



FAMOUS SIVAGIRI PILGRIMAGE OF KERALA: SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE IN THE PRESENT SOCIETY

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INTRODUCTION

Pilgrimage as the name suggests signifies a long journey made to sacred places as an act of religious devotion. One can witness a lot of pilgrim centres in and around the world with certain importance being ascribed to them based upon their relevance pertaining to religion. Pilgrims is often said to go for a pilgrimage to attain spiritual significance, peace of mind, enlightenment etc. It embarks a kind of positive energy among those persons who visits such places every now and then. Typically, it is a journey to a shrine or other location of importance to a person's beliefs and faith, although sometimes it can be a metaphorical journey into someone's own belief. Though there are many pilgrim centres all throughout the world India stands out among those countries in terms of the number of pilgrim centres as well as the pilgrims who arrive here each year to visit the same. While focussing clearly upon Indian pilgrimages and its influence upon the society one can clearly witness it in a more random manner than any other event related with the society. There are a few noted pilgrim centres in India which is famous in terms of the message it conveys to the public and the direct impact it has upon the society. One can find its ultimate culmination in the Sivagiri Pilgrimage in Trivandrum district of Kerala state. Though,

Guru gave permission for such a pilgrimage in 1928, it eventually started only in the year 1932.¹ The place where this pilgrimage takes place is better known as Varkala which is already adorned by the presence of famous Jagannatha Temple near to the famous Varkala Beach, which however is a place of tourist attraction especially in Trivandrum district of Kerala. Sivagiri Pilgrimage as we know it is related with SreeNarayanaGurudevan, the pioneer of Kerala renaissance. This particular pilgrimage is unlike its other counter parts as it tends to provide a message to the public. It contains speeches and discussions on 8 different topics as stated by guru, which is eminent for the development of the society as such. The pilgrimage which ranges for three days from December 30th-January 1st each year takes up a new theme as an action plan to be enacted each year, the later one being the eradication of plastics from the society, ultimately resulting in the concept of plastic free Kerala society. It surpassed its 84th session on December 2016-January 2017.² This particular pilgrimage also celebrated the 100th year of the famous proclamation by SreeNarayana guru : “I have no Caste”, (*EnikkkuJathiyilla*). Furthermore, it also celebrated the centenary of inter caste and inter dining messages as given by Guru himself. In this context the study attains much prominence especially when its popularity among the masses is concerned. Guru, who believed in the dictum “ we don’t belong to a particular caste or religion”, imagined a pilgrimage without the distinction of any caste, religion, rituals, customs or narrow-minded attitude of certain people. Through this he wanted to impart the grandeur of humanity and universal love as a message to the whole world.³

The social implications of such a pilgrimage on the society along with its contemporary influence attains much prominence in the present social scenario as it tends to change the inner crux of the society by spiritually and mentally elevating them through the propagation and practice of doctrines propounded by guru himself. Thus it necessitates a study which makes it feasible enough to know more about the main theme of Sivagiri pilgrimage and the way in which it impacts upon the society in a peculiar manner

SREE NARAYANA GURU AND HIS ACTIVITIES: A SHORT RETROSPECTIVE

SreeNarayana Guru is considered as one of the greatest social reformers of all times. He is the one such social reformer who initiated much changes in the society inflicted by the social evils of society namely caste system, untouchability, gender discrimination educational backwardness etc. He was born on 20th August 1854 by the time he reached the age of 14 he was better known to the public as Nanubhaktha or devotees of Narayana. The most important feature of Kerala

society during the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century was the existence of a deep-rooted caste system. Casteism began to be looked upon as an evil that corroded the very foundation of a society in need of a transformation.⁴ During his time period, the Ezhavas who claimed a rich heritage were subjected to all kinds of social disabilities and just like all other castes they were also reduced to the status of mere slaves in the society. They were even denied the right to earn their livelihood through business or other types of enterprises. Furthermore, they were also denied the opportunity to participate in administration and thereby impact upon the developments happening in the then society. Superiority of Savarnas or the high castes over the low castes was yet another factor which destroyed the social wellbeing and the sense of equality of the society that existed prior to the coming of SreeNarayanaGuru. The representation of Christians, Muslims and Ezhavas in government services, on the other hand, was nominal. According to the 1875 census, these three communities constituted 20.29 per cent, 6.06 and 16.59 per cent, respectively, of the total population of Travancore.⁵ In 1888, Guru consecrated a Siva temple at Aruvippuram. It was a revolutionary act from the view point of the then caste ridden society of Kerala. Through this particular act he challenged the Brahmanical supremacy in religious affairs. This marked the beginning of a silent but highly powerful social and religious revolution. He declared brotherhood and equality for all by founding several temples after this, which were not for any particular caste but for human race.

