondents on the basis of house hold amenities

Sl. No.	House hold amenity	Beneficiaries		Non beneficiaries	
		No of house holds	Percentage	No of house holds	Percentage
1	Radio	23	39.6	13	35.1
2	Stereo	10	17.2	14	37.8
3	Black and white TV	29	50.0	14	37.8
4	Colour TV	18	31.0	6	16.2
5	Dish antenna	4	7.0	1	2.0
6	Cable connection	5	8.6	3	8.0
7	VCP	20	34.4	12	32.4
8	Telephone	19	32.7	8	21.6
9	Grinder	28	48.2	5	13.5
10	Mixie	24	41.3	16	42.1
11	Refrigerator	16	27.6	7	18.9
12	Heater	20	34.5	2	5.0
13	Sewing machine	13	22.4	11	29.7
14	Washing machine	16	27.6	3	8.0
15	Electric Iron	34	58.6	16	41.2
16	Fan	42	72.4	19	51.3
17	Bicycle	3	5.1	6	16.2
18	Two wheeler	6	10.3	5	13.5
19	Car	4	6.8	2	5.0
20	Any other vehicle	7	9.6	9	23.0
	Average of percentages		26.58		20.92

Source: Primary Data

The above table clearly indicates that the sample respondents belonging to beneficiaries of Sabari pilgrimage enjoy better household amenities than the non-beneficiaries. Average of percentages of the household amenities enjoyed by the beneficiaries is 26.58 while the average is only 20.92. Though there are many other factors influencing the same like foreign sources of income, other employment etc., the difference in overall percentages indicate that Sabari pilgrimage has definite impact on the economic status of the people of the sample Panchayat.

Classification of the respondents in terms of the value of household amenities will help to assess the economic impacts of the pilgrim related activities. Table given below serves the purpose.

Table 3.11

Value of house hold amenities

Value of household Amenities	Beneficiaries				Non beneficiaries		Total	
	Direct participation		Indirect participation		No	%	No	%
	No	%	No	%				
< 10000	11	29.7	5	23.8	14	37.8	30	25.3
	19	51.4	9	42.9	17	45.9	45	50.5
10000 - 50000	2	5.4	3	14.3	4	10.9	9	10.5
50000 - 100000	3	8.1	4	19	2	5.4	9	11.6
100000 - 150000	2	5.4	-	-	-	-	2	2.1
> 150000	37	100	21	100	37	100	95	100

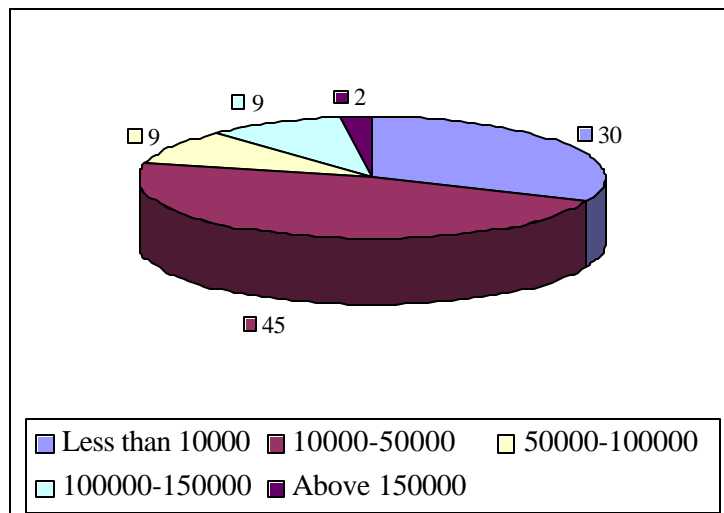
Source: Primary data

The table reveals that 51.4 percent of the households with direct participation in the pilgrim related trades belong to the income category of 10000-50000 (moderate income group) followed by the low-income group of less than 10000 category, which is 29.7 %. It also implies that the higher income category does not have much direct participation in the

pilgrim related activities.

Figure3.7

Value of household amenities



More or less similar conclusion is obtained from the statistics of households having indirect participation because 42.9 percent of them belong to 10000-50000 ranges while 23.8 % belong to less than 10000 category. Here 150000-100000 income category and 50000-100000 category follows with 19 and 14.7 percent respectively.

The data also shows that the percentage of low income category is more among non beneficiaries because 45.9 percent of the non beneficiaries come within the income range of 10000- 50000 while 37.8 % of them belong to less than 10000 category. This definitely indicates the economic significance of sabari pilgrimage on the low -income category.

At this juncture it will be appropriate to classify the sample respondents in terms of their involvement in the pilgrim related activities. Here direct pilgrim related activities include engaging in business activities like selling ritual articles, coconuts, vessels, snacks, and operating temporary hotels. Indirect participation includes, providing facilities for virivakal, supply of drinking water, toilet facilities etc. without any monetary benefit. Table 3.12 shows a better picture of the situation.

Table 3.12**Classification based on participation in pilgrim related activities.**

Nature of involvement	Total		Ward VI		Ward XVII	
	No. of families	Percentage	No. of families	Percentage	No. of families	Percentage
Direct involvement	37	38.9	22	48.9	15	30
Indirect involvement	21	22.2	10	22.2	11	22
Non involvement	37	38.9	13	28.9	24	48
	95	100	45	100	50	100

Source: - Primary data

From the table it can be observed that the percentage of respondents having direct involvement in the pilgrim related activities is 38.9 which is exactly equal to the percentage of people having no involvement in such activities. At the same time 22.2 percent of the people of the region have indirect involvement in the pilgrim related activities. The statistics is more or less same in both the sample wards because 48.9 percent of the VIth ward and 38.9 percent of the XVIIth ward have direct involvement in the process while 22.2 percent of the VIth ward and 22.1 percent of the XVIIth ward are having indirect connections only. At the same time 28.9 percent of the VIth ward and 38.9 percent of the XVIIth ward are having no involvement in the process.

