

Economic Benefits of Pilgrimage Tourism: A Case Study of Sabarimala Pilgrimage with Special Reference to Pandalam Rural Locality in Kerala (India)

LIBISON.K.B.* and K.P. MURALEEDHARAN**

*Libison.K.B., Research and Teaching Assistant, School of Management Studies, IGNOU, New Delhi, India.

**K.P. Muraleedharan, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Commerce and Management Studies, University of Calicut, Kerala, India

ABSTRACT

The growth of pilgrimage tourism in India has been astonishingly impressive. India is blessed with plenty of well-known religious destinations. Pilgrimages to these destinations bring enormous economic gains to local residents. The number of pilgrims visiting famous Sabarimala temple in Pathanamthitta district of Kerala is almost equal to the population of Kerala state. The present study attempts to investigate how Sabarimala pilgrimage helps in giving manifold economic benefits to local residents of Pandalam rural area. The study is designed as empirical one based on survey method. Six wards of Pandalam Grama Panchayath have been identified as places where high level of economic activity is taking place during pilgrimage season. The study reveals the high positive effects of pilgrimage season on income, employment and standard of living of local residents in Pandalam rural locality.

KEYWORDS: *Pilgrimage tourism, Sabarimala temple, Pandalam rural locality, Demographic factors, Aspects of Standard of living.*

INTRODUCTION

The Sabarimala temple in Pathanamthitta district of Kerala has been revered as a sacred location and has been drawing increasing numbers of pilgrims year after year. Sabarimala Sri Dharma Shasta Temple is the most famous and prominent among all the Shasta Temples. The Temple at Sabarimala is one of the most visited in entire India. The temple is dedicated to **Lord Ayyappa**, a deity closely associated with forest lore. Riding a handsome tiger, the youthful Ayyappa is revered as a protector of the forest.

Pandalam locality has paramount importance in the Sabarimala Pilgrimage. The overwhelming relationship between **Lord Ayyappa** and king of **Pandalam** is well known. The Pandalam palace and local people of Pandalam have undeniable role in the success of Sabarimala pilgrimage season.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Pandalam is a major base camp for Sabarimala pilgrimage. As a sacred city, Pandalam is perhaps second only to Sabarimala. Sree Ayyappa, the presiding deity of Sabarimala had his human sojourn here as the son of the Raja of Pandalam. The *Valiyakoikal* temple near the palace on the banks of river *Achenkovil* has been modeled on the Sabarimala shrine. Pilgrims usually stop here to worship before proceeding to Sabarimala.

During pilgrimage season numerous economic activities are taking place in the Pandalam locality. Flow of pilgrims bestows innumerable socio-economic benefits to the region. It is worthwhile to look at the questions like, how does Sabarimala pilgrimage come to the aid in giving manifold economic benefits to the Pandalam locality? Whether the region has

succeeded in capitalizing the various advantages from the pilgrimage season? Are there any economic and other avenues remain unexplored for the improved utilization of pilgrimage season? All these questions deserve reliable explanations.

The main objectives of the present study are:

1. **To comprehend the micro economic benefits obtained from the Sabarimala pilgrimage by local economy.**
2. **To examine the impact of Sabarimala pilgrimage on the standard of living of people in the Pandalam locality.**

The study is confined only to the economic dimensions of pilgrimage in the midst of local residents. The field of enquiry is restricted to wards of Pandalam Grama Panchayath.

HYPOTHESES

On the basis of objectives framed for the study, the following hypotheses have been developed:

1. *There is no significant difference between incomes of households in the Pandalam locality and pilgrimage and non pilgrimage seasons.*
2. *There is no significant difference between employment days of people of the Pandalam locality and pilgrimage and non pilgrimage seasons.*

METHODOLOGY

The study has been designed as empirical one based on survey method. The necessary data has collected from both secondary and primary sources. Primary data required for the study are collected from residents of Pandalam locality. Discussions have been held with Panchayath officials. Data have also been collected by making interactions with knowledgeable persons and scholars in the subject area.

Residents of Pandalam Grama Panchayath constitute total size of the population. Sample selection has been made by applying '**Multi stage sampling technique**'. At first stage total wards in the Panchayath is divided into two categories on the basis of level of economic activities taking place in each ward. Wards in which more economic activities are taking place in connection with pilgrimage altogether comprise one group. Wards in which less or no economic activities are taking place altogether form another group. Pandalam Grama Panchayath has 22 wards in its control. Out of 22 wards 6 wards have been identified as where high level of economic activity is taking place during pilgrimage season. They are wards 3, 4, 5,13,14,20. Other wards are being identified as places where low or no economic activity is taking place during pilgrimage season.

