

**Kancheepuram - the Heritage city of the ‘ancient past,  
rich culture and timeless spirituality’**

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**Abstract**

The paper discloses the facts substantiating the high level heritage values of the city, Kancheepuram, having better scope for increased number of tourists / pilgrims to visit, and increased revenue to tourism industry including foreign exchange revenue from the overseas visitors. The heritage value of Kancheepuram is actually multidimensional. By focusing the search light on the intricate values depicting the antiquity, culture, Architecture, tradition and spirituality, the facts about them are brought to the fore. The objective of the paper is to depict the facts to sensitize the readers to the ‘nagareshu Kanchi’ and to make them wonder about the heritage values inherent to the city of Kancheepuram, so as to judge on their own to rate the standing value of Kancheepuram in the heritage scale. Kancheepuram is the most ancient city in South India, and has numerous cultural and historical heritage sites. The paper focuses on bringing out the underrated historic sites of the city, as it is said to have thousand and more temples once. The facts considered for placing before the view of the readers are culled out from the authentic sources to make the readers appreciate the values in the right genre and to reorient their view of the Heritage city of Kancheepuram, the values of which are already a part of rich heritage literature. The paper also draws scope to throw light on how the de-centralization concept of tourism would positively work in the case of Kancheepuram city. Substantiation through the findings of a couple case studies also have been done through which adequate understanding is possible for implementation.

## Introduction

Heritage is a measure of recognition and value - a narrative about the antiquity, a value of tradition, regional exclusivity, and an identity of culture & spirituality, which relate to how people connect with the past. People passionate about the wonders of the past consider it invaluable, having the possibility of timeless connect. Such heritage sites/objects/values are preserved by applying innovation, creative application, and technology to harness benefits - social and economic benefits of the heritage value and its preservation. Heritage factors could relate to human life style, practices, monuments, nature, etc., and the socio-economic impact that it presents to the world, apart from the sustainability of the resources at the sites from depreciating over time.

A nation having no cultural heritage is similar to an orphan with nothing to feed upon. India is a country which has a diverse culture, rich heritage and deep run roots which dates back to the ancient period. Heritage has always been a significant contributor for the growth of the tourism industry. It is considered highly important to be listed as one of the UNESCO sites, since it creates cooperation at the international level which would enable creating of funds eventually for the protection, preservation and conservation of historical heritage sites”.

The very initiative to preserve anything carries an underlying notion of value that enhances the nuances of life’s values. - impacting the social and economic part of life setting. Tourism comes in picture to enable people from different locations to travel to places such as the popular / attractive/ heritage sites. They stay, take care of the food, convenience and other needs so as to fulfill their purpose of travel/visits to the destined locations. Tourism thus covers such facilities for purposes of visits to locations, far and wide, for the needs that are diverse - from leisure, holiday to education, medical, sports, etc.

Kancheepuram is called a temple-town. The city enjoys being a great seat of culture. Xuanzang a Chinese monk and traveler wrote in his book about his visit to Kanchi in the mid-7th century. He praised the city that time itself as a prosperous town surrounded by paddy fields and has sacred buildings. He was much impressed with the temples within and around the town. This was his impression much before even the construction was started in the city. Kanchi temples were an attraction for a large network of merchants and communities who were devotional, which made them travel to the city. This city had another name

“Siva Vishnu kanchi”, due to the faiths existing both - Saivism and Vaishnavism. Visitors used to pour in more for the visiting the temples with beautiful shrines and architectural monuments. The Pallavas dynasty rulers were behind the construction of the heritage temples. The dynasty following was of the Cholas, who also were much interested in constructing temples. During the Vijayanagara period, the rulers reconstructed and rebuilt the previously built temples.

Visits of the tourists to heritage locations are of high impact. Huge number of tourists travel to heritage sites. The types of heritage values directly impact economy and social setting - could be religion, culture, etc. The types that are predominant are - focusing on historic value; spiritual value, aesthetic value, socially relevant value and symbolically perceivable value. Looking at Kancheepuram with the said values, the city is in the list of top level heritage category, as it enjoys the niche status.