Figure 3.8

Involvement in pilgrim related activities

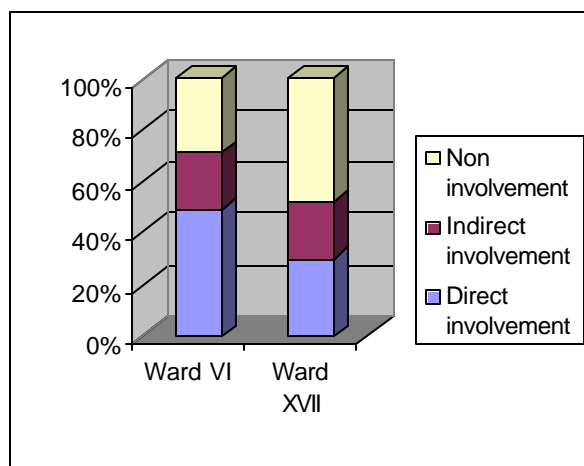


Table 3.

Classification based on the experience in field of rendering services to the pilgrims.

Experience in rendering services to the pilgrims (In years)	Direct participation		Indirect participation	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Less than 5	11	29.8	7	33.3
5-10	12	32.4	6	28.6
10-20	12	32.4	6	28.6
More than 20	2	5.4	2	9.5
	37	100	21	100

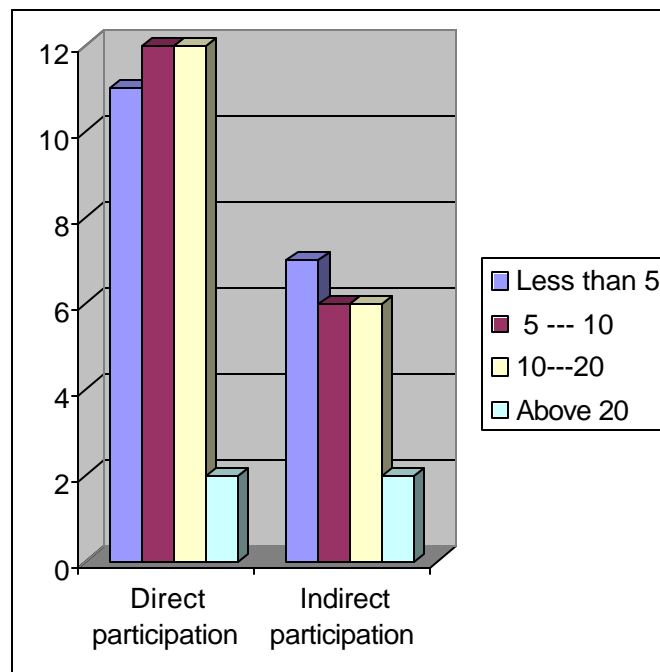
Source: - Primary data

The table reveals that the percentage of new families coming to the pilgrim related activities is more or less equal with that of the average experience category because 29.8 percent of the households in the less than 5 year category are rendering direct participation while the average

experience group of 5-10 and 10-20 are 32.4 percent respectively. It is really noteworthy that the percentage of households with 20 years or more of experience is more in the case of indirect participation. It otherwise implies that the more experienced are rendering indirect services more, than the direct services.

Figure 3.9

Experience and involvement in pilgrim activities



Here it is relevant to see the proportion of sample households engaged in different pilgrim related activities. Table given below shows the details.

Table 3.12**Classification based on the type of pilgrim related activities**

Type of activity	Direct involvement	%	Indirect involvement	%	Total	%
Selling ritual articles	6	16.3			6	10.3
Selling coconuts	3	8.1			3	5.2
Selling vessels	1	2.7			1	1.7
Temporary hotels	9	24.3			9	15.5
Petty trades	10	27.0			10	17.3
Selling snacks	1	2.7			1	1.7
Workshop	7	18.9			7	12.2
Virivakkal			8	38.1	8	13.7
Parking facilities			4	19.0	4	6.9
Toilets			3	14.4	3	5.2
Drinking water			2	9.5	2	3.4
Other services			4	19.0	4	6.9
	37	100	21	100	58	100

Source: - Primary data

The table clearly indicates that petty trades and temporary hotels are the prominent among the direct pilgrim related activities of the households which are 27 and 24.3 percent respectively. At the same time workshops and selling ritual articles are following the above with 18.9 and 16.3 percents respectively. Other activities like selling of coconuts, vessels and snacks have negligible importance only.

In the case of indirect participation, Virivakkal is the most prominent with 38.1 percent followed by parking and other services with 19 percent. Providing toilet facilities, drinking water etc. are other activities of the house holds but having insignificant magnitude only.

Section – C

3.3 Perception of the households

Reasons for welcoming pilgrimage

In order to assess the perception of the household on the various aspects of the pilgrim-related activities, the informants are requested to furnish their views and the data is presented as follows: The table 3.13 to 3.20 give an account of perception of the households about pilgrim related activities.

TABLE 3. 13

Why welcoming sabari pilgrimage?

Variables	Ward VI		Ward XVII	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
1) Employment Generation	208	1	219	1
2) Development of Panchayat	149	2	138	3
3) Income Generation	173	3	186	2
4) Absence of Power failure	93	4	95	5
5) Absence of Bandh/ Hartal	52	5	112	4

Source: - Primary data

The Table reveals that informants from both the wards attributed employment generation as the major reason for welcoming Sabari Pilgrimage. The households in ward VI assigned second rank to the development of panchayat. Those who are in ward XVII, opined that they welcome it due to income generation.

TABLE 3. 14**Income Generation**

Variables	Ward VI		Ward XVII	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
1) Trade	251	1	237	1
2) Leasing	109	5	165	4
3) Rent	190	2	140	6
4) Rent from Parking Ground	171	3	173	3
5) Letting of Toilets	130	4	153	5
6) Accommodation	94	6	182	2

Source: - Primary data

It is evident from the Table that, the households perceive that trade is the major medium through which income is generated. But regarding the other sources there is divergence among the households in different wards.

TABLE 3.15**Need and Availability of Services (GAP)**

Variables	Ward VI		Ward XVII	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
1) Parking facility	322	1	333	1
2) Toilet	318	2	318	2
3) Medical	226	4	196	5
4) Security	93	8	90	8
5) Police Assistance	113	6	205	4
6) Accommodation	164	5	194	6
7) Communication	108	7	154	7
8) Water supply	276	3	310	3

Source: - Primary data

The above table shows that there is difference among the respondents who belong to different wards with respect to the need and availability of various facilities to the pilgrims. However, they are of unanimous opinion that the mismatch between demand and availability is more with respect to the parking facility, which is followed by toilet facility and water supply.