By using random sampling technique a ward is selected from the group in which more economic activities are taking place. The selected ward is Thonnallur. **This ward comprises 473 households. 100 respondents are randomly selected from 473 households. Size of the sample items constitutes more than 20% of the selected ward.** Field survey is conducted to gather primary data from respondents by direct personal interview with the use of structured interview schedules. Observation of study area has also been made to understand various economic activities taking place in the region.

DISCUSSION

The discussion now turns to the analysis of economic impact of Sabarimala pilgrimage on the people of Pandalam locality. Analysis is carried out at micro level. Respondents' economic activities during the season are classified in to five categories. They are (1) Petty trading (2) Accommodation and Dormitory facilities (3) Food/Tea Shops (4) Transportation Facilities (5) Other economic activities. This classification is based on the nature of trading activities in the survey area.

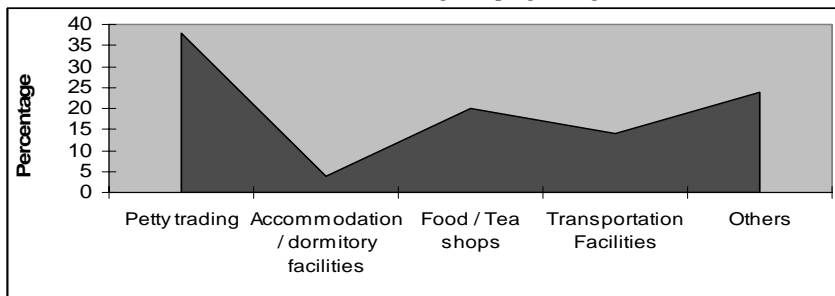
The term 'petty trading' has got wider meaning in the interview schedule than it has in ordinary usage. Flower shops, Fruit stalls, Bakery shops, Coconut sales, Vegetable shops etc... are considered as the Petty trading activities. The term 'Transportation facility' is used in the interview schedule to include the services provided by Auto drivers, Taxi drivers, Truck drivers, Travel agencies etc... The term 'Food/ Tea Shops' represents all the shops which serve food and other eatables. The term 'Accommodation and Dormitory facilities' used to indicate lodging facilities provided by local residents for the pilgrims. The term 'Other economic activities' is meant to include all other activities which are outside the scope of earlier mentioned activities such as electrical shops, auto workshops, two wheeler work shops, S.T.D booths and salaried persons.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS: MICRO LEVEL ANALYSIS

Local residents of Pandalam locality have been receiving invaluable economic values from the pilgrimage season. The season offers an exclusive occasion to local people to acquire all financial benefits using their entire resources. Households engaged in economic activities in the pilgrimage season can make speedy economic gains with less input. Economic impact assessment at micro level examines the extent of income generated during the season, the extent of man day's employment generated during the season, acquisition of household assets, impact on standard of living etc... Micro level impact assessment will enable us to understand the kind of transformation that takes place in the households of the locality during the pilgrimage season.

SAMPLE RESPONDENTS ARE CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO THEIR NATURE OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES DURING THE SEASON

FIGURE – 1. *Classification of respondents in to different categories on the basis of economic activities undertaken during the pilgrimage season.*



(Source: Survey Data)

INCOME OF RESPONDENTS DURING PILGRIMAGE AND NON-PILGRIMAGE SEASONS

The extent of income generated during the season has to be examined to understand the effects of pilgrimage season on income of the sample households in the locality. It is exciting to note that income composition of the households of Pandalam locality in the season changes significantly. Income is depended on the money pilgrim tourists spend in the community. Expenditures of pilgrim tourists have great significance as it increases the income earning capability of the local people. The following table reflects the impact of income on the local residents of Pandalam locality.

TABLE 1. Comparison between average monthly income of family during pilgrimage season and average monthly income of family during non pilgrimage season

<i>Economic Activity</i>	<i>Average monthly income during pilgrimage season (Rs)</i>	<i>Average monthly income during non pilgrimage season (Rs)</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Petty Trading	25013 (SD: 22821)	15276 (SD:11344)	9736 ---
Accommodation / Dormitory facilities	37500 (SD: 8660)	25000 (SD: 5773)	12500 ---
Food / Tea shops	36850 (SD: 48115)	11300 (SD: 10661)	25550 ---
Transportation facilities	56392 (SD: 57737)	25285 (SD:19667)	31107 ---
Other economic activities	20562 (SD: 12816)	14875 (SD: 8346)	5687 ---
Aggregate	32285 (SD: 36494)	16175 (SD: 12581)	16110 ---

(Source: Survey Data)

Table 1 displays average incomes and their standard deviations of people engaged in various economic activities during pilgrimage as well as non pilgrimage seasons. People who provide transportation facilities got high average monthly income during the season. These people could increase their average monthly income more than Rs. 31000 in the pilgrimage season. People who serve eatables to the pilgrims could earn Rs. 36850 as average monthly income during the season. Their average monthly income in the non pilgrimage season is Rs. 11300. The difference between the earnings of pilgrimage and non pilgrimage season is Rs. 25550. Petty traders got Rs. 25000 as their monthly average income during the season. This income level is reduced to Rs. 15276 during the non pilgrimage season. People engaged in other economic activities category got less advantages in terms of income when compared to other categories. However their income structure also got considerable increase in the season. Table – 3 gives more clear picture of the income patterns of sample respondents.

