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Economic Development and Tourism Potential in Vailankanni

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ABSTRACT

India is a country of immense diversity, the communion of several beliefs, universal truth seeker's path and a land of deep spirituality. Being a country of devote, India is doted with innumerable pilgrimage sites. The Shrine Basilica of our Lady of Vailankanni in Nagapattinam District, popular pilgrimage destinations in the world. To this magnificent pilgrimage spot people flock throughout the year, from all over the world irrespective of caste, creed, colour and religion, to offer prayers and to obtain gracious blessings for their well being and to offer thanks with grateful hearts for the countless gifts they received through the powerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Vailankanni. The topography, seashore, conducive climatic conditions and above all the deity namely, our Lady of Vailankanni, the miracles and the grand festivals are the main tourist attractions by which millions of domestic and foreign tourists are motivated to flock to this spot Vailankanni round the year. The Shrine of Vailankanni primarily seen as a place of pilgrimage. However, a closer look at the activities of the shrine reveals that, the Shrine has contributed to the economic and social development of the Vailankanni region and has contributed through its tourism and its related economic activities. Thus, tourism is a growing industry of promise and potential for economic development in Vailankanni. Tourism in Vailankanni is considered as a cultural and technological ambassador, as an industry without smoke, and economic multiplier, as an instrument of social progress, as a promoter of national integration and international understanding and peace. This article studies in detail and analyse how the pilgrimage Tourism of Vailankanni empowers the local people economically and socially. This paper also concentrates on how the pilgrimage Tourism of Vailankanni promotes National Integration and cultural fusion. This also examines the relationship between eco-tourism and economy with a view to understand how the benefits are utilized within the local community. Thus a combination of descriptive, interpretive and analytical approach has been adopted in this research work. This article explores the physical and cultural potential that can be harnessed for the development of pilgrimage tourism of Vailankanni.

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Introduction

The shrine of Vailankanni has been a boon to the economic activities and development of the area around Vailankanni. Since the economic development of any society is an integral part of the overall societal development we can also surmise that the Shrine of Vailankanni contributes a lot to the development of the society. The economic development takes place through the ever increasing growth of tourism and its potentialities. The economy of the place grows through the inflow of pilgrims to the shrine from all over the country and even abroad and tourism throughout the year. Therefore, our endeavour here is to study the impact of the shrine on the economy of the place due to tourism and the ever growing number of pilgrims visiting the Shrine. However, the conservation and preservation of the natural and architectural heritage in Vailankanni, especially the magnificent and spectacular Vailankanni church which, majestically stands as the remarkably cultural attraction for innumerable pilgrims and enthusiastic tourists speed up the intensive operation of tourism industry in Vailankanni.

TOURISM

Tourism has become a major and an integral part of economic and social development. It comprises the complete system of nature, which include the man and his activities. Tourism is an organized industry today. Its dimensions are very large, its location varies and its benefit are scattered over large segments of the population. Those who live in tourism resorts or in tourism regions are all participating in the activities of tourism. The tourists – both foreign and domestic – all contribute to the development of economy of the area, provide employment to the people and offer opportunities to them to assimilate the best in the many and diverse cultures. Each citizen has pride in the greatness of his city, its culture, traditions and history.

Promotion of tourism is the key operation to any regional, state or Community Development Programmes. Basically there are three ways to bring money and business into a new given area. These are agricultural development, industrial development and tourism development. Tourist development is probably the quickest and least difficult method of the three. This new trend in the development of communities gives rise to the interest and

increase of business and payroll for the spectacular growth tourism allows. Tourism is a multidimensional phenomenon. It is a fragmented product, integrated with and directly affecting many other sectors of economy. These sectors although separate and inter-dependent, require cooperative efforts and common policies. The shrine of Vailankanni is a place of pilgrimage and at the same time a place of tourism. Here, let us define what we mean by pilgrimage tourism.