TABLE 3. 16**Agencies rendering services**

Variables	Ward VI		Ward XVII	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
1) Erumely Grama Panchayat	164	3	212	1.5
2) Devaswom Board	212	2	172	3
3) Ayyappa Seva Sangam	225	1	273	1
4) Govt. Agencies	126	5	212	1.5
5) Juma-Ath	155	4	107	4
6) Voluntary Agencies	62	6	73	5

Source: - Primary data

It is evident from the table that with respect to the agencies that render various services to the pilgrims, the respondents were of different perceptions. However, they are unanimous in the view that the Ayyapa Seva Sangam occupies the most prominent place. But regarding the other they differ much. Those respondents who hail from ward VI perceive that Devaswom Board is the second most important agency; but those who belong to ward XVII are of the opinion that government agencies and Grama Panchayat are much ahead of Devaswom Board which is supposed to be the cardinal agency to co-ordinate and contribute to the welfare of the pilgrims.

TABLE 3.17**Agencies Benefited by Pilgrimage**

Variables	Ward VI		Ward XVII	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
1) Devaswom Board	273	1	254	1
2) Juma – ath	212	1.5	224	2
3) Ayyappa Seva Sangam	172	3	123	4
4) Taxi operators	212	1.5	103	5
5) Hospitals	107	4	68	6
6) Traders	73	5	173	3

Source: - Primary data

The table reveals that there were divergent opinions among the respondents with respect to the agencies who are financially most benefited. The respondents belonging to ward XVII perceived that Devaswom Board is the agency, which is financially the most benefited, followed by the Juma-ath. The perception of the respondents in ward VI is that the Devaswom Board is the most benefited agency followed by Juma –Ath and Taxi operators.

TABLE 3. 18**Beneficiary groups – traders**

Variables	Ward VI		Ward XVII	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
1) Medical Shops	226	4	139	7
2) Movie Houses	63	8	103	8
3) Petrol Pump	330	1.5	382	1
4) STD Booths	222	5	315	3
5) Hotels	382	1	324	2
6) Liquor Shops	157	7	234	5
7) Studios	305	3	247	4
8) Textiles	187	6	79	9
9) Provisional Shops	330	1.5	163	6

Source: - Primary data

The respondents converge to a certain extent with respect to the beneficiaries among the traders. The respondents who hail from ward VI perceive that hotel owners are the most benefited followed by the owners of provision shops, medical shops and studios. However, those who belong to ward XVII are of the opinion that owners of Petrol Pumps, Hotels and STD booths are the major beneficiaries.

TABLE 3. 19**Difficulties of the Households during the season**

Variables	Ward VI		Ward XVII	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
1) Pick pocketing	169	5	157	5
2) Water shortage	185	3	258	3
3) Medical facility	184	4	101	7
4) Increase in cost of education	75	7	105	6
5) Traffic Problem	312	1	316	1
6) Mosquitoes and Flies	261	2	276	2
7) Higher Price	98	6	187	4

Source: - Primary data

The table reveals that there is a great extent of divergence among the respondents of different wards with respect to the various difficulties that they encounter during the pilgrim season. However, irrespective of the area of their residence, they are unanimous in their opinion about certain difficulties. They find the traffic problem as the most serious problem. The second is mosquitoes and flies followed by water shortage.

TABLE 3. 20**Problems to pilgrims**

Variables	Ward VI		Ward XVII	
	Score	Rank	<i>Score</i>	<i>Rank</i>
1) Language	49	10	96	10
2) Parking	495	1	427	1
3) Toilet	376	2	388	2
4) Drinking Water	386	3	366	3
5) Security	159	9	229	7
6) Unhealthy Trade Practices	247	4	332	4
7) Hygiene	162	5	240	6
8) Waste disposal	409	7	162	9
9) Medical Facility	225	6	307	5
10) Hospitality	107	8	202	8

Source: - Primary data

The households perceive that the pilgrims are facing many problems. With respect to their perception there is wide divergence among the sub variables. However, they are unanimous in the opinion that the major problem is inadequate parking facility. Those who belong to ward VI are of the opinion that disposal of waste, inadequate drinking water, toilet facility and unhealthy trade practices are the major problems. The respondents of ward XVII perceive that inadequate toilet facility, scarcity of drinking water, unhealthy trade practices and inadequate medical facilities are the major problems to the pilgrims.

Section - D

3.4.1 Pilgrimage and Agencies

In this section the various agencies which are mainly involved in pilgrim related activities are analysed on the basis of income and expenditures incurred during the years 2000 to 2003.

3.4.2 Erumely Grama Panchayat

Table 3.21

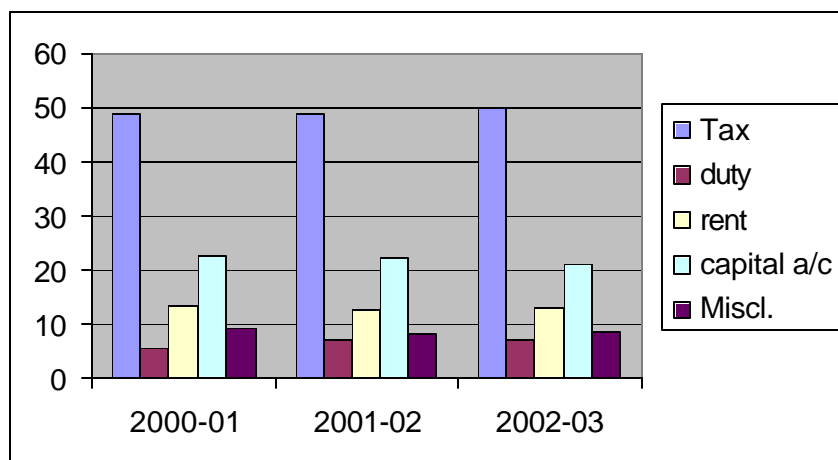
Details of Income of the Erumely Grama Panchayat

Source of Income	2000-01		2001-02		2002-03	
	Amount	%	Amount	%	Amount	%
Tax	17,68,400	48.9	20,22,647	49.	22,24,567	50.1
Duty on transfer of property	2,05,142	5.6	2,95,552	7.3	3,15,257	7.1
Rent	4,85,185	13.4	5,42,163	12.9	5,82,567	13.1
Capital account	8,25,240	22.8	9,24,560	22.4	9,35,267	21.2
Miscellaneous Income ?	3,31,721	9.3	3,42,114	8.4	3,80,857	8.5
Total	36,15,688	100	41,27,036	100	44,38,515	100

- Includes license fee, rent etc. received from pilgrim related activities

Source: - Primary data

The following diagramme shows a better picture of the above data.