TABLE – 2. Comparison between income categories of family during pilgrimage season and non pilgrimage season

<i>Average monthly income of Family during pilgrimage season</i>	<i>Average income of family during non pilgrimage season</i>				<i>Total</i>
	<i>Below Rs. 10000</i>	<i>Between Rs. 10001 - Rs. 20000</i>	<i>Between Rs. 20001- Rs. 40000</i>	<i>Between Rs. 40001 -Rs. 60000</i>	
Below Rs. 10000	21	0	0	0	21
Between Rs. 10001- Rs. 20000	23	12	0	0	35
Between Rs. 20001- Rs. 40000	5	14	2	0	21
Between Rs. 40001- Rs. 60000	0	0	6	2	8
Above Rs. 60000	0	2	11	2	15
Total	49	28	19	4	100

(Source: Survey Data)

There is a sharp decrease in the income of respondents during the non pilgrimage season. In the non pilgrimage season around 50% of households satisfied with income of below Rs. 10000. Out of 100 families 15 families could expand their income above Rs. 60000 during the season.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING: {VARIABLE: INCOME}

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant difference between incomes of households in the Pandalam locality during pilgrimage and non pilgrimage seasons.

TABLE – 3. Paired Samples t- test (1)

	<i>Paired differences</i>				
	t	Df	P Value	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
				Lower	Upper
Average number of monthly employment days during pilgrimage and non pilgrimage seasons	10.83	99	0.000	.67798	.98202

Table – 3 shows the results of hypothesis testing. Since the P- Value of t- test for equality of means is less than 0.05, null hypothesis has rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted. That is to say, there is significant relationship between incomes of households in the Pandalam locality and pilgrimage and non pilgrimage seasons.

MAN DAY'S EMPLOYMENT OF RESPONDENTS DURING PILGRIMAGE AND NON PILGRIMAGE SEASONS

TABLE – 4. Average monthly man day's employment in different seasons

	<i>Pilgrimage Season</i>	<i>Non Pilgrimage Season</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Average Monthly Man Day's Employment	29.7000	27.9400	1.76
Standard Deviation	0.93744	1.87929	---

(Source: Survey Data)

It can be noted from the table – 4 that average monthly man day's of employment is higher in the pilgrimage season when compared to non pilgrimage season. Respondents received employment almost all days (30 days) throughout in a month during pilgrimage season, where as during non pilgrimage season, number of employment days in a month is reduced to 28 day.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING:

{VARIABLE: MAN DAY'S EMPLOYMENT}

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant difference between employment days of people of the Pandalam locality and pilgrimage and non pilgrimage seasons.

Table – 5 exhibits the results of hypothesis testing. Since the P- Value of t- test for equality of means is less than 0.05, null hypothesis has rejected and alternative hypothesis has accepted. That is to say, there is significant difference exist between employment days of people of Pandalam locality and pilgrimage and non pilgrimage seasons.

TABLE – 5. Paired Samples t- test (2)

	<i>Paired differences</i>				
	t	df	P Value	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
				Lower	Upper
Average number of monthly employment days during pilgrimage and non pilgrimage seasons	6.085	99	0.000	.23588	.46412

(Source: As computed by the Researcher)

IMPACT OF PILGRIMAGE SEASON ON STANDARD OF LIVING

As Table – 6 points out, 70% of respondents believe that Sabarimala pilgrimage season has moderate positive impact on the standard of living of their families. 19% of respondents feel that pilgrimage season has nothing to do with standard of living of their families. 11% of respondents consider the season having high positive impact on standard of living of their families.

TABLE – 6. Attitude of sample respondents regarding impact of pilgrimage season on standard of living of their families

<i>Economic activity during pilgrimage season</i>	<i>No impact</i>	<i>Moderate positive impact</i>	<i>High positive impact</i>	<i>Total</i>
Petty trading	2	34	2	38
Accommodation/dormitory facilities	0	2	2	4
Food/tea shops	0	13	7	20
Transportation	2	12	0	14
Others	15	9	0	24
Total	19	70	11	100

(Source: Survey Data)

IMPACT OF PILGRIMAGE SEASON ON DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF STANDARD OF LIVING

Impact of Sabarimala pilgrimage season on different aspects of the standard of living of families has been identified on three aspects. Following analyses reveal whether Sabarimala pilgrimage season has any role in improving quality of life of people of the Pandalam locality?