Meaning of Pilgrimage

The saving Power of God or of the divinity, which in Christianity, is regarded as operative and effective through the intercession of certain saints like Antony of padua and others. In the Blessed Virgin Mary especially in Mother Mary who is gloriously seated in Vailankanni shrine, the pilgrims seek a tangible help in times of sickness and distress (Karl Rahner, *Sarramentum Mundi*, 1975). In order to gain blessing and assurance in important decisions and pray the pilgrims travel to such destinations like Vailankanni. There is also another reason why the pilgrims go to such places. Man, at times, is tormented by the uncertainty of his life after death and is impelled to seek out particular holy places in order to gain certainty about his afterlife. On the other hand, people may undertake a pilgrimage in gratitude for benefits already received or in order to preserve divine goodwill by regular visits to the holy place.

Pilgrimage Tourism

The idea of pilgrimage in general has the three aspects.

- a. Under certain circumstances God responds to prayer in a special way.
- b. This special activity of God or a divinity is particularly manifest in certain places which on that account become centers of pilgrimage.
- c. In order to benefit by this special responsiveness of God, of the divinity or of certain heroes and holy persons, one must make a pilgrimage to this holy place of favor or deliverance, undertake a journey which forms a unity with the visit to or stay in sacred place (Karl Rahner, *Sarramentum Mundi*, 1975).

Pilgrimage Tourism of Vailankanni

Pilgrimage tourism in Vailankanni offers people a healthy atmosphere of the cultural society of the human nature. What do we mean by 'the cultured society of the human nature'? Even though it is a traditional Roman Catholic place of worship exclusively for the Catholics it gives a different dimension or a healthy beginning to implement the mood of the Vatican Council (RJKnox, 1966).

Vailankanni is the only Catholic institution where in a healthy atmosphere of universal brotherhood prevails. It is possible in Vailankanni because people, irrespective of caste, creed, colour and nationality undertake pilgrimage this tourism based on the humble and genuine devotion to our Lady of Good Health.

Basic facilities offered to the pilgrims and tourists

Any tourism or pilgrimage site generates lot of economic activities and income due to the incessant flow of people. The local people get employed and enjoy opportunities to earn money and improve the standard of their lives. All this depends on the flow of the pilgrims. Unless they are provided with the basic facilities and infrastructure the flow of the pilgrims will decline. Being conscious of this fact the Vailankanni shrine takes care of the needs of the pilgrims, provide basic facilities and keeps her entire premises clean and tidy always and throughout the year. For, the shrine is keen to provide a healthy

atmosphere to the pilgrims. Meticulous care and attention is given to provide the following facilities:

Water Supply

Clean and protected drinking water supply to the vast congregation of the festival days is done by the church administration every year. The shrine of Vailankanni, located at the sea shore finds it very difficult to get drinking water. Therefore, by utilizing the above mentioned number of vehicles the water is taken from the selected private and public wells at the close by villages (poriyur, Keevalur, Ramar Madam, etc.) and distributed to the pilgrims after making proper chlorination by the public health department officials. In 2009, totally 160 hand pumps (tube wells) were erected during the festival period at various spots, for the use of pilgrims.

In order to provide purified drinking water to the devotees throughout the year, a private Lottery Company called Best & Co from Coimbatore, established a huge water purification plant at the premises of the church and has donated it to the church. Now the church has taken up the responsibility of providing the clean water, which is equal in quality to mineral water, to the devotees. The devotees who come to Vailankanni never experience any water scarcity, though there may be water scarcity in some cities and in rural places of the state of Tamil Nadu, and due to the availability of generator facility the pilgrims never suffer electricity power cut, and therefore they are happy to stay at Vailankanni for a longer period.

Food Facilities

Besides the private sector hotels, safe and tasty food is provided by the church canteen at a marginal rate to the festival devotees and to the pilgrims who visit Vailankanni church throughout the year. Besides the care taken by the church administration, the Block Health supervisors and Food Inspectors also inspect regularly the church canteen during the festival days.