Another major event related with Guru was the founding of S.N.D.P Yogam in the year 1899. Infact it was founded for the administration and functioning of the establishment at Aruvippuram. Initial name of this organization was 'Vavoottu Yoga'. On April 23rd 1894 P. Parameswaran, brother of Dr. Palpu was appointed as the manager of Aruvippuram temple.⁶ Dr. Palpu and Swami Vivekananda strongly believed that any social reform movement in Indian context should have a religious foundation powerful enough to penetrate the innate beliefs that persisted in the society. Hence, Palpu found it as an ample opportunity to execute those ideas once propagated by Swami Vivekananda, through the organization started by Guru. Vavoottu Yogam assumed its new name of S.N.D.P. Yogam in May 1903. The Yogam also stood for the multiple purposes of spiritual and material education, economic progress and social reform of Ezhava community along with other backward classes. SreeNarayana Guru acted as its life president and Kumaran Asan as its secretary. However, after K.E. 1087, Guru decided never to attend S.N.D.P. meeting sessions directly at the mean time he always kept in contact with the same through relevant messages and advices capable enough to provide the world with desired

prosperity and welfare , if executed in the rightful manner.⁷ The Yogam thus started began to engage itself in several issues related with the society such as Temple Entry Movement, Temperance Movement, Movements for Proper Representation in Public service etc.

Guru wanted to reform the society starting from the grass root level. He vehemently criticized the caste barriers that existed in the society and further advocated against the unnecessary rituals and customs that existed in the society. Subsequently, he campaigned against TalikettuKalyanam(mock marriage), Tirundukuli(festival connected with Puberty),Pulikudi(a festival related with first pregnancy after marriage) etc which hindered the progress of society , by adversely affecting its development. To Guru, physical and mental freedoms are essential for a man to better himself which can only be attained by whipping out the influence of caste in the society.He was totally against the practice of caste based occupations and instead instigated people to pursue those employments based upon their interests. Furthermore, he firmly believed that such an attitude from the part of the society can create much changes in the society in terms of education and profession.Guru can be considered as the one person who transformed the once so called ‘social lunatic asylum’ of Kerala into a well renowned pilgrimage centre.⁸ He gave teachings that negated the age old concept of caste system from the mind of people by stating examples of great men and sages of puranas who were born to low caste women. For example, sage Parasara was born to a pariah lady.SageVyasa was born to a Mukkuva lady. According to him, inter-marriage and inter-dining played a primordial part in removing caste based concepts prevalent in the society. Guru propagated against varna and jati system. Hence asked people to practice cleanliness to remove untouchability which can be considered as an evil effect of caste system.SreeNarayanaGurudevan firmly stood for the destruction of caste and preservation of religion with all its purity which is in turn is useful for developing moral values inside the society.

The process of ‘Sanskritization’was started by Guru for the self-purification of lower caste men. This to him, enabled the lower caste people to receive the rewards of modernization by raising their status to that of Brahmins. In fact, the process involved them to do away with their age old customs, replacing Aryan Gods in the place of tribal ones, and in educating both themselves and their children to get strong socially as well as politically.To further enhance the sanskritization or modernization process of low castes or avarnas, Guru started constructing temples and consecrating Gods like Siva, Vinayaka, Subrahmaniya, Saraswathy etc. in these