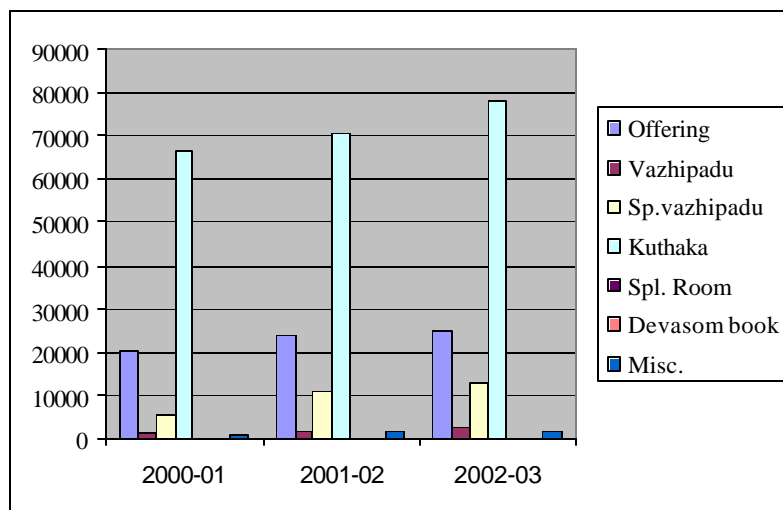
Figure 3.10**Erumely Grama Panchayat –Source of Income****3.4.3 Devaswom Board****Table 3.22****Details of Income of the Devaswom Board**

Source of Income	2000-01		2001-02		2002-03	
	Amount	%	Amount	%	Amount	%
Offering (Kanikka)	20,19,320		23,95,000		25,18,000	
Vazhipadu	1,42,500		1,72,000		2,43,000	
Special vazhipadu	5,48,967		10,95,000		13,16,000	
Kuthaka (Auction)	66,78,000		70,66,000		78,10,870	
Special room rent	--		--		20,630	
Devaswom Book	7,305		8,069		9,600	
Miscellaneous	1,01,235		1,64,131		1,82,000	
Total	94,97,327		1,09,00,200		1,21,00,100	

Source: Primary Data

Figure 3.11

Source of Income of the Devaswom Board



3.4.3 KSRTC

Table No.3.23

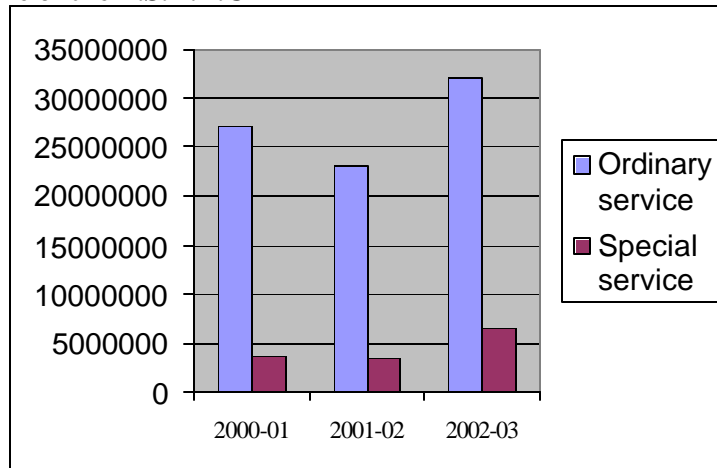
Details of Income of the K.S.R.T.C

Source of Income	2000-01		2001-02		2002-03	
	Amount	%	Amount	%	Amount	%
Ordinary service	2,71,80,000	88	2,32,20,000	87	3,20,77,648	82.2
Special service during Pilgrim season	36,52,367	12	34,51,281	13	64,85,897	17.8
	3,08,32,367	100	2,66,71,281	100	3,85,63,545	100

Source: Primary Data

Figure 3.12

Source of Income of the K.S.R.T.C



CHAPTER IV

Résumé' and Suggestions

This chapter marks the study in retrospect, objectives of the study, research design, sample design, major findings of the study, suggestions and conclusions.

4.1 The Study in Retrospect

Erumely now a phenomenon. It has an integral role in the legend of the Sabari pilgrimage and is the major transit point to Sabarimala. The number of pilgrims who visit Sabarimala has gone up considerably over the years. It is estimated that 50 percent of the Sabari pilgrims visit Erumely.

Enormous changes have been taken place in a few years in Erumely which used to be an almost anonymous village in a backward region. Economically, the presence of million of pilgrims encourage the development of the service sector, benefited the households by providing employment and income during the season. The recent development in and around Erumely especially infrastructure development, is mainly attributed to Sabari pilgrimage.

4.2 Objectives of the study

The study has the following objects.

5. To examine the economics of Sabari Pilgrimage at micro and macro levels.
6. To understand the attitudes of the local people to the various aspects of the pilgrimage.
7. To investigate and analyse the effects of pilgrimage on the socio-economic conditions of the households.
8. To suggest suitable measures for the maximisation of benefits from Sabari Pilgrimage and also to suggest measures to mitigate adverse impacts.

4.3 Research Design

The study was empirical in nature and was based on survey method and observations. The primary data required for the study was collected from the households by using interview schedule (Annexure I). Those from agencies by using another schedule (Annexure II). Relevant information was also collected by holding discussion with the key informants. The collected data was organised

ward wise, activity wise and beneficiary –non- beneficiary wise. The secondary data was collected from records of the Grama Panchayat, the Devaswom Board office Erumely, the study reports of the Legislative Committee on Environment, newspapers, books and journals.