**Historic Value** - Historical value of any destination acts as a guide to the long past and records how people of the society have developed over a long drawn period of time - countless number of years. It would help us to identify times, traditions and the events that would explain why we are expressing the way we are doing in the present time. It will only be a reaffirmation of the evolving society with the values guiding lives on a broader note.

**Spiritual Value** - the values are supposed to be spiritual which are often referred to specific place/s or object/s, which provides insights on religious, sacred, meditative and yogic practices and the related experiences. Such practices and values mature as cultural values too. When values do not lose their significance despite long time passing by, such values and practices become a part of the culture. They also have relevance to emotion, mindful behaviours, engaging and experiencing.

**Aesthetic Value** - Value in terms of aesthetics has visual element and it is a component defining the style, something environmental and witness-able elements of heritage. It is not limited to the creations of artificial nature. It is relevant to natural elements too. The colours and hues, shapes of varied nature, patterns, the textures, etc. It also includes natural features, processes, the growth erosion, etc.

**Social Value** - Social value is the significance of the place/s which brings an identity, a belonging, and association connecting people, places, and shared socially relevant experiences. It is what is defined as a distinction in communal identity that could be similar but different when seen in terms of values - historically or culturally. These associations are helpful to promote locally relevant values and possibly be represented to create a local pride. It is a working of motivation for practices of communities which are perceivable as intangible forms such as remembrances, oral expression of history, and genealogy concerning a community.

**Symbolic value** - Symbolic value connotes the meaning depicting the power of chronology associated with the heritage value. It is mostly meant to say about the cultural and historical identity of anything of symbolic value and the whole thing carries a pride of being.

Pilgrimage tourism is the most popular purpose for which people travel to places. But some in India and overseas locations are attracted to the Hindu pilgrimage centres and others out of their interest in heritage values - Cultural, & architectural. India is a multi-religious country. The Religions that are followed are Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and Sufizm and each of them has individual pilgrimage centres which are popular and they attract pilgrims belonging to the religion. Religion and Spirituality are the most popular motivations which engage people to travel. All the other types of tourism follow the pilgrimage as the objective. The places, events and the days are important for visiting pilgrimage centres. (Prasad - 2017).

### **Methodology**

The paper has been conceived as a descriptive-qualitative research work. The data needed has been gathered from various research papers, articles, journals, government official websites, online travel agencies portals, and reports of the tourism government organizations. After studying and analysing, the data needed is brought into the paper for discussions to arrive at the conclusions.

### **Discussions**

Heritage Value of any place / site / object can be derived from different factors to judge and to provide necessary information / awareness and guidelines to the tourists who look for travelling

on pilgrimage. They are 1. Antiquity 2. Culture 3. Architecture 4. Spirituality & 5. Religion. When we speak about Kancheepuram as a pilgrimage centre, it is actually the temples in the city and in the close by villages and towns which are a part of the aura of the great city of Kancheepuram. Kanchi of Tamil Nadu, as it is famously called is a heritage pilgrimage city, which can be found as one of the top 3 temple towns among the other temple towns in the state. And Kancheepuram has rich and un-matchable religious & spiritual connections, apart from the other factors that lure the visitors.

## Antiquity

Hinduism is held as one of the principal faiths in the world, with more than billion followers. Hindu is the world's oldest of religions, with full scriptural texts, which date back to 3,000 years. The oral tradition which was responsible for Mahabharata, perhaps, dates back to around 850 BCE, written Sanskrit form. (Britanica - 2024).