places. Furthermore, lower castes were appointed as tantric in these temples which however can be considered as an ample opportunity to educate themselves in ancient scriptures and practices. By and large guru realized the utility of temples, monasteries, hermitages in bringing about a religious revolution among the masses. Besides he also set up institutions and organizations which were parallel to that of Brahmins thus providing an opportunity for the lower castes to elevate their position to that of high castes and thereby actively participate in the concept of Brahmanical Hinduism. Furthermore, he firmly insisted not to spend too much money on unnecessary rituals, decorations and celebration in temples. Moreover, he suggested to construct large rooms which can accommodate more people to hear great speeches instead of other unnecessary extravaganzas.⁹ Through these activities he intended to teach the society lessons of Self-reliance and equality. Guru also believed in the equality of all religions, and considered their purpose as highly divine in nature. He ascribed many qualities to temples such as centre to develop personality, co-operation, social attitude, health etc. He made a major attempt to remove untouchability by propagating the virtues of education as such. Guru believed that the people would attain educational progress through the activities of non-formal educational agencies.¹⁰ He advised the wealthy lower caste people to promote learning through the establishment of schools and industrial centres. In fact, one of the messages of Guru, "Strengthen by organization-liberate by education", speaks in itself about the significance of education in accelerating the overall development of the society. Guru was a strong advocate of women empowerment without which the complete development of the society was impossible. To him, a woman who opts to come out of the seclusion of her prison like house-hold and lead a liberated life, and safeguard her good name and purity, is the best among woman.¹¹ He considered overall individual development as well as upliftment of lower castes or *Harijans* as absolutely necessary to resolve the problems faced by the society. SreeNarayana Guru stated that the development of Hand, Heart and Head were absolutely essential for the wellbeing of the individual. Besides, he also advised lower castes to take professions of high status namely those related with trade and industries. Furthermore, agricultural involvement was also promoted alongside other ways to attain economic progress. Education and industrial development were stated as essential factors for economic development. He was not against mechanisation in industries.

The revolution initiated by Guru can be considered as silent in nature and henceforth played a major role in transforming society with a new foundation laid by Guru on religious and social basis. His activities involved people from all strata of society initiating a revolution from inside

the core. Temple entry movements and School Entry which are capable enough to revolutionize can be considered as the major achievements initiated by Guru. He was very much instrumental in promoting English education among the keralites and also stood for material wellbeing of individual. Besides, the Guru thought that conferences, seminars, and public meetings were powerful weapons to equip ordinary folks with better understanding on their way to progress.¹² Involvement in matters of high social prevalence was a fact which Guru steadfastly believed in and preached the same among the masses and his disciples. Thus, he can be considered as a pioneer socio-religious reformer who initiated a movement which is capable enough to revolutionize the society and thereby impart a sense of modernity to the society free from the clutches of social evils and discriminative Beliefs.

SIVAGIRI PILGRIMAGE AND SREE NARAYANA GURU

Sivagiri as we know it is a pilgrimage centre in Varkala of Trivandrum. Sivagiri mutt was established here in the year 1904 subsequently a prathishta (consecration) of Goddess Sarda was done here by Guru himself. The temple was designed by Gurudevan himself. In fact it was octagonal in shape with windows, which however is absent in other temples of the same Goddess. The idol represented Goddess Saraswathy who is often worshipped for attaining more knowledge and wisdom. The idol of Saraswathy seated on white lotus is the symbol of knowledge blossoming on whiteness or purity. Rituals and practices often done in other temples are not done here instead there is only recitation of hymns in praise of the Goddess. The idol was in fact consecrated on Medam 18th in the day of *chitrapournami* at 2:00 pm past midnight, as scheduled by the Guru himself pertaining to this particular auspicious occasion.¹³ The entire region enjoys the close vicinity of nature in terms of water availability; air free from pollution, a place adorned by the presence of trees and plants, fertile soil, better cultivation etc. The Sarada temple and mutt has now become a unique place of pilgrimage. The Sri Narayana Jayanthi, birthday of the Guru, and the Samadhi day are befittingly celebrated in August and September respectively every year. On these days colourful processions, seminars, public meetings, cultural shows, community feasts and special rituals are held here with much vigour and enthusiasm. A day in the year 1928 while Sree Narayana Guru was camping at Nagampadam temple at Kottayam, it was 3 pm in the afternoon when a couple of his ardent disciples Vallabhasseri Govindan Vaidyan and Kittan writer hesitantly put forward the idea of “ Pilgrimage to Sivagiri” to him. Swamiji enquired them about the real motive behind such a pilgrimage but they