Lighting Facilities

Lighting facilities is provided by the special grade town panchayat and the church authorities provide lighting facility to all the public halls and thatched sheds where huge number of pilgrims takes free shelter during the festival days, and to all the festival areas especially at the sea shore which accommodates a vast crowd of devotees. In case of power failure generator is used.

Public Toilet Facilities and Sanitation

There are sufficient number of public latrines, urinals, wash basins and bathing rooms, constructed by the church, located at three different places such as at the bus stand, at the back of Christuraja Mahal and at the right side of the main church. All the latrines, urinals, wash basins and bathing rooms are kept clean and maintained properly for the use of the festival pilgrim and the regular visiting devotees. Care is taken to maintain cleanliness in the church premises.

Sanitation at the premises of the Shrine can be discussed under three heads. 1) Preliminary cleaning, 2) Festival cleaning 3) Post cleaning. Preliminary cleaning of the entire shrine premises is conducted from 14th August to 28th August every year. Festival cleaning starts from 29th August to 9th September every year and post cleaning starts from 10 September to 29 September. A system is in place by the church sweepers section to attend to cleaning during the festival.

Accommodation

As per the Public Health Act of Tamil Nadu government, perfect standard is maintained in the church lodges. Besides the church lodges and halls the church authorities construct temporary sheds for the free stay of pilgrims. Added to that public health stall sheds, fire service sheds, hospital sheds, and exhibition sheds are also constructed by the church. The church authorities provide four rooms at St. Joseph's Lodge (church lodge) from 1st August to 24th September every year, for the stay of Block Health Supervisor, Special Health Officer, and Deputy Director of Health Service. For the police department 15 rooms are allotted at St. Joseph's Lodge in which District Superintendent police, Inspectors and Sub-Inspectors stay during the Annual Feast. For other officials seven rooms are allotted at St. Joseph's Lodge and one room at Little Flower Lodge is allotted for the Fire Officer (Church Room Counter Register). The presence of these officials assures safe and affordable accommodation to the pilgrims.

Educational Aid

People from Vailankanni as well as from other places irrespective of caste and creed approach the Parish Priest of Vailankanni and never return empty handed. Besides free distribution of books and note books for the poor students, the church is also helping them, by meeting their school and boarding expenses (Auditor's Report, Church Office, Vailankanni).

Marriage Aid

Marriage Aid is provided by the church to the poor and deserving cases. The church also freely distributes *Thali* and Saree for the marriage parties who come and meet the Parish Priest, with their marriage invitation.

Medical Aid

Medical Aid is provided for the sick people who ask material help from the Parish Priest. The church workers especially the poor sweepers and others, with due permission from the Parish Priests are given free treatment in the church owned hospitals and dispensaries (Accounts Note Book, Church Office, Vailankanni).

Medical Facilities

The Government Hospital functions near the bus terminal at Vailankanni. The church hospital is situated by the side of the main road, at the distance of ¼ km from the main church. They render medical service round the clock, with tender love, care and concern, not only during the festival days, but also during the rest of the year. In addition to this, two private doctors also render their medical service at Vailankanni main road.

Epidemic Control

Hygienic atmosphere around the shrine. There have been instances, in the history of the shrine epidemics spreading. For example, in the years 1939, 1942 and 1945 three epidemics of cholera, invaded Vailankanni, during the annual festival of Vailankanni *Arockia Matha* (GO MS No. 1183/PH/Dated 10.04.1947). Now, the Government of Tamil Nadu has notified this festival in the government order (Form / Report, Town Panchayat, Vailankanni, 2004) and steps have been taken year after year to prevent any outbreak of epidemic by organizing all sanitary arrangements such as (a) protected water supply, (b) maintaining proper food sanitation and (c) maintaining proper conservancy system etc. Anyhow this can be managed only by the dedicated services of public health staff and sincere

cooperation from the pilgrims in adhering in strict civil in its true sense.