(A) FOOD HABITS

56% of respondents admit that their food habit has moderately improved during the pilgrimage season. 18% respondents agree that their food habit has high positive impact during the season. 26% of respondents consider that pilgrimage season has no impact on their food habit.

(B) CLOTHING

With relate to the impact of pilgrimage season on clothing of families, we get similar results as in the case of food habits. 56% of respondents admit that their clothing has moderately improved during the pilgrimage season. 18% respondents agree that their clothing has highly improved during the season. 26% of respondents consider that pilgrimage season has no impact on their clothing.

(C) SAVINGS PATTERN

According to 54% respondents, their savings pattern has received moderate positive impact in the pilgrimage season. 20% of respondents opined that their savings pattern got high positive impact in the season. 26% of respondent felt that season has no impact on their savings pattern.

MAJOR FINDINGS

The following are the major findings of the study:

- It is confirmed that there is great deal of relationship between incomes of households in the Pandalam locality and pilgrimage and non pilgrimage seasons.
- People who provide transportation facilities got high average monthly income during the season. These people could increase their average monthly income more than Rs. 31000 in the pilgrimage season.
- People who serve eatables to the pilgrims could earn Rs. 36850 as average monthly income during the season. Their average monthly income in the non pilgrimage season is Rs. 11300. The difference between the earnings of pilgrimage and non pilgrimage season is Rs. 25550.
- Petty traders could earn Rs. 25000 as their monthly average income during the season. This income level is reduced to Rs. 15276 during the non pilgrimage season.
- People engaged in other economic activities category got less advantages in terms of income when compared to other categories. However their income structure also got considerable increase in the season.
- There is a sharp decrease in the income of respondents during the non pilgrimage season. In the non pilgrimage season around 50% of households satisfied with income of below Rs. 10000. Out of 100 families 15 families expand their income above Rs. 60000 during the season.
- The average monthly man day's of employment is higher in the pilgrimage season when compared to non pilgrimage season. Respondents received employment almost all days (30 days) throughout in a month during pilgrimage season, where as during non pilgrimage season, number of employment days in a month is reduced to 28 days.
- Increase in income helps the households to make their daily living much better than non pilgrimage season.
- People of Pandalam locality have better economic status in terms of household amenities than other rural localities. Electric iron box and electric fan is the common thing in all the households. 80% of households enjoy telephone facility and 90% of households possess Television sets.
- 70% of the respondents believe that Sabarimala pilgrimage season has moderate positive impact on standard of living of their families. 19% of respondents feel that pilgrimage season has nothing to do with standard of living of their families. 11% of respondents consider the season having high positive impact on standard of living of their families.
- Impact of Sabarimala pilgrimage season on different aspects of standard of living of families is great. Above 50% of respondents admit that their food habits, clothing and savings pattern has moderately improved during the season. 26% of respondents say that pilgrimage season has no impact on their food habits, savings pattern and clothing. Handful of respondents say pilgrimage season has high positive impact on different aspects of standard of living of their families.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the above findings the following suggestions are put forward for the growth and dividend of pilgrimage tourism in the locality.

- Patterns of pilgrims spending on different items should be thoroughly studied.
- Dearth of accommodation facilities is the one of the prime reasons that pilgrims do not like to stay in the locality. If more pilgrims stay in the locality for one or two days, that will attract more expenditures from pilgrims which will ultimately benefit petty traders and others in the locality. Government authorities should assist the people to provide more lodging facilities in the region. K.T.D.C rest houses should be built in the locality.
- Dearth of parking facilities in the season is another area of concern. Provision of additional space for parking is essential in the pilgrimage season.
- Widen the road from Pandalam junction to Pandalam palace and temple. This is the area where more economic activities are taking place during the season. If this road is widened vehicles can be parked road side and pilgrims can alight for any purchases.
- Wide publicity must be given for the importance of '*thiruvabharanam*' kept in the Pandalam palace. This will enable to bring in more pilgrims to the locality.
- There is a wide scope for pilgrimage tourism in the region. A number of Shasta temples are situated in the region. A pilgrimage route to these temples will attract pilgrims who arrive to visit Pandalam palace and temple.
- As suggested in 'Sabarimala Master Plan', transform the Pandalam locality as a major base camp for the Sabarimala pilgrimage. Government interventions needed for this purpose must be obtained by the panchayath authorities as early as possible.
- Constitute a development committee including officials of Pandalam Grama panchayath, Travancore Devaswom Board, Pandalam palace executive committee and local people to make long term and short term development plans for the locality to leverage maximum economic benefits from the pilgrimage season
- Conduct a scientific research to ascertain number of pilgrims entering the locality and estimate their basic needs, finalize all plans to accommodate all these basic needs of pilgrims.

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