couldn't reply. Hence the Guru himself explained that the aim of Theerthadana (pilgrimage), stating that it must be for the generation of a comprehensive knowledge among the people for their overall development and prosperity. Before giving it his blessings he set out the goals of such a pilgrimage. He said: "Let the pilgrims congregate at the beginning of the European New Year. It should be Dhanu 16-17 in Malayalam calendar. Let the pilgrims observe 10 days' self-purification according to Sri Buddha's principles of five purities (Pancha Dharma) - body, food, mind, word, deed.¹⁴ After that the pilgrims should reach Sivagiri in yellow clothes (white clothes dipped in turmeric water) as the symbol of devotees. Guru insisted in the need for education, cultural and moral purity for this yearly pilgrimage. January 1, the new year day of the European calendar was suggested by Guru himself for the Pilgrimage and it should be henceforth planned to focus attention on eight subjects namely, Education, Cleanliness, Piety, Organised Endeavour, Agriculture, Trade, Handicrafts and Technical Training. Strict instruction was given such that experts on the above mentioned subjects should be invited to lecture on them for the pilgrims to derive some message from it by paying attention to those talks elucidating the relevance and scope of these subjects in the contemporary world. Furthermore, The Guru visualized an ideal unified world in which the difference of religion and, region did not exist.¹⁵ These thoughts pertaining to eight subjects and its practical use in the world, when put to practice by the devotees can lead to prosperity and wellbeing among the masses. According to Guru this should be the main objective of the pilgrimage to Sivagiri.

Though the Guru had permitted the idea of starting the pilgrimage and prescribed the modalities to be observed as early as 1928, it could not be fulfilled till 1933 on account of Swamiji's Maha Samadhi on September 20, 1928, and also due to unfortunate rift between the two organisations - S.N.D.P Yogam and the Dharma Sanghom, both founded by the Gurudev. The S.N.D.P Yogam was registered as a joint Stock Company in 1903 with Sree Narayana Guru as life time President. The first Sivagiri Theerthadanam was held on January 1, 1933. The S N D P unit No.76 of Elavumthitta selected 5 youngsters for the pilgrimage, namely, P.K.Divakara Panicker, P.K.Kesavan, P.V.Raghavan, M.K.Raghavan, S.Sankunni. All the 5 pilgrims wore bright yellow dress, as suggested by Sreenarayana Guru. All the way to Sivagiri, they were reciting 'Swaathanthryagadha' – written by the great poet Kumaraasan. They were teased with the words 'Manjakkilikal' – meaning yellow birds.¹⁶ They never got provoked, with a smile they moved on. The dominant thought in their mind was the mission to fulfill, that is to reach Sivagiri, it was a great responsibility bestowed on their shoulders by ideologies of Sree Narayana Guru

and the trust of other devotees of Guru. Their mission was a great success. The following five devotees followed strict austerity for ten days before embarking on a journey to Sivagiri, started from there on foot on 25-12-1933 and reached Sivagiri on 28-12-1933.