Snake Bite Precautions

There are poisonous sea snakes near the edges of the seashore and some have died due to the snakebite. A notice board is kept by the church, at the seashore to avoid the danger. Barricade is also provided by the church administration, near the seashore and police constables at the request of the parish priest are posted during the festival days, to prevent pilgrims bathing in the area. By the church necessary posters and pamphlets are displayed on this and announcement is made over mike every new and then to warn the danger to the pilgrims.

Fire Precautions

The traders dealing with fire, like teashops, hotels, etc. are instructed by volunteers employed by the church, to be careful to prevent fire accidents. Handbills and pamphlets are printed and distributed by the church authorities. Church has provided a place at the main road, with other infrastructure, to station the permanent Fire Service Unit. Added to that the church also provides place during the feast, to station the fire service units at the festival area.

Mosquito and Fly Control

Before and after the festival days: 6 men with power sprayers are employed to control the mosquito menace. On other days, one man with one power sprayers.

Burial

The expenses to conduct funeral services of the poor are met by the church. Without giving heed to the repeated warnings given by the church administration and volunteers, not to take bath in the sea since there is poisonous snakes one or two devotees go into the deep sea and kick their buckets. For those victims also the church extends its helping hands and meets the expenses to conduct the burial services (Register Note Book, Church Office, and Vailankanni).

Travel Allowance to the Poor and Needy

It is very common scene at Vailankanni that a few devotees, at times, lose their money and stand helpless. For such pilgrims the church comes toward to help in getting them bus or train tickets to their respective places (Register Note Book, Church Office, Vailankanni).

Social activities and public works

Bethsaida pond was dug for the pilgrims to bathe themselves and enjoy. Rupees one million has been donated to the Indian Railways for extending the railway line from Nagapattinam to Vailankanni and the work has been taken up by the Railway. About 100 shops are constructed for the welfare of the poor. And a scheme of providing houses for the 100 homeless employees has also taken up and protected drinking water is provided to the devotees of Vailankanni *Arockia Matha* by the Church administration (Accounts Note Book, Church Office, Vailankanni).

The role of vailankanni in national integration and universal brotherhood

Although the shrine of Vailankanni is mainly a religious pilgrimage centre, we cannot deny the fact that it has also become an interesting site of tourism. All people, as we have mentioned umpteen times, irrespective of caste and creed, rich and poor flock to the shrine because they experience a kind of divine experience and peace in their hearts. As it attracts innumerable persons towards her, the shrine contributes to national integration and international understanding. Let us now

discuss in the following paragraphs how it is realized. The highest priority is being given to national integration today, to help India rise above the many divisive forces that led to widespread mistrust among the people. The pilgrimage tourism of Vailankanni contributes in a substantial manner to re-affirm the value of India being a country with a multi-lingual, multi-religious and multi-cultural society where one is to celebrate true unity in diversity. It has the objective of bringing humankind closer together. All vacations involve change and adaptations, pilgrim groups from different races, regions and political areas meet and intermingle at Vailankanni.

Vailankanni *Arockia Matha* church majestically stands as a great symbol of communal harmony. People flock to the shrine throughout the year, from all over the world, irrespective of caste, creed, colour and religions to offer prayers and to obtain blessings for their well being, and to offer thanks for the gifts they received. However, the crowd of pilgrims becomes vast during the annual feast of this Vailankanni church. The name and fame of Vailankanni Church is known far and wide transcending many faiths. The annual feast of our Lady of Vailankanni is not only recognized as a religious festivity but also is considered as an occasion to strengthen national integration. Vailankanni *Arockia Matha* church stands as the symbol of unity, harmony, peace and brotherhood, for which Mother Mary stands in a unique manner uniting people of the whole world involving fellowship under her mantle of love.

