

RELIGIOUS TOURISMIN KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

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Abstract

Religious travel is not a new phenomenon. Religion has long been an indispensable motive for undertaking journeys. Every year millions of people travel to religious destinations both ancient and modern around the world. Approximately 240 million people go on pilgrimages in a year, the majority being Christians, Muslims and Hindus. Religious travel is the oldest type of tourism in the world. Anthropologists and archaeologist found evidence that for example Stonehenge and the cave dweller paintings had the same function as today's religious sites. Kanyakumari is notable for pilgrimage and tourism. In the total population of Kanniyakumari Hinduism constitutes 48.65% and Christian 46.85% as majority. The Tamilians are the people of mother-god worshippers. Kumari Amman Temple is dedicated to Goddess Bhagavathi. The Goddess is a virgin that is why she is called Kanyakumari. MandaikaduBagavathi Amman Temple also attracts more pilgrims.

Keywords

Religion, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, pilgrimage, tourism, temple.

Introduction

After the crucifixion of Christ religious travel grew strongly. In the first century A.D, one of the important providers of lodging places was the church for pilgrims. The first 'hotel chain' for religious travel was operated by the church. The quality of inns kept improving over the years as travel become more frequent due to conquests, religious travel and commerce as empires expanded. Pilgrimage can be traced to 4th Century A.D. When Christian regarded pilgrimage a sacred duty to visit the holy land. Tourism is concerned with pleasure, leisure, holidays travel, pilgrimage etc to somewhere. These are the motivations that make people leave their "normal" places of work and residence for short –term temporary visits to "other" places. As an industry, the impact of tourism is numerus. Tourism industry nourishes a country's economy, stimulates development process, restores cultural heritage, and helps in maintaining international place and understanding. As per Statistical Hand Book 2019, Government of Tamil Nadu, Tourist arrival in

Kanniyakumari in the year 2017 for domestic tourist was 20469101; foreign tourist 212199 and total number of tourist were 20681300.

Meaning of Tourism

Tourism Occupies a promotion place in the changing trends of the modern world. It is a growing industry denoting the voluntary movement of the people in search of rest, relaxation and for a new experience from their normal place of residence and work to a distant destination. The role of tourism for the promotion of national development, economic growth, cultural expansion etc. is a widely accepted fact. Every country having realized the advantages of tourism has taken suitable steps for its promotion, sustenance and maintenance of this growing industry. In Sanskrit literature there are three terms which explain the substance of tourism. They are,

- Parartna - Going out for seeking pleasure and knowledge.
- Desatna - Going out of the country for economic gains.
- Trithatna - Going out of places for religious merit.

Religious Tourism:

Kanyakumari district is blessed with many reputed mythological, historical, architectural and artistic importance. Hinduism is one of the most popular religions of Kanyakumari district. Most of the temples were dedicated to Lord Shiva and there is always an image of his consort Parvati or Durga for worship. According to the official census 2011 and population data 2021 for Kanyakumari district, there is a Hindu majority in the state of Kanyakumari. According to the 2011 census Kanyakumari district has a total population of 1,870,374. Hinduism constitutes 48.65% of Kanniyakumari population. Christian plays important role in electoral of Kanniyakumari state forming significant 46.85% of total population. Muslim 4.20 %, Sikh 0.01 %, Buddhist 0.02 %, Jain 0.01 %, and other Religions not stated 0.26 %.

In Religion tourism and in the philosophies of all major religions an important role is played by social solidarity on various levels. Travel of spiritual nature acts as a positive controlling factor with respect to both tradition and modernization. Devotional, pilgrimages, rites and religious ceremonies constitute an important factor for the development of tourism on the area that hosts them. But they need to be regulated and monitored in order to ensure respect for faith and tradition. Some Hindu temples in kanyakumari district are Nagaraj temple in Nagercoil, Thanumalayan Temple in Suchindram, KollemcodeSreeBhadrakali Temple, Thiruvattar Sri AdikesavaPerumal Temple, etc. Some pilgrimage places in Christianity in Kanyakumari District, Particularly St. Xavier Church in Kottar, MylaudyRingleToubeVedhamanickam Memorial C.S.I. Church, St. Antony Church in Vettuvanni and etc. There are some Islamic pilgrimage in Kanyakumari, they are, Malik Mohammad OliyullahDharga at Thiruvithancode, peer Mohammed OliyullahDargha at ThucklayPalliVaasal in Tehngapattanam etc. These Monuments also attract large number tourists from all over the world.