Ever since then pilgrimage continues its success story for the last 84 years. Sivagiri pilgrimage is entirely different from that of other pilgrimages in terms of the message it conveys to the public as well as the mental and spiritual awakening which it entrusts upon the pilgrims who arrive here year after year with much vigour and enthusiasm. The pilgrimage is for three days starting on December 30, continues to December 31 and finally ends in January 1, every year. The procession of pilgrims in yellow garb chanting mantras with one heart and mind carrying the GurudevRiksha, starts from Maha Samadhi on the early morning of December 31 and returns after passing around the town when the "TheerthadanaSammelanam" commences in the specially decorated large Pandal. Eminent personalities from different parts of the country are invited to address the gatherings on the aforesaid eight subjects. Several cultural programmes and variety entertainments are also arranged on these days. Side by side many small scale business also goes in here withal help being rendered by the state government itself.¹⁷ Funding to provide facilities to those arrive here are provided by a joint undertaking of state government central government and other beneficiaries from different areas of excellence. Several dignitaries such as Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. Zakir Hussain, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Shri. Rajeev Gandhi, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Shri. P. Chidambaram, Shri. Lalu Prasad Yadav, Kumari Mayavathi had participated in the various functions held here. The number of participants has been increasing rapidly year after year. In one of the sessions back in 2005, the then Chief Minister of Kerala, Oommen Chandy highlighted the need to mobilise public consensus on ensuring social justice in the education sector.¹⁸ Likewise, the most recent one is also inaugurated by the Honourable Chief Minister of Kerala, Pinarayi Vijayan. During pilgrimage season, one can witness a huge traffic restriction being implemented to check rush among the crowds. According to an official release, only vehicles for which passes have been issued will be permitted to proceed towards Sivagiri from the Mutt junction and Gurukulam junction. Recently, it has been stated that approximately 30 lakh people arrived here in the last year itself. The pilgrims who come here is not only from one region or those from one caste or creed alone but also from various regions of the world belonging to different ethnicity, caste, creed and community. In fact most of those pilgrims who come here are from outside Kerala, mostly from north India and other western countries.¹⁹ They are also conducting studies based on

the same. There are no gender disparities being followed at any level in this pilgrimage. Anyone who arrives here seeking mental peace and spiritual awakening is treated on equal grounds.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

The pilgrimage which started in 1933 upholding the ideals and blessings of Sree Narayan Guru is still going on and recently it completed its 84th session in this context if we look forward to its social implications and contemporary relevance, one can clearly understand that it is a pilgrimage unlike any other with masses arriving here increases at a rampant rate year after year. Guru was the one who modernized the concept of pilgrimage by giving a new meaning to the same. Besides being totally religious Guru aims to provide the pilgrims with an unique opportunity to rediscover oneself in terms of self and society. The major significance of such a pilgrimage is to provide a conglomeration of spiritual(sreyass) and materialistic(preypass) fulfilment to the public. Guru also stated that the main purpose of a pilgrimage is to help us overcome our sorrows and miseries.²⁰ It tends to impart a sense of positive energy to the public. The innate idea of pilgrimage sticks on to the teachings of Guru giving much stress to the eradication of concepts such as casteism, untouchability, gender disparity, unnecessary customs and ritual. Through a scrutinized study of the nature of pilgrimage one can witness the practical enactment of such ideals as propagated by Guru. Pilgrimage is attended by devotees after taking 10 days austerity with a pure mind without any feelings of disparities and prejudices against anyone. Such an endeavour was initiated by sreenarayana guru to overcome disparities and grudge between different religions, which was a concept initiated by Guru himself in one of the conversations with C.V.Kunhiraman.²¹ Every person who arrives here enjoys a sense of unity and harmony among each other. No one is segregated in terms of their caste or occupation. Women are treated on equal grounds along with men. Moreover, people are provided equal opportunities to be a part of the pilgrimage and receive its blessings mentally, spiritually and materialistically. Furthermore, it is clear that they work hard to provide insights into the goals of the pilgrimage as explained by Gurudevan himself by counting on his fingers and he even stated the ways to achieve them. They give speeches each year on these specific eight goals stating about its significant role in human life and the way its scope can be enhanced by facing the challenges of the contemporary world. Furthermore, it spreads the concept of universal harmony which stands in striking contrast to the communal and sectarian feelings as followed by certain people in the present world. The main goals of the pilgrimage as stated by Gurudevan himself

are as follows: Education, Cleanliness, Devotion to God, Organisation, Agriculture. Trade, Handicrafts and Technical training.

While closely analysing each concept or goals put forward by SreeNarayana Guru it is very much clear that he is pointing towards the overall development of the society by reforming an individual from inside out. Take for example the concept of education itself it was a concept that attained great significance even prior to the coming of Guru himself. The verses like *Vidyasarvatravandite*. alternatively; *Vidyasarvatrapoojite* which means knowledge is worshipped everywhere; *Amrutamtuidya*-Knowledge is eternal etc. is evident of the status it attained among the people of ancient Indian society. Guru held a very vivid picture about the purpose of education in the society. He was very much particular about this particular aspect of the society. He was the one Guru who opened