Kancheepuram was the seat of Hindu Religious and Spiritual tradition. Kancheepuram - today's Kanchi finds a place in the ancient literature of sanskrit and Tamil. Mahbhashya (2nd Century BCE) referred to Kanchipuraka (the other name then for Kanchi) indirectly. While the works of Tamil Sangam, Ahananuru and Perumpanatruppadai sings in glory of the city of Kancheepuram as the important centre in Tondaimandalam, the epic in Tamil, Manimekalai of 2-3rd century made a mention of Kanchi, where Buddhism as a religion grew. Huen Tzang wrote about Kanchi as a fertile land area, rich, though hot with many monasteries with Bhikkus along side 80 Hindu temples and other Jains' temples. Kanchi thus was filled with religious fervour for centuries. All the religions - Hinduism (Saivism, Vaishnavism), Buddhism and Jainism were adopted by people. Bodhidharma - the prince of Kanchi went on voyage to spread and convert people in China to Buddhism. With the growing Bhakthi movement later by Guru Sankara, Nayanmars of Saivite faith and Alwars of Vaishnavite community, Buddhism dwindled. Saivism and Vaishnavism became the twin religious faiths. It can even today be felt about the strong influence of the religious philosophies of Guru Sankara, Shaivite Nayanmars and the Alwars of Vaishnavite faith right from the 7th century and after that. Kanchi Peetha was also established by Guru Sankara. The history speaks about Thirumular of the 6th Century - a staunch Sahavite, who was followed

by the three nayanmars (saints) Appar, Sambandar and Sundarar, who all sang from their souls about the Shaivite Abode of Kanchi.

The great poet of 6th Century Bharavi composed Kiratarjuniya, a sanskrit work, which means Kancheepuram. The nagareshu Kanchi was hailed as the best city among the best of them. Kanchi was then also one of the several cities considered sacred. It is said that in sacredness and education Kanchi was considered at the same level as Kashi. The added values of glory that Kancheepuram attained were education, literature, monuments and temples and religious philosophy. (UNESCO - 2021).

Antiquity is one of the major factors to be considered for a place to have heritage value. Antique place / site could remain in the minds of generations of people with reverence. And Kancheepuram holds the unflinching identity to support the feature to be reckoned for heritage value.

## **Culture**

To speak about the history of Kancheepuram, it is a busy Indian city & now a district headquarter -dates back to the 3rd century. From the 3rd to 17th centuries Kancheepuram was the seat of power, successively, for the Pallava, Chola and Vijayanagar Empires. The city of Kancheepuram had flourished as a centre of commerce and learning. Successive kingdoms added to the glory of the architectural heritage through temples, Kancheepuram has been an important place of pilgrimage as well, since it is a powerful spiritual centre.

Even today, Kancheepuram is a vibrant city of a thousand temples, and for years it continues to be among the seven most important pilgrim centres of Hinduism. The city has around 45,000 expert weavers who belong to the Devanga and the Pattu Saliyar communities. They are weaving communities highly reputed for their skills in weaving and are known as those migrated in huge numbers from the current state of Andhra Pradesh to Kancheepuram early in the 15th century, The eminence that Kancheepuram attained is also on account of Weaving and being popular as a centre for trade.

The temples of Kancheepuram are vibrant centres for worshipping and seeking blessings of the almighty and the pilgrimage would enable people have spiritual elevation. The temples of Kancheepuram clocks in thousands of pilgrims day in day and day out - all through the year.

- The idols of Gods and the wall murals depict rich culture encompassing spiritual and religious values which the worshipers connect with their souls Considering the rich cultural past, Kancheepuram boasts of exemplary level of repository of arts and crafts.
- The famous Kancheepuram silks are considered important by devotees
- The Priests use the Silks to adorn the deities in all the temples
- Temple architecture and design are the source for designing the printed silk material, acting as an inspiration for the skilled weavers in Kancheepuram.
- The intricate traditional designs of temple gopuram and peacocks are woven using gold Zari.
- Rudrakshams are the holy beads, the images of them are chosen for patterning the Sarees.
- Similarly 'mayilkan', peacock eye, 'kuyilkan', and the nightingale eye are used in designing sarees

Literature of long past becomes culturally relevant. Because of the popular impression of them, they are believed to be belonging to the present too - inherited from the past. Literary works & culture - Literary works of any time period narrates the life style, essential practices, Thought culture and the economic and social aspects of the people living at that time. The major literary works of the time included religious, secular, non-religious literature, and they were:

Poet / Scholar	Literary Work
Raja Mahendravarman	Mattavilasa Prahasana and Bagavatha Ajikkiyam
Dandin	Kavyadharsha
The Saints and the Bhaktas	Devotional Tamil Songs
Perundevanar	Bharathavenba.
Kalladanar	Kalladam.
Unknown	Nandikalambakam about Nandivarman
Nayanmars	Devaram
Alvars	Divyaprabhandam
Perundevanar	Bharathavenba Mahabharatam (tamil translation)

The Pallava kingdom encouraged different religions and languages - Sanskrit, Telugu, Prakrit and Tamil.