The religious practices that are prevalent in Vailankanni church reflect truth, love, harmony and peace. These are values which humanity likes, seeks and endeavours to establish. It is the element of transcendence in religion that elevates religion above all historical and communitarian limitations and gives its devotees an essential freedom to rise above the bondages of its own limitations and link themselves with people of other faiths. Vailankanni pilgrimage piety can never be considered as a matter of narrow historicity, an ethnically or really bound reality. Religious indifferentism and fanaticism can do a lot of harm to a nation, first by depriving religion of its role in modern society and second, by exaggerating the role of religion and fighting for the unimportant elements of religions. Both ways of behaviour may jeopardize national integration. Only when people are in the state of non-freedom, they may create communal disharmony. But here in Vailankanni the followers of different religions come and stay peacefully, co-exist and pray together for the building up of a nation. Thus, the pilgrimage tourism of Vailankanni paves the way to break the barriers between person and person.

India is a huge country where one finds various culture, various states, but even then, there is real unity. It is surprise to see how such a large federation of states and such a large geographical area with all its variety is sticking together. So the promotion of national integration is in the best interest of India. Tourist and pilgrimage centers foster national unity, and in particular, the pilgrimage tourism of Vailankanni which is the subject matter of our research, promotes a positive concept of nationalism, a concept which is open to other nations, which is open to international integration and universal brotherhood. It also awakens the genuine values in the hearts of the pilgrim tourists who visit Vailankanni. In course of time, these genuine values flow into genuine actions of love and acceptance of one's own neighbour. The result will be harmony, peace, happiness and an integrated society. Gandhi once said, "The greatness of a

religion consists in its capacity to produce great minds," meaning, "Great minds are capable of accepting and appreciating the other". Actually, the teachings of Christianity especially the documents of the second Vatican council always stand for such a goal. The pilgrims in Vailankanni are greatly influenced by the loving grace of God through Mother Mary. The co-pilgrims seek values that are basic and eternal, that will bind people together and thus create a world of love, abiding peace and harmony. The pilgrimage tourism of Vailankanni makes the realization of universal brotherhood possible.

Vailankanni pilgrimage promotes socio-cultural integration

Human person is the crown of creation in the universe. He or she makes lot of efforts in order to make his/her life happy and beautiful. The desire of him/her is the origin of the creation of music, art and literature. Thus, whatever he/she creates in the field of thinking and action with the help of his intelligence may be termed culture (VM Gnanapragasam, 1987). So culture may be regarded in a wider sense as the way one feel and think, live and worship. According to Taylor, "Culture is that complex whole of which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capability and habit acquired by man as a member of society (VM Gnanapragasam, 1987). Mathew Arnold writes, "Culture is the acquainting ourselves with the best that has been known and said in the world." (VC Pandey, 1986). Vailankanni has a renowned name in the cultural history of Tamil Nadu. Vailankanni occupied a distinct place in the peninsular India due to its cultural and harmonious nature. The location of Vailankanni near by the seashore itself seems to be a strong foundation for cultural prosperity. Being the located near the sea-shore as well as near the flourishing port of Nagapattinam, Vailankanni could get a developed and refined culture.

The cultural development has been studied under four different phases namely; enculturation, acculturation, transculturation and inculturation. Enculturation is the process by which an individual becomes inserted into his own culture. Through his/her life, man learns from ancestors, which would distinguish human from other creatures. The culture, which is inherited from his elders or ancestors, came from generation to generation. This learning experience is called enculturation. Acculturation denotes the phenomenon resulting from contact between culture of two regions or races. It indicates the mutual influence of both. It is also viewed as the adaptation of custom or practice from a foreign culture.

Christianity has its roots in India since the beginning of the first century AD. In fact according to a tradition Thomas the Apostle of Jesus brought Christianity to India in the first century AD. When the antiquity of Christianity is analyzed, it seems remarkable that there has never been a truly Christian culture. There was a beginning of enculturation even at the time of Thomas. Even then, the Christians were able to keep up their Hindu social customs. Instead, they mainly expended on the Eastern Syrian Church for theology and liturgy (religious rites.) (P. Thomas, 1989).

The Portuguese who came to India in AD 1438 were keenly interested in their trade. As they were merchants, they showed disinterest in understanding the local language. Regarding the customs and practices of India, on the other hand, as soon as the missionaries arrived in India they realized the importance of learning as well as understanding the Indian practices and customs. A missionary cannot be expected to perform his/her

task unless he is able to mingle with the people among whom he works. The learning of indigenous language and customs automatically helped them mingle freely with the natives (P. Thomas, 1989).