Hinduism

Kanyakumari is considered as a holy place for the Hindus. Bathing in the sea at this point, and worshipping the goddess, duly fasting, was believed to wash away all sins, secure virtue, ensure the elevation of souls to blissful realms. In the Vena- Parva of the Mahabharata (v.23) it is said that “one should both in the firtha called Kanya on the sea coat. It is believed by the Hindus that the most of sins are those committed on the banks of the Ganges and (Kanya) kumara.

Many of the early temples are devoted to Siva. Siva is worshiped in different appellations such as Mahadeva, Iswara, Sankara and Ardhanareeswara by the people. The notable centers of Siva worship are SuchindrumThanumalaya Swami Temple, ThirumalaiMahadevar Temple, ThirupparapuMahadevar Temple, KalkulamNilakantaswamy Temple , Sri Mahadevar Temple at Thiruvithancode, Nattalam Siva Temple. The devotees believe that they will get the blessings of Lord Siva and Lord Krishna on completion of the run at Thirunattalam. The twelve Sivalayams will be vibrant with the spirit of festivity on the ottam day. It is an occasion for prayer and worship as well as for enjoyment.

SreeAdiKesavaPerumal Temple, Thiruvattar, Sri Venkatachalapathi Temple, Thirupathisaram, are the famous Vishnu Temples in Kanyakumari. Tamilians have many temples for these Goddesses. MeenakshiSundareswarar Temple, Aralvaimozhi, Azhagamman Temple, Vadeweeswaram, Jegadeeshwarai Amman temple, Thalakudi, Awaiar Amman Temple, ShenbagaramanPuthoor, Esakki Amman Temple, Muppandal, Bhagavathiamman Temple, Kanyakumari, Bhagavathiamman Temple, Mandaikadu, Esakki Amman Temple, Nadukkadu, Pathrakali Amman Temple, Kollencode, Samundeswari Temple, Kuzhithurai, Bagawathi Amman Temple, Karuparai 361, are famous among them.

In this district there are famous and sacred abodes for Lord Muruga are found in Marungoor, Vellimali, Murugankuntram, Kumarakoil. SwamithoppuSrivaikunda Swami Pathi Temple is the headquarters of the five pathis of Ayyavazhi.380 ThazhakudiAvvaiyarkovil Madam It was located in the Kadukkarai – Aralvaimozhi Road. It is believed that the poetess Avvaiyar stayed here and sung a song about Murugan.

Temples are considered to be the backbone of Hinduism. The temples are the places where the devotees worship and so the place of worship should be sacred.

Christianity

From ancient times Kanyakumari was famous in the commercial sphere. It is to be remembered that at the time of the arrival of St. Thomas, there was commercial relation between Rome, Greece and Kadiyapattinam, Colachel, Muttam and the places near Kanyakumari such as Kottar, and Kovalam. Kottar was a great commercial city. One can infer that St. Thomas had come to this southern area which was very famous historically and commercially. The ancient Church of Thiruvithancode sheds light on this belief.

The first Christian Church in Kanyakumari District is St. Mary's Church at Thiruvithancode. This Church is known as Arappally (1/2 Church). This church claims an age of about two thousand years. St. Thomas, the Apostle of Christ came to Kerala by 52 A.D. He founded seven and a half Churches (Elaraippalli). Thiruvithancode Church is one of it. The seven Churches founded by St. Thomas in Kerala are Kodungalloor, Niranam, Kollam, Palayoor, Kottackavu, Kokkamangalam, and Chayal (Nilackal). These seven Churches and the holy Church at Thiruvithancode are the seven and a half Churches. This is the traditional belief. But historians maintain the opinion that seven and a half Churches means seven excellent or magnificent Churches and not seven big Churches plus a small Church.

The Christian community forms the second major community in Kanyakumari District. Among the Christians in the district the Roman Catholics constitute the major group. There are also the members of the Church of South India (C.S.I.), the Salvation Army and the Lutheran Church. There are converts from Brahmins and Vellalas also. Later on the Christians spread in all the taluks of the district which have already been the centre of activities of various Missions like the London Mission Society, the Salvation Army, the Lutheran Mission and the Roman Catholic Mission. They did glorious services for the spread of Christianity in Kanyakumari District. Most popular among the propagators was St. Xavier at Kottar.