Culture of any place is carried on as continuing practices there, which are - the language spoken, the way it is spoken, food eaten, clothing, thought culture and the religious and spiritual values

## **Architecture**

Architecture is a major area of concentration of the successive rulers of Kancheepuram. Architecture excellence was visible brilliance that could be seen in the temple structures - the gopurams, the mandapams, the stupa and other structures like the arch structures, etc. The temples of Kancheepuram stand with pride displaying the excellence and the features are briefed below;

### **The eleven major temples of Kancheepuram**

#### **1. Kailasanatha Temple**

The Pallava king Rajasimha I (700-728 CE) built this magnificent temple as a royal edifice to befittingly adorn his capital Kanchi,

This temple was built by the Pallava architects with a different design, plan and scale. The architect opted for a softer sandstone which was highly friable, instead of using harder granite. Considering the weakness of the sandstone in load-bearing capacity one layer of hard granite at the floor level was used, which was an engineering marvel.

The temple has the sanctum (vimana), and a detached mandapam of the design of the Pallava period. “And another independent shrine was built axially in front, but in a smaller scale. Both the sanctums enshrine the signature Somaskanda panel on the rear wall with faceted linga (dharalinga) in the centre of the shrine. Another important aspect that was introduced was the passage for circumambulation (pradakshinapatha) around the sanctum.”. There are several other architecturally brilliant features which are unique. There was a veritable display of iconography based brahmanical pantheon image for the entire plan of main and the subsidiary shrines including the praakara-wall

All the flanks of the centrally located niches show the idols of different gods - natesa, ganesa, Shiva, Durga on one side and dancing form idol of Lord Shiva; and ganas with bearers of chamara



who were all female. Again the vimana walls of Mahendravarman's shrine are with the depictions which are Bhikshatana, Somaskanda, Samhara thandava on the different sides.

In fact, paintings could be noticed showing that the temple had plastering of lime on the fragile surface of sandstone; embellished with frescos/murals depicting themes of images of Siva in different forms.

Number of other epigraphs could be seen in this temple with the engraving on the pillars of the separate mandapa. "Vikramaditya, having overwhelmed by the beauty of the city and the lavish beauty of this temple, left them untouched. He recorded his munificence, having overawed, that he left the 'riches of the temple to God himself'. This is a unique record and its kind was not to be seen often in the Indian history".

## **2. Piravathesvara temple**

Following the grand royal edifice, Rajashima (700-728 CE) had constructed two smaller temples using sandstone. It is a square shaped two storied vimana structure and the sikhara part is octagonal in shape. It has a sanctum and rectangular shaped mukhamandapa. In the sanctum there is a Linga with circular shaped pitha which became the later additions. Somaskanda is depicted flanked by Brahma on the back wall and together were Vishnu, and other deities.

## **3. Iravathanesvara temple**

The temple has east facing entrance. The two-storied vimana, can be found carrying nagara sikhara. The superstructure is of square shape. "The griva-devatas Siva (east), Dakshinamurthi (south), Vishnu (west) and Brahma (north) are found. The wall of ardhmandapa bears Durga (north) and Ganapati (south)". The garbhagriha has linga and a Somaskanda panel on rear wall.

## **4. Paramesvara Vinnagaram or Vaikuntaperumal temple**

The Parameswara Vinnagaram temple, or Vaikunta Perumal Temple, is a great architectural structure marvel. It is standing a testimony to the Pallava dynasty's cultural affinity and religious patronage under the rule of Nandivarman II (731-796 CE). This temple is an architectural

grandeur on the one side and rich sculpture that narrates history of the dynasty. The temple is celebrated much in his hymns by Tirumangai Alwar.