In Vailankanni, due to christianisation or westernization there is a fusion of rituals, habits and culture, which leads to inculturation. The conversion to Christianity changed the faith but not the custom of the society. Development without culture has no meaning. It is said that history did not stop yesterday nor it stops today and it is so with culture. The religious tendency and behaviour of the society brought about development in the society. Subsequently a society rich in culture and civilization come into existence.

The contribution of Vailankanni pilgrimage tourism to the socio-cultural integration of India is praiseworthy. In Vailankanni the real integration of different sectarian forms of worship is explicitly seen. One can learn from history that political integration based on imperial conquest failed.

Therefore, the Indian intellectuals and cultural leaders turned away from the political realm to culture and religion for their own emotional integration and directly for the integration of one India. Both religion and cultural tolerance, learning and appreciating attitude of visitors that are found in the shrine Vailankanni enhance the integration of India. The pilgrimage tourism of Vailankanni brings the pilgrim tourists and the local residents closer together. Pilgrims groups from different races regions and political areas meet and inter mingle at Vailankanni. This social interaction influences the pilgrims, and it is not an exaggeration if it is stated that Vailankanni pilgrimage tourism stands as the passport for space, harmony. Vailankanni pilgrimage tourism is also one of the civilizing influences in the world. The pilgrims from world over arrive not only with money, but with treasures of their civilisation and the history of this country of which they are the ambassadors. The description of cultural and harmonious nature of Vailankanni is given below. The pilgrimage tourism of Vailankanni which fosters national, social and universal harmonies also paves the way for the cultural development. A casual observer of the day to day activities of shrine of Vailankanni will arrive at the conclusion that our Lady of Health, Vailankanni is being venerated as a loving and caring mother by the pilgrim tourists who visit this tourist and pilgrimage centre, due to the infusion of Indianisation or Inculturation with Hinduisation.

Shaving of the hair on the head is an act of penance especially for a woman. This practice is also followed by some of the devotees as an act of penance. Bathing in the sea has a religious significance. Non-Christian devotees consider that it is a religious practice. In Hindu temples in places such as Kanyakumari, Rameshwaram, Tiruchendur and Mahabalipuram, the devotees worship the deities after taking bath in the sea. Such a Hindu practice is being adopted in Vailankanni. The different aspects of Hindu cultural practices that are prevalent in Vailankanni reveal the fact that pilgrimage tourism of Vailankanni respects and promotes the Indian culture. Through the scientific and systematic method of a questionnaire we employed, it is learnt that the arrival of foreign tourists in Vailankanni does not endanger the existing local customs and culture.

The economic impact of vailankanni pilgrimage tourism

Production, distribution and consumption are the three dimensions of economics. Andre Silgried adds 'travel' as the

Fourth dimension of modern economics (G.G. Singhal, 2006). Tourism is acknowledged as an industry today. The economic development of a country is inter-linked with the development of tourism. Tourism helps the nations to earn foreign exchange largely. It also provides both direct and indirect employment to millions of people. The pilgrimage tourism of Vailankanni generates a number of direct and indirect job opportunities. The total economy of the entire area of Vailankanni greatly depends on the pilgrimage tourism industry of Vailankanni. Considerably, steady growth in the incoming number of pilgrims was found after the introduction of motor cars. The pilgrimage tourism of Vailankanni is the most important, income generating, economic enterprise. The people engaged in this pilgrimage tourism business welcome 'strange pilgrims' as their brothers and sisters and with real dedication, commitment and hospitality really help the pilgrims in different phases.

Hospitality is a single phenomenon which simultaneously involves two phases of the pilgrims' business activities. The first phase involves the employees, employers, and the guests. In this phase the three components share a healthy relationship because they are mutually beneficial. In the second phase which involves transport and accommodation. The Catholic Church gives high priority to human works through the Holy See's encyclicals.