The Missionaries started their work in South Travancore in the village of Vadaseri near Nagercoil. After fifteen years of work in Trivandrum and its surroundings the Missionaries extended their work into Central and North Travancore. They opened schools in many places and carried out much beneficial work among the backward communities. The mission opened 69 schools with a total enrolment of 4,473 pupils.

Muslims

Islam is the term from Arabic word, means surrendering to God. They built mosques, and minarets for their worship. They have Darghas also. Mosques are places of worship. In Islam, they are called as Dargha. They are found in various places. People come to the Darghas to redress their complaints and wishes to be fulfilled. When their wishes are fulfilled they offer their offerings. A tall tower Minaret is usually a part of a mosque in which Muslims are called to worship. The high towers of minarates take a significant place in the construction work of mosques or Darghas. Minarates are erected straight from the bottom to the peak. This type of pillar was first used in mosques by "KhalifaMusuvia". There are many mosques in Kanyakumari District. The Muslims are the third major community in the district with 4.20 per cent of the population.

From very early times the parts on the West-Coast attracted many sea-faring people of world. By about 712 A.D the first batch of Muslims reached Malabar. They came for trade and settled in the coastal regions. They erected mosques and slowly made many converts to Islam. The general structure, customs, manners and religious beliefs of the Muslims of the district are basically the same in other parts of the State. In all the Taluks of the District Muslims are fairly distributed. However, at Thiruvithancode, Thuckalay and Colachel in the KalkulamTaluk, Edalakudy in the AgastheeswaramTaluk and Thittuvilai in the ThovalaiTaluk, there are large numbers of Muslims mostly engaged in trading activities. The two major sections of the Muslims in this district are the Shiahhs and the Sunnis. Peer Mohammed OliyullahDargha At Thuckalay, Malik Mohammad OliyullahDargha at Thiruvithancode, Kaatu Baba Sahib Dharga – Velimalai,

Thuckalay, SulaimanOliyullahDargah at Elankadai – Kottar, Mosque at Kanyakumari, ThittuvillaiJumma Mosque, Mosque at Thengaipattanam are some well-known Mosques in Kanyakumari District.

Muslims visit the Darghas during the Kanthoori festival and also on Thursdays and Sundays of the week. The water of the tank in the Darghas is considered holy. Sweets and dried rose petals are distributed to the devotees in the Darghas. But in some Darghas sacred ash blessed with verses of the Quran is also distributed. Though the Muslims do not apply sacred ash to their forehead, they receive it with reverence and sprinkle it on the head and take it home for being kept there. Dargha worship is much familiar among the Muslim women. Since there is no separate place for women to worship and plead for the welfare of their families they find it in the Darghas. Muslim women pray five times in their house itself. In the premises of the mosques like Thengaipattanam and Colachel there are separate enclosures for women. They visit mosques on ordinary days but consecrate on festival occasions.

Jainism

The origin of Jainism in Kanniyakumari is a mystery. The religion of Jains was founded by Parsvanath known as the twenty-third Jain Tirthankara. Jainism spread throughout India and as well as overseas. Due to its simplicity thousands of people joined Jainism. Jains follow the teachings of 24Tirthankaras. The Cape Comorin or Kanniyakumari was once a centre of Jain pilgrimage.

The world, according to Jainism, is a function of six eternally existing substances, five materials and the one spiritual. Jainism believes in life after death which is either in the form of rebirth, or the transmigration of the soul from the old body to a new one or Moksha. Soul of man is capable of attaining infinite power, faith, knowledge and bliss. The Tirthankar Kevalis and the Siddhas who have attained perfection, cannot be taken as God. It tries to explain in material world by the help of the following five substances Dharma (motion) Adharma (principle of rest) Akasha (space) Kala (time) and Pudgala matter to explain conscious being it adds, a sixth substance – five (soul) matter that is composed of almost material atoms which possess the qualities of touch, taste, smell and colour, space gives or for the pudgiest. It is infinite time effects change. Dharma and Adharma are peculiar to Jainism and this makes Jaina explanation of the world very scientific and it is by the principle of motion that the budgets move and combine together to form objected.