The three-tiered vimana of the temple is unique. The representation featuring Vishnu in three different postures (seated, reclining and standing) has a narrative of method of worshiping. The temple's innermandapa has sculptural panels that depicts history of the dynasty of Pallava, the legendary ancestors to the rule of Nandivarman II. The panels are a visual chronicle providing translation of the genealogy inscribed on the plates embedded in the stone carvings. The panels offer various aspects of royal life, the ceremonies, like coronations, sacrificial events, warfare, Kingly attire, and the customs followed by the temple. All of them provide wealth of information on the Pallava era, the cultural and religious ceremonies, as well as socio-political surroundings. The temple stands as a testimony to the dynasty and its architectural prowess, religious tolerance and the legacy which was historic revered both by devotees and the historians.

#### 5. Muketswara temple

The Muktesvara Temple, is a Pallava structural marvel in the city of Kanchipuram, of the 8th century CE. The sandstone structure is a three-storied vimana has a circular sikharam with a linga and a Somaskanda panel. Exquisite architecture adorns the mukhamandapam with the exterior walls, with the depiction of deities and scenes. Inscriptions are of the period 759 CE and 1030 CE, of the dynasties of Pallava and Chola, respectively, which attest to their historicity. The temple stands as testament to architectural finesse an expression of rich cultural heritage of the ancient India.

#### 6. Arulala or Varadharaja Perumal temple

The Attiyur Temple of Lord Vishnu, traces back to the 7th century CE. Originally named Attiyur, the deity was carved out of Atti woo. The temple had undergone Chola-era's reconstruction. With punya-koti-vimana and the shrines thereof expanded later. Beyond its architecture, the temple serves as a centre for Vaishnava philosophy. Every forty years, devotees retrieve the Lord Vishnu's image from the temple tank, which signifies cherished religious tradition.

### 7. *Ekambaresvara temple (Thirukachiekambam)*

The Ekambaresvara Temple, sung in praise by Nayanmars, is a symbol of Saivite cosmology as a “Pancha-bhutakshetra” and it represents earth. The temple is the abode for the Valisvara shrine with Siva and Uma. Developed during Chola and Vijayanagar eras, mainly the temple got its gopura built as majestic structure by Vijayanagar's Krishnadeva Raya in 1509 CE, it has the Pallava-era inscriptions and many later ones. This cultural centre has diverse festival calendar, as could be seen in Varadaraja temple, glorifying the rich spiritual and architectural heritage of Kanchipuram.

### 8. *Kamakshi Amman Temple*

The Kamakshi Amman Temple in Kancheepuram is considered a spiritually powerful pilgrimage site. Devi Kamakshi, with divine energies of Saraswati and Lakshmi, is worshipped in this holy site. The spectacular sculptures and also the carvings take the visitors to the Pallava era. The goddess here is a swayambhu and she is said to be in three forms here —Sthula, Sukshama, and Shunya—giving the temple with immense significance. The sanctum here is a symbolic representation of Vedas and the Gayatri mantra. It deepens the spiritual experience of the worshippers. The temple's association with Shakti Peethas adds to the spiritual power of this pilgrimage centre and Rishi Durvasa is said to have done the installation of Sri Chakra installation, which therefore adds to the historical and cultural richness. Kamakshi Amman Temple thus stands as a powerful Spiritual centre for the Hindu community, connecting the devotees to the timeless divine feminine and cultural heritage. (Vṛttāntam - 2023)

### 9. *Jvaraharesvara temple (Less known but important site for visit)*

Although it is small in structure of its time, it is ornamental, and is a distinct example of a temple of the period of Kulottunga III - 1178–1218 CE. It is an interestingly appearing structure due to its ovular plan. The lower part of the gopura appears as of the late Chola time period.

### 10. *Pandava Dootha Perumal Temple*

The Pandava Dootha Perumal Temple in Kanchipuram is of the period of Kulottunga III, has intricately executed decorative style in spite of its modest size which has the unique ovular plan.