Man's life is built up every day out of work and from work, it derives its specific dignity, but at the same time, the work contains the increasing measure of human toil and suffering. A career serves an individual's own need for development; it derives little social benefits to this type of work in terms of public obligation. Vocation is in simple terms a calling from God. It is a calling to recreate the world continuously and it is a calling to serve the needy and the downtrodden. For the people of faith, when they take business as a vocation, nothing other than serving God and his people can be the ultimate objectives or measures.

Economic Benefits

The major economic benefit in promoting the pilgrimage tourism of Vailankanni tends to be the earning of foreign exchange. Income from foreign pilgrims in the form of foreign exchange earning adds to the national income. Vailankanni pilgrimage tourism provides employment, brings infrastructural improvement and helps regional development. The incoming number of pilgrims in Vailankanni has enhanced the income of the natives and the outsiders.

Employment Opportunities

Vailankanni pilgrimage tourism generates a number of direct and indirect job opportunities. Apart from the workers employed in the private concerns, a good number of workers are employed in the church and its allied institutions. A very liberal policy is followed in the church, with regard to employment. Contrary to popular perceptions, employment is not restricted only to the Catholics. In fact non-Christians outnumber the Christians and thus Vailankanni stands as the role model for the national, social, cultural and religious integration and universal brotherhood. Of the 792 employees, 301 are Catholics, 491 are Hindus and only one is Muslim. The Hindu employees are recruited not only from Vailankanni, but also from distant places. One could have complaints from Catholics that they are not getting their due in the employment opportunities of the church. This grievance is one way high lights the uniqueness of the shrine of Vailankanni embracing all fellowmen, irrespective of religious belief.

Improving the Standard of Living

The visit by the pilgrims to Vailankanni affects the living pattern of the local residents. The way visitors conduct themselves and their personal relationships with citizens of the host town often have the profound effect upon the mode of life and the attitude of the local people. It is an undeniable fact that the inflow of pilgrim tourists in Vailankanni facilitates a sophisticated and higher economic standard of living of the local people. The exposure of local residents to the foreign and domestic pilgrim tourists is potentially beneficial from the political and economic point of view. The economic benefit and the socio-cultural interaction influence the standard of living of the local residents. The pilgrims encounter the pilgrim centre Vailankanni with its inhabitants and social structure and mode of life. The pilgrim tourists are also in turn affected by the experience. They carry back home the habits and new outlook on life of the pilgrim centre.

Women development programmes in vailankanni

The empowerment of women is one of the universal issues in the process of development of countries all over the world. Thus, women in Vailankanni have gained greater share of control over decision making in the society. The shrine administration also gives increasingly great attention to the upliftment of women by offering job opportunities. The traditional devotion of lighting candles has created sufficient job opportunities for women. Church owns a candle industry totally run by women. Moreover about 30% of women are engaged themselves in the candle production at their respective homes.

The church administration along with Thanjavur Multipurpose Social Service Society, Non-governmental organizations and with district administration conduct entrepreneurship development training for women, capacity building and skill formation to expose the women of Vailankanni to various business opportunities and to motivate them to start economic activities. These self help women groups help women to improve their saving habits and to fulfil their economic needs through self-employment and utilization of bank loans and government schemes.

Eco-friendly Products in Vailankanni

The church administration organizes small sale cottage industries to produce eco-friendly products such as doormats made of coconut fiber, detergent soaps, phenyl and soap oil which could be used in the lodges and in the church cleaning. The eco-friendly garland making, the statue making and candle making businesses are also flourishing in Vailankanni. Mostly the locals are engaged in these endowers. It is remarkable that the artists in Vailankanni carefully avoid the usage of plastics in statue making.