4.4 Sample Design

All the households in Erumely Panchayat form the universe of the study. For the purpose of selection of the sample households a multistage in sampling techniques was used. The entire wards (19) in the Panchayat were classified into two groups – the Direct Influence Zone and Indirect Influence Zone. In the second stage, two wards viz; VI and XVII which were subjected to great direct impact were selected for further analysis.

Ten percent of the households were selected from the lists following stratified random sampling procedure. Thus 45 households were selected from ward VI and 50 from ward XVII. The households were divided into three categories, beneficiaries, non-beneficiaries and those who were not involved in pilgrim related activities. Relevant data were collected in two records during the pilgrim season and offseason.

4.5 Major Findings of the Study

Erumely and Pilgrimage

- It is an industrially backward panchayat.
- Erumely is well known for its religious harmony.
- In Erumely, there are 7156 households (3598 Hindus, 2224 Christians, 1334 Muslims).
- About 60 percent of the households of Erumely Panchayat depend on agriculture for their livelihood; the service sector is the second largest sector.
- In Erumely, the representation of the various religious segments is almost the same i.e. Hindus, Christians and Muslims.
- 60 percent of the respondents are Muslims, 27.4 Christians and the rest Hindus.
- The recent development in and around Erumely was taken place mainly because of the Sabari Pilgrimage. The economy of the Panchayat, Devaswom Board, Juma-Ath and the local people depends a lot on the pilgrimage.

- It is estimated that about 10 percent of the families in Erumely Panchayat were involved in the pilgrim related activities. However, in and around Erumely town, their involvement (both direct and indirect) is much more.
- The households/agencies were involved in the pilgrimage by providing drinking water, toilet facility, parking, virivakkal, accommodation and doing seasonal business.
- Majority of the pilgrims were from Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, TamilNadu and Maharashtra.
- The households residing near the main road, bylane and near river are engaged in pilgrim related business activities.
- There is relationship between number of members in the family and their involvement in the pilgrim related activities. The proportion of beneficiaries of Sabari pilgrimage increases with the Sabari pilgrim number of members in the family. There are certain families where all the members are benefited directly or indirectly from the pilgrimage during the season.
- Respondents belonging to the age group of 20-40 are the prominent group among the beneficiaries.
- 72.2 percent of the members of the respondent's family having either primary education or high school level education. The involvement of members having higher education is comparatively less.
- The type of dwelling house, its flooring, drinking water availability and household amenities of the beneficiaries are comparatively of high standard and value compared to that of non-beneficiaries.
- Petty traders and temporary hotels are the prominent among the direct pilgrim related activities.
- There are more than twelve agencies involved in pilgrim related activities: of these, Devaswom Board, Juma – Ath, K.S.R.T.C and Grama Panchayat is gained the most.
- The devotees spend about one day on an average in Erumely during the season.
- The important agencies/institutions involved in the Sabari Pilgrimage are; Govt. Agencies/ Departments, Grama Panchayats, Non-Governmental Agencies, Devaswom Board, Juma –Ath, Ayyappa Seva Sangam, Local People, traders and service operators.

- Local people were also involved in the pilgrim-related activities directly (involvement in trade related activities) or indirectly (providing drinking water, virivakkal, toilet facilities to pilgrims and manufacturing of Pettakettu related articles).
- The households / agencies were benefited in the form of toll, rent, wage/salary, taxes, hiring charges profits and infrastructure developments.
- Employment generation at Erumely during the pilgrim season takes place mainly in the form of establishment of shops, service centres, workshops, tailoring centres etc.
- Manufacturing and selling ritual articles, selling vessels, petty trade, coconut sale, temporary hotels selling snacks, taxi operators, construction workers, supplying materials to hotels, cleaning, painting etc.

Households involved in pilgrim related activities

- The involvement of households in pilgrim related activities was limited to certain wards which are in and around Erumely. Here majority of the families were either directly (involvement in business is such as selling ritual articles, coconuts, vessels etc.) or indirectly involved. (Indirect involvement is by way of providing facilities for drinking water, toilet facilities, manufacture of petta kettu related articles and virivakkal). Some services were provided out of friendship (free) and out of business relation (paid). Majority of the respondent families have been providing services to pilgrims over a period of 5-20 years.
- The Sabari pilgrimage affects the public health, social life and environmental quality of Erumely and its neighbouring villages. Open defecation, overflow from the pit of public latrines to river, discharge from temporary hotels, deposits of garbage by the pilgrims and shops pollute the river and the surroundings. After the season all these cause various types of diseases. Even those who are not at all benefited from pilgrim-related activities too suffer the consequences.
- Almost all local people/agencies welcome Sabari pilgrimage even though it creates physical, social, cultural problems and socio-economic costs to the people and agencies.
- There is a lot of potential for developing Erumely as an important centre for pilgrim tourism.

General Observations

Erumely is a phenomenon. The geographic uniqueness lends Erumely a different dimension when compared with other centres of pilgrimage. The basic facilities available to the pilgrim remain almost the same, which do not commensurate with their increasing number. The major

recommendation of Legislative Committee on Environment headed by (A.V. Tamarakshan M.L.A) is not yet implemented by the authorities nor has it taken active steps for implementation. Lack of futuristic and scientific planning and ad-hoc approach to problems, lack of proper waste disposal system, lack of proper co-ordination among various agencies, exploitation by the local traders, lack of hygiene, parking problem etc. resulted in the sharp decline of pilgrims who arrive at Erumely during the season. If the above recommendations are not implemented on war footing it will adversely affect the economy of the Panchayat and local people.

4.6 Suggestions

- ❖ A Scientific study must be conducted to assess the carrying capacity of the town and to estimate the gap between need and availability of various facilities required for the pilgrims.
- ❖ Construction of more pucca latrines/provide more pay and use latrines in and around Erumely and on the way to Sabarimala with the concurrence of the Forest Department, without felling trees.
- ❖ Provision of more space for parking and virivakkal.
- ❖ Provision of uninterrupted supply of purified drinking water. For this construct more check dams, enhance the capacity of existing water tank and laying more public taps.
- ❖ Provide more facilities at the health centre.
- ❖ Provide incinator for garbage disposal.
- ❖ A Development Authority has to be put in place with all stakeholders represented in it. They must discuss and implement programmes.
- ❖ Make short term and long term plans for development.
- ❖ Plan the development (like that model - Guruvayoor Township).
- ❖ To provide for administrative buildings outside the town to reduce congestion. In the off-season they can be used for alternative purposes.
- ❖ Invite private investments in the development of roads, hotels, parks etc.
- ❖ Vehicular traffic in the places of Petta kettu and Petta thullal must be banned provided them alternate routes.
- ❖ Construct a fly-over from the temple courtyard to the Dewaswom School grounds.