Dedicated to Lord Krishna, it's also known popularly as Thirupadagam, which signifies Lord Vishnu's gracious presence. Inscriptions of the time period of Kulottunga Chola I and also of Rajaradhiraja Chola narrate the patronage which is historical. The tall Pandava Thoothar deity, depicts Lord Krishna's Vishwaroopam, standing 25 feet tall, representing his manifestation before the King Dhritarashtra of Dwapara yugam . With a rectangular shaped sanctum providing a four-tiered Rajagopuram, the temple evolved—from Pallava brick origin to Chola and Vijayanagara expansions—chronicling centuries long cultural and religious identity in Kanchipuram

### **11. Yathothkari Perumal Temple**

Tiruvekkaa, of Vishnu Kanchi, Kanchipuram, is one of the oldest temples. It is dedicated to ‘Sonnnavannam Seitha Perumal’. The Perumal appears here in a rare reclining and graceful image of Ranganathaswamy. First built by the Pallavas, the temple had undergone architectural add-ons by Vijayanagara kings, They include two prakaras and also a grand gopuram at the entrance A mention is made in Sangam works, and it bears inscriptions from Chola period - “Parantaka I, Rajendra Chola I, and Kulothunga Chola I.” They highlight the historical and cultural significance for centuries over, in Kanchipura

### **12. Ulagalanda Perumal Temple**

The Perumal deity here is of Vishnu's Vamana avatar, the “Ulagantha Perumal” Temple features a tall 35-ft image of the lord within the precincts of the sanctum. Like the other sacred shrines - Ooragam and Neeragathan, it is spanning 60,000 square feet and boasts a three-tiered structure of the Rajagopuram decorated with seven kalasas. Fifteen inscriptions refer to the period of the Pallavas and Cholas, including Rajendra Chola I & Rajaraja Chola III. The main festivals like Brahmotsavam in Tamil Thai month (January–February) and the Vamana Jayanthi during Avani (August–September) adds to the current cultural richness - a place considered revered site worthy of worship and celebration interested by the devotees for over the centuries.

## **Spirituality**

Kanchipuram, as a divine centre was spiritually adored by devotees for the blessings from Shiva, Vishnu, and Shakti. In the Vaishnavism Hindu theology, Kanchipuram is one of the seven Tirtha (pilgrimage) sites, for spiritual release. The city houses Varadharaja Perumal Temple, [Ekambareswarar Temple](#), [Kamakshi Amman Temple](#), and [Kumarakottam Temple](#) which

are some of major Hindu temples in the state. Of the 108 holy temples of the Hindu god Vishnu, 15 are located in Kanchipuram. (Kanchipuram - 2024)

The capital of the mighty Pallava dynasty from the 3rd century to 9th, had significance for Buddhist and Jain cultures. Before Pallava era, Jainism and Buddhism thrived in Kancheepuram. The ancient prestige earned it to be listed among the seven holy cities for attaining Moksha, celebrated by India's poet like Kalidasa. Jainism's influence continued, Jina Kanchi became a popular Jain area. There are two Jain temple structures of the 6th century of Pallava period. Jina Kanchi, a vital center for Tamil Jains, boasts historic significance documented in inscriptions like the Pallankoil copper plate, revealing details of administration and society. Today, Jina Kanchi houses the Trailokyanatha and Chandraprabha temples, tended by a hereditary Jain family and protected by the State Archaeology Department. (RUCHI PRITAM - 2021)

Kancheepuram stands as a well known Buddhist center right from the 2nd Century BCE, after Poompuhar. It was a flourishing community signified by Xuanzang in the 7th century CE, with personalities like Bodhidharma from Kancheepuram. The city was for a long time pivotal in Buddhist history, with emerging scholars and masters Buddhist traditions. References by Marco Polo, and Korean inscriptions confirm its long Buddhist presence till the 14th century, though there was global decline. Kanchi's tradition persists through art works like statues and the manuscripts. It stays as a treasure trove for people who like Buddhist historical background. They render insights into the rich heritage and immeasurable cultural significance. (**Yogi Prabodha Jnana - 2019**).