Development of infrastructure

Development and improvement of infrastructure is another important benefit. In addition to development of new infrastructure, the improvements in existing infrastructure which are undertaken in order to attract and provide facilities to the pilgrim tourists is also of crucial importance. These improvements may confer benefits upon the resident population in Vailankanni by providing them amenities which, hitherto, they had not enjoyed. Furthermore, the provision of infrastructure may provide the basis or serve as an encouragement for greater economic diversification, a variety of secondary industries like hotels, lodging, transport, etc. Thus, indirectly, the inflow of pilgrims may be responsible for

stimulating other economic activities. Creation of basic infrastructure for pilgrim tourist's usage in Vailankanni will also be of service to other sectors of the economy like small scale industries and agriculture. The outcome of this is a better equilibrium of general economic growth. The economic benefit from the existing infrastructure in Vailankanni is considerably high and thus it makes a decisive contribution to the growth of the national economy.

Regional development

The provision of infrastructure and construction of roads, the system of electricity supply, water supply and sewage disposal, hospitals, schools and shops become necessary when this particular Vailankanni pilgrimage and tourist centre is to be developed. This is a key factor in the promotion of economic growth. The United Nations Conference on International Travel and Tourism held in Rome in 1963, noted that tourism was important not as a source of foreign exchange, but also a factor in the location of industry and in the development of less developed regions. It further stated that in some cases the development of tourism might be the only means of promoting the economic advancement of less-developed areas lacking in other resources.

Vailankanni being a pilgrimage and tourist centre has greatly benefitted from the pilgrimage and tourism development. The areas in and around Vailankanni have been developed for the use of pilgrims and thus it has brought a lot of prosperity to the location. The pilgrimage tourist expenditure in Vailankanni area greatly helps the development of areas around it. Thus, the state Government and the church Administration create and develop facilities for the pilgrims with a view to bring prosperity to Vailankanni.

Heritage preservation and environmental conservation in vailankanni

The magnificent and spectacular Vailankanni church majestically stands as the remarkable cultural attraction for innumerable pilgrims and enthusiastic tourist. The ancient structure of the main church is well preserved by the Vailankanni church administration. Every year just before the commencement of the annual feast of Vailankanni considerable attention is given to the effective conservation, preservation and restoration of the exuberant structure of Vailankanni church. The church administration also pays due attention to the construction of infrastructure of the tourism of Vailankanni by taking due consideration not to permit the other structures to exceed the esthetic and gothic structure of the original church which is a strong attraction to visitors. The following benefits of Conserving the Natural and Architectural Heritage in Vailankanni (a) Makes Vailankanni even more attractive (b) Helps the visitors to breathe easier (c) Keeps the visitors happy (d) conserves energy and keep the local economy booming.

Well-planned and cleaned operation of tourism facilities that are available in Vailankanni minimizes the environmental impacts. The church authorities and the special grade panchayat in Vailankanni take careful steps in waste treatment and disposal to avoid pollution. They also follow scientific and systematic pollution prevention and waste minimization techniques. To raise environmental awareness among the residents and the visitors the district collector and the Tamil Nadu Health department distributed printed notices and they make public announcements in Vailankanni. They provide information, training and support to community groups working on waste

prevention. They also publicize the positive effects of waste prevention and the eradication of the use of plastic carry bags.

Conclusion

Pilgrimage tourism to Vailankanni has brought about economic and social development without its original culture being destroyed. Pilgrimage tourism to Vailankanni has improved the income and standard of living of local people. The tourism of Vailankanni generates employment and thus income to most of the people in this locality. The improved infrastructure facilities and the educational and social services rendered by the shrine to the people in and around Vailankanni, as we have explained has contributed enormously to the economic development of places and villages around Vailankanni. Economic development is an important component of overall societal development. We have also understood the fact that without women liberation and empowerment overall societal development in today's context is not possible. It is continuing its mission of working for the integrated development and empowerment of women of our society. The impact of the Shrine of Vailankanni on all the spheres of the life of the people of Vailankanni is very strong and positive. In the

social and cultural spheres the shrine has made a even greater impact. It brings people together irrespective of caste, creed and colour. Thus, the shrine contributes to social and national integration, peace and harmony and the universal brotherhood.

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