In Jainism Man is in the highest status. There is no God in the ordinary sense of the term, but if the word God has any meaning it is applicable to man self. The Jaina answer in these questions is that man in his present state is in bondage. Like the Buddhists, the Jains built, Bjikshisugrihas or cave dwelling for the resident of their monks. In Kanyakumari District, Jain centres are established in different places like Chitharal, Thirunanthikkarai and Nagercoil. Among these, Chitharal appears to be the centre of Jainism in Kanyakumari District. Chitharal Jain centre in Kanyakumari District appears to be the regional headquarters of Jainism next to Seravanabelagola. A group of Dhigambara Jains from North India visited in 1977. The ancient Tamil literature such as Naladiyar, Nanmanikadigai and Thirukadigam has references about the spreading of Jainism in Tamil Nadu. These books reveal that Jainism has flourished in Chitharal, Thirunanthikkarai and Nagercoil. The Jain Temple of NagarajaKoil was converted into a Vishnu Temple in

the latter half of the 16th century A.D. by the Venad kings. Similarly, the Jaina Cave Temple in Tirunandhikkarai was converted into Siva Temple during the period of Raja Raja Chola-I. The Archeological Department has taken care to preserve some of the records of the site at Chitharal.

Buddhism

In Travancore the spread of Buddhism began before 300 B.C. Temples were dedicated to various deities along the coast and temples were vestiges of the Buddhist influence. In Agasteeswaram Sasta worship was common. Kuthumangalam Sasta temple in Kalkulam people worshipped Sasta as their God. Sastha is the chief deity of the temple. The temple was built by the Krishnavahakars. Poojas in the temple were performed by a Brahmin priest.

The Sangam works furnish with several evidences for the reconstruction of the history of early Buddhism in Tamil Nadu. Even though the Ceylonese chronicles like Deepavamsa and Mahavamsa do not speak anything about the place from where Mahendra, the son of Asoka and Sangamitra, the daughter of Asoka came to Ceylon, it is obvious that they might have gone to Srilanka through Tamil Nadu touching Kanyakumari which was connected by a land-bridge with the island in ancient days. As the Buddhist-monks were also physicians they camped at the top of the hill Marunthuvaalmai (Medicinal Hill) situated on the way to Kanyakumari knowing the medical and spiritual heritage of the hill. It is interesting to note that the word 'Therapeutic' is derived from 'Therapeutaes' which means Buddhist monks who carry medicines on their shoulders. Very close to Marunthuvaalmai is Agasteeswaram which named after the sage Agasthiya who is accredited as the Father of Siddha system of medicine. Thus, the history of Buddhism in Tamil Nadu and Srilanka throws some light on the advent of Buddhism in Kanyakumari District.

A Japanese scholar Dr. Shu Hikosaka in his book, "Buddhism in Tamil Nadu" explained the etymology of the words Pothiyiland Pothalaka. According to him the word 'Bodhi' became 'Pothiyil' which means the abode of Bodhisattvas including Avalokitha. He added that Buddha loka became Pothalaka. This has become the name of the above mountain as soon as it was held sacred to the Buddhists.

It is further said that a portion of the Western Ghats was named Mahendragiri because Asoka's son Mahendra descended there. It is also interesting to note here that there is a place named Sanghamitra near Mahendragiri. In Kerala it is called Pongappaara. In all probability Mahendra and Sanghamitra had visited the famous Potalaka, once the abode of Avalokitha and Taradevi. A rock near Pothikai hill is named TaravattamPaarai in the rock where Tara dwelled. There are two places named Taravilai in Kanyakumari District. The worship of Tara might have been popular in Kanyakumari in olden days.

Conclusion

Pilgrimage is a journey of discovery of morals of spiritual importance. Usually, it is a visit to a pilgrimage or other important place for a person's faith and belief. Many religions attach tourist to particular destination: the place of birth or death of founders or saints, or the place of spiritual awakening, places where miracles occur are performed or seen. Such sites are encouraged to visit for their own spiritual benefit: to be healed or to answer questions or to obtain some other spiritual benefit. People who undertake such a journey can be called a pilgrim. Kanyakumari has a big name for its pilgrimage and tourism.

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