<https://www.wayofbodhi.org/buddhism-in-kanchi-tamilnadu/>

## **Religion**

Somewhere, at some point, all religions started as a spiritual process. But in their eagerness to organize, they lost the fundamentals. Let us understand the distinction between religion and a spiritual process. The moment you say you belong to a religion, you call yourself a believer. The moment you say, "I am on a spiritual path," you call yourself a seeker." (Sadhguru-2020)

Knowing about Kancheepuram and the Hindu Religious faith which is the spirit behind this great city of spiritual and religious fervour, there are followers of Vaishnavism & Shaivism. Vaishnavism bloomed at Kanchi and it was Ramanuja, the Vaishnavite acharya of eleventh century who also moved to Kanchi early in his life to learn the basic tenets of Vaishnava from his guru Yadava Prakasa. Tirukachchi Nambi was another great vaishnavite scholar who hailed from Kanchi. Kanchi Peetha established by Adi Sankaracharya and the Kamakshi amman temple which added glory to the Kanchi. The Saiva and Vaishnavite scholars of great religious fervour built a number of temples as abodes of Lord Siva and Lord Vishnu in the city of Kanchi. The Pallava Kings were celebrated patrons of learning, who established the educational institutions. The temples became the centres of higher education where Vedas and Vedangas were taught. (UNESCO - 2021)

Religion played a key role in the culture and history of India and the landscapes in it. And, temples are the reason for them, which made an indelible mark in the hearts and minds of the devotees. Kancheepuram is considered one important seat of Religion in South India. Kanchi bears the meaning 'Brahma' among the trinity of Gods and Puram is 'abode'. There are 108 Shiva and 18 Vishnu temple, which is a pious significance. Kancheepuram is therefore a very important pilgrimage. It is also reckoned as one of the seven highly revered and sacred cities in India for Hindu community. Throughout its history, Kanchipuram remained an important pilgrim site. Today, it is considered one of the seven most sacred cities in India for Hindus. (Veena world - 2022).

### **Leveraging Decentralization to achieve Socio-economic benefits**

**Decentralization** - The Decision to allow adjacent regions of equal importance, but less known could benefit in terms of economic & socially relevant aspects. More people in other closer regions also could get involved in the activities that churn out the benefits thereof. It could be creation of new companies, engaging unemployed to get possibilities to be employed and earn income. The decision would be thus have a positive consequence in better equity and sustainability. Simultaneously the distributed crowds mean slowing down the depreciation of resources due to tourism.

**All Tourist places / sites - those of less known, but important ones would attract people:**

Tourist locations of equal or less known nature also will attract the tourists, by which the increased crowd numbers will get distributed among the other locations also, easing to create possibility for the optimum visitors to enjoy the places of visit better and in a relaxed manner. Especially, the pilgrims need not have to be pushed in the places of worship. The tourists' will have satisfaction of having spent sufficient time focusing on their prayers and understanding the surrounds of the temple and the garba gruhas of other demi gods and their blessings

**Tourist Numbers increase**

Tourist numbers will increase and more people would get opportunity to visit and satisfy their needs.

**Sustainability factors taken care**

Sustainability factors of the tourist sites and the economic and social needs of the people in the town will have been taken care of.

**Summary of study on Pilgrimage trends in the highland areas and also in the river valley areas****Himalaya & Ganga River Valley Pilgrim Centres**

The findings of the research study and its conclusion suggests that though the pilgrimage maintains its popularity in the Himalayas, infrastructure development and practices of sustainability are necessary for its sustenance and the long-term growth.

The study discusses pilgrimage trends in the highland areas and also in the river valley areas, with the focus on domestic and foreign pilgrims' inflow numbers and the noticed trends. In high range areas like Himalayan and Ganga River valley domestic pilgrim numbers were found to exceed foreign pilgrims in numbers, since the factors like accessibility and infrastructure are favourable. Natural conditions, distance of locations due to remote locations, and the infrastructure affect pilgrimage flow trends, due to which some areas face low pilgrim inflow numbrs due to distances

and limited availability of facilities. Haridwar and Rishikesh show high inflows because of good infrastructure.