- ❖ Widen the T.B. Road to provide for 4 tracks, also make it level by removing the soil in the steep gradient.
- ❖ Make the road near the Panchayat office traffic worthy and clean.
- ❖ Widen the Chalakkayam Pampavalley road to 100 meters. The return journey must be via Manimala or Vizhikkithodu. This arrangement is for effecting one-way traffic, to the extent to avoid possible congestion.
- ❖ Widen all roads from Kottayam to Sabarimala. Also widen the Mundakayam Erumely road and the road from Ponkunnam via KVMS Hospital.
- ❖ All along these routes rest facilities may be provided in the private and public sectors, for the pilgrims.
- ❖ Throw a bridge at Orunkal kadavu suitable for traffic.
- ❖ Provide for a camping site at Orunkal kadavu for parking vehicles in a 5 hectare site.
- ❖ Two bridges are to be made between Koratti and Valiyambalam across the Valiyathodu. Further the existing T.B Road may be extended up to Koratti Bridge.
- ❖ All along the pilgrim route, make 1000 comfort stations for the traveling devotees.
- ❖ Also, provide for potable water along these routes.
- ❖ The temple courtyard should be earmarked for the devotees to keep their holy bundles.
- ❖ In place of the temporary comfort stations make pucca stations; divert water flow from Perunthenaruvi to Valiyathodu.
- ❖ Re-constitute a Development Authority at Erumely with wide powers instead of the Panchayat for early solution to these problems of the pilgrims.
- ❖ Designate Sabarimala a National Pilgrimage Centre with Erumely a part of the same system.
- ❖ For the return journey of the seasonal pilgrims the designated route must be via Athikkayam and Manimala.
- ❖ Create awareness among the devotees about the eco-system and its fragile stability. Ensure proper quality of services to the devotees. Contractors supplying sub-standard service should be eased out of licence.

- ❖ Install shopping complexes along the routes to supply food, and offertories at reasonable price. Provide for stable power supply.
- ❖ Conduct scientific study to judge the number of people arriving at Erumely and calculate their basic needs, peg all plans to the needs.
- ❖ Calculate the impact of tourism on the environs.
- ❖ Hold an eco audit.
- ❖ Form a cell to monitor the eco balance.
- ❖ Provide for special monitoring of the two river systems of Manimala and Koratti.
- ❖ Give primacy for providing potable water, quality food, accommodation and transport to tourists.
- ❖ Install signboards in all Indian Languages; employ staff that can handle all queries in all Indian Languages.
- ❖ Create awareness among the visiting tourists about what they should and should not do.
- ❖ Create a website for Erumely town with necessary information for tourists.
- ❖ Establish a museum of History for Erumely.
- ❖ Make maps of the various routes the tourists can take.
- ❖ Market Erumely as a living model for religious amity.
- ❖ Develop the neighboring areas as tourist destination.
- ❖ Make brochures on Kerala for tourist information.
- ❖ Put in place a pilgrim tax on business for the exclusive development of Erumely Town.
- ❖ Make sure that those who pollute the area pay for the clean up.
- ❖ It will be useful to include Erumely in the Pampa Action Plan.
- ❖ Give the major business houses and Industries of India a chance to join the efforts to develop Erumely.
- ❖ Designate Erumely Panchayat as a regulator or facilitator for these developmental activities, under a Special Officer. It should not remain just a spectator sans powers.

- ❖ Implement the Railway project for Sabarimala.
- ❖ Involve the nearby Panchayats like Mundakayam, Kanjirappally, Manimala, Parathodu, and Chirakkadavu for joining the efforts to develop Erumely.
- ❖ Erumely Panchayat should set up a full-fledged Base Camp for Sabari pilgrims in the Panchayat limit. Proposed base camp would provide lodging facility, dormitories, a petrol pump, vehicle parking space, medical facilities, hotel and cafeteria, automobile workshop, STD/ISD, Internet, fax, mobile phone facility and comfort stations. The facilities at the base camp can be utilised for other purposes like conducting marriages, exhibitions, political meetings, conferences. FRIENDS etc., during the off-season, which in turn helps the promotion of pilgrim tourism.
- ❖ Proper monitoring of the pollution at Koratty River and Manimala River during the season.
- ❖ An environment management cell must be constituted.
- ❖ A Master Plan should be prepared for the development of Sabarimala and the development of Erumely must also come under the purview of the Master Plan. This plan must give thrust on avoidance of concentration of pilgrims at a particular place and development of the basic infrastructure.
- ❖ Examine the scope of introducing “Entrance Fee” and use of this fee for the development of the basic facilities to the pilgrims such as toilets, virivakkal, parking and drinking water. Examine the scope of “Polluter Pay Principle”.
- ❖ There should be a *Development Authority* for the development of Erumely comprising representatives of political parties, governmental and non-governmental agencies with statutory powers.
- ❖ Creation of awareness and tourism ethics and culture amongst the hosts and the guests is the need of the hour. Moreover a coherent and co-ordinated action on the part of various peoples/agencies involved – governmental, non-governmental organisations, private sector and visitors can also help in delivering the desired. What is needed is Sabarimala pilgrim-tourism development (during off-season), which reduces the tensions and frictions created by the complex interaction between the tourism industry, the visitors, the environment and the communities.
- ❖ The basic economics of pilgrim tourism must be planned according to the sustainability and present carrying capacity of Erumely. The scope for the implementation of ‘Polluter Pay Principle’ must be examined.

- ❖ Re-orientation of the focus of various agencies – ‘well being of the pilgrims’ and ‘not making profit’ out of the pilgrimage is the need of the hour. This will attract more pilgrims to Erumely which in turn help the local people and authorities to reap rich dividend from the pilgrimage. The Grama Panchayat must play more proactive role and exercise the powers entrusted to them consequent to the implementation of People’s Planning Campaign for developing Erumely as a major *“Pilgrim Tourism centre”* which in turn benefit the pilgrims, general public and Panchayat.
- ❖ As suggested by the United Nations Conference on Human Environment (UN 1973), Environmental and Developmental goals could be harmonised, interalia, by the wise use of natural resources. For this ensure the proper co-ordination of the activities of various agencies/ authorities/ institutions.

4.7 Conclusion

In brief, the present study shows that even though Sabari pilgrimage is having immense potentials in improving the economic conditions of the households and agencies, they failed to tap the potential. The basic facilities available to the pilgrims remains almost the same, it is not commensurate with their increasing number. The major recommendation of Legislative Committee on Environmental headed by Prof. A.V. Tamarakshan M.L.A is not yet implemented by the Authorities nor has it taken active steps for its implementation. Lack of futuristic and scientific planning and ad-hoc approach to problems, lack of proper waste disposal system, lack of proper co-ordination among various agencies, exploitation by the local traders, lack of hygiene, parking problem etc., resulted in the sharp decline of the pilgrims who arrive at Erumely during ‘the season’. However, a re-orientation of the focus of various agencies ‘well being of the pilgrims’ and ‘not making profit’ out of the pilgrimage along with the creations infrastructure can change the things around.

There is scope for declaring Erumely Panchayat as a “Model Pilgrim Tourism Panchayat” in the form of “Kunbalangi - the Model Tourism Panchayat”.

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**ECONOMICS OF SABARI PILGRIMAGE
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO
THE HOUSEHOLDS IN ERUMELY GRAMMA PANCHAYAT**

Abstract

Erumely is a Panchayat in the taluk of Kanjirapally in Kottayam district. It is the major transit point to Sabarimala. The devotees on their way to Sabarimala visit both the temple (Koc hambalam) and the mosque (Vavar Palli), which are close to Erumely with equal fervour, which sets fine example for religious harmony.

It is compulsory and customary that devotees on their first pilgrimage (Kanni Ayyappas) should visit Erumely and participate in the "Pettathullal".

Enormous changes have taken place in a few years in Erumely which used to be an almost anonymous village in a backward region. Economically, the presence of millions of pilgrims encourage the development of the service sector, benefits the households by providing employment and income during the season. The recent development in and around Erumely has taken place mainly because of the Sabari pilgrimage. The economy of the Panchayat, Devaswom Board, Juma-ath and the local people depends a lot on the pilgrimage. The local people involve in the pilgrim related –activities directly (involvement in season business) and indirectly (providing drinking water, virivakkal, parking and toilet facilities to pilgrims).

The study entitled "The Economics of Sabari Pilgrimage with special reference to the households in Erumely Panchayat" is conducted to investigate and analyse the resultant effects on pilgrimage on socio-economic conditions of the households (beneficiary, non-beneficiary analysis) and to understand the perceptions of the local people about the various aspects of the pilgrimage.

The study was conducted in two wards i.e. ward VI and XVII and among 95 households by using an interview schedule.

It is found out that about 10 percent of the families in Erumely Panchayat is involved in the pilgrim-related activities. However, in and around the Erumely town, their involvement is much more.

The study reveals that the households are benefited in the form of rent, wage/salary hiring charges and profit from business. There is a remarkable increase in the annual income of those families who are involved in the seasonal business activities. The total income of the respondents who are directly involved in pilgrim-related activities is higher than that of those who are indirectly involved. Thus, it is concluded that the pilgrim-related activities are a boon to those households who are involved in it.

Dr. BABY M.D

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APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Economics of Sabari Pilgrimage with Special Reference to Households of Erumely Panchayat

1. Background Information

Ward No. House No.

Religion Location

2. Details regarding members of households.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
Sl. No.	Name of Members	Relation to the head	Age	Sex (M/F)	Married/ Unmarried	Educational Qualification	Occupation (Full Time/ Part Time)	Monthly Income	Remark

3. Particulars of House

Type of roof⁶³

Type of floor⁶⁴

Source of Drinking Water⁶⁵

<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>

4. Details of Household amenities

Do you have	Yes/ No	Amount (Value in Rs.)	Month & Year of Purchase	Source of Fund

⁶³ Concrete (1), Tiled (2), Asbestos (3), Plated coconut leaves (4), Light roof (5), Others (6).

⁶⁴ Cow dung (1), Cement (2), Mosaic (3), Cowdung & Cement (4).

⁶⁵ Own well (1), Neighbour's well (2), Tube well (3), Public tap (4).

Radio				
Tape Recorder				
Stereo				
Black & White T.V				
Colour T.V				
Dish Antena				
VCP				
Telephone				
Grinder				
Mixie				
Refrigerator				
Heater				
Sewing Machine				
Washing Machine				
Electric Iron				
Fans				
Bicycle				
Two Wheeler				
Car				
Jeep				
AutoRickshaw				
Bus				

5. Households and pilgrimage

- i. Is any one of your family members engaged in pilgrim related activities? **YES / NO.**
- ii. If 'Yes' state the following.

Direct services

Yes

Selling ritual articles

Coconut sale

Selling vessels

Temporary Hotels	<input type="text"/>
Petty Trade	<input type="text"/>
Selling Snacks	<input type="text"/>
Studio	<input type="text"/>
Workshop	<input type="text"/>

Indirect Services

Virivakkal	<input type="text"/>
Parking	<input type="text"/>
Toilet Facility	<input type="text"/>
Drinking Water	<input type="text"/>
All the four	<input type="text"/>

- iii. How long has your family rendering the services to pilgrims?
- iv. Has it been family rendering indirect services? YES / NO
If 'Yes' why it is rendered?

6. Perception of the households

(Please rank all the variables in the order of performance)

1) Reasons for welcoming pilgrimage

- a) Employment generation
- b) Development of Panchayat
- c) Income Generation
- d) Absence of power failure
- e) Absence of Bandh

2) Source of Income Generation

- a) Trade
- b) Lease
- c) Rent
- d) Rent from parking ground

e) Letting of toilets

f) Boarding and Lodging

3) *Need and availability of facilities*

a) Parking facility

b) Toilet

c) Medical

d) Security

e) Police Assistance

f) Accommodation

g) Communication

h) Water Supply

4) *Agencies who render services to pilgrims*

a) Erumely Grama Panchayat

b) Devaswom Board

e) Ayyappa Seva Sangam

f) Government Agencies

e) Juma - Ath

g) Voluntary Agencies

5) *Agencies benefited by pilgrimage*

a) Deaswom Board

b) Juma - Ath

c) Ayyappa Seva Sangam

d) Taxi Operators

e) Hospitals

e) Traders

6) *Beneficiary Groups (Traders)*

- a) Medical Shops
- b) Movie houses
- c) Petrol Pumps
- d) STD Booths
- e) Hotels
- f) Liquor Shops
- g) Studios
- h) Textiles
- i) Provisional Shops

7) *Difficulties of Households during season*

- a) Pick Pocketing
- b) Water shortage
- c) Medical facility
- d) Increase in cost of education
- e) Traffic problem
- f) Mosquitos and flies
- g) Higher price

8) *Problems to Pilgrims*

- a) Language
- b) Parking
- c) Toilet
- d) Drinking water
- e) Security
- f) Higher price
- g) Hygiene
-

h) Waste disposal

i) Medical facility

j) Hospitality

7. General

“It is believed that, pilgrimage to Sabarimala via Erumely promotes religious harmony and national integration”.

Agreed / Disagreed

Your suggestions:

Observation of the Investigator.

Date of Interview.

APPENDIX II

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

**For the Institutions
Involved in the Pilgrim Related Activities**

I GENERAL INFORMATION

1) Name of Agencies

- a) Grama Panchayat
- b) Devaswom Board
- c) Juma – Ath
- d) HospitalSchool
- e) Police Station
- f) Water Authority
- g) Electricity Board
- h) K.S.R.T.C.
- i) Movie houses
- j) PWD
- k) Ayyappa Seva Sangam

II FUNCTIONS

- 1. Infra-structure crations
- 2. Awareness creations
- 3. Supply of ritual articles
- 4. Supply of power
- 5. Provision for ritual ceremonies
- 6. Provision for drinking water
- 7. Food quality checking
-

- 8. Parking facilities
- 9. Maintenance of Law and Order
- 10. Provision of toilets
- 11. Virivakkal facilities
- 12. Health care facilities
- 13. Entertainment facilities
- 14. Waste disposal
- 15. Disinfecting
- 16. Accommodation
- 17. Transportation facilities
- 18. Maintenance of water quality

III FORM OF BENEFIT

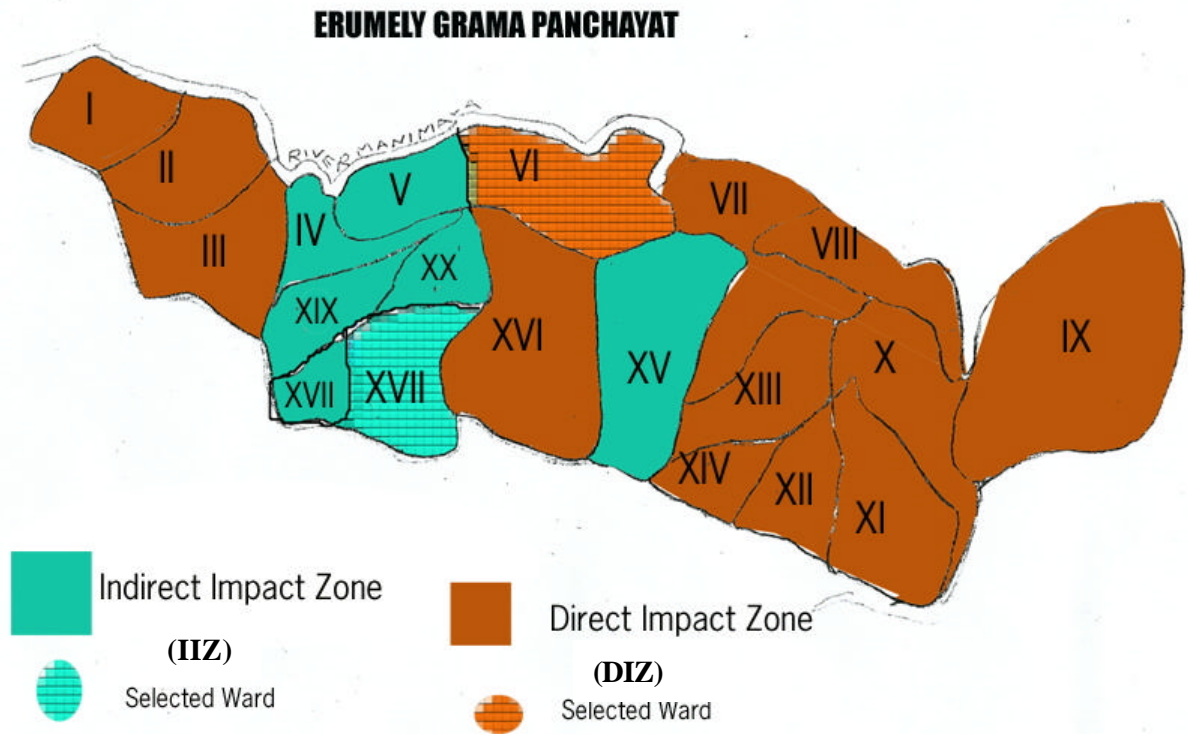
Benefit	Amount		Grand Total
	Off season	Season	
Rent			
Toll			
Service charge			
Profit			
Tax			

IV Specify the cost involved in providing various facilities

Facilities	Cost		Grand Total
	Season	Off season	
Accommodation			
Road Construction			
Provision of Drinking water			
Parking facilities			
Transportation facilities			
Sewage disposal			
Water quality maintenance			
Health care facility			
Street light			
Provision of toilets			
Food quality checking			
Awareness creation			
Supply of ritual articles			
Provision for ritual ceremonies			
Virivakkal			

Figure 1.1

Map of Erumely



“Seasonal Employment and Income generation”



Making of Katcha



Making Swords



Preparation of Sharakol



Sharakols are Ready for the seasonal Market



Parking Facilities



Seasonal Studio



Temporary way-side Hotel



Making Arrows