It is therefore noted that the changing trends on account of climate changes and natural disasters, the pilgrims inflow in highland centres got affected. Where as the numbers increased after 2015. Sustainable tourism development therefore is crucial and there was a need for attention on environment factors, infra-development and policy implementation. (Vishwambhar Prasad Sati 2022).

### **Summary of study on Sabarimala pilgrimage and non-pilgrimage seasons**

The analysis here goes into the economic conditions of the Sabarimala pilgrimage on the residents of Pandalam comparing the pilgrimage with non-pilgrimage seasons. Residents there will be involved in different economic activities while it is the pilgrimage season, which includes small trade, services for the pilgrims accommodation, provision of food / tea / coffee shops, the movement of goods, and other supporting services. This arrangement is a primary requisite which enables the setting of economic landscape to prevail.

When the pilgrimage season is on, residents' in the localities find a marked increase in their earnings looking at different kinds of economic activities mentioned. Mainly, providers of transportation services experience their income to touch the peak which will influence the other activities such as food/tea shop owners and petty traders. Thus income growth significantly goes up and results in the financial well-being of the community, which contributes to improvement in the household amenities and their overall living standards.

Further, the pilgrimage season enables more employment opportunities to emerge, with residents enjoying increased monthly working days compared to the periods when it is non-pilgrimage season. The increase experienced by them in employment supports the local economy and elevate the livelihoods within the community.

Residents see a moderately higher impact of the pilgrimage season working positively on their standard of living, in particular in regard to their food habits, clothing, and their inclination towards savings. Most of the residents report improvements in all these areas of living standards during



the pilgrimage season, which speaks about the socio-economic conditions of them significantly during the Sabarimala pilgrimage for the Pandalam locality.

In totality, the Sabarimala pilgrimage works as an essential economic life support for Pandalam's residents, leading to the income growth, employment possibilities and improved living standards. Understanding the dynamics involved is one crucial element helping policymakers and also the stakeholders to ensure sustainable development and maximization of the benefits as a result of the religious event.

## **Conclusion**

Keeping the objectives of the study chosen for the paper, the study and the discussions were focused on the data concerning the values of the heritage site Kanchipuram city involving several pilgrimage centres within and surrounding the Kancheepuram city having in the periphery, sites of equal importance. The number of pilgrims visiting all the sites are not of optimum level leaving large scope focusing on the less known and less popular sites, having similar level heritage values. Since the dimensions of heritage value - antiquity, cultural, architectural, religious and spiritual values - of the less known pilgrimage sites mostly match with the popular sites in the city, there is a need for intervention from the stake-holders - Tourism companies, local community, Government and the tourist themselves, to come together and work for drawing a plan to unitedly work in order that the appreciable socio-economic development could be achieved, which is the primary objective of decentralization in tourism.

**The detailed discussions in the paper based on the excerpts of the previous studies and findings, chosen for study, clearly indicate two conclusions which are answers to the objectives of this paper:**

- a) The heritage status of Kancheepuram city needs to be reassessed considering the rich heritage resource of this pilgrimage centre, having multiple heritage pilgrimage sites (within the city and close to the periphery of it) equal in their values, yet reckoned lower in the heritage scale.
- b) There are several heritage values which are explained through the dimensions which go to

support the higher and more deserving status of Kancheepuram in the Heritage scale, compared to the current level of reckoning.

- c) Decentralization as a process has huge scope in Kancheepuram city where there are several equally or marginally less of value / importance pilgrimate sites, reckoning which, if the communities, tourism industry, government and the tourists themselves come together to work for increased attention, planning and development of support services, there will be considerably more tourists, who could visit the centre making it a more economically flourishing pilgrimage centre than it is now.
- d) With the implementation of the suggested points of attention, there will not only be more number of Tourists, but also they will be a spread out, providing solutions such as de-congestion & spread of pilgrims; spread of visits by the pilgrims to other sites, enabling their extended stay, thus resulting in increased socio-economic benefits to the local communities living there. Also in the process, sustainability of the resoures could be better taken care of, neutralizing the depreciation of values of pilgrim sites and values thereof.

### **COMPETING INTERESTS**

The authors have no compting interest to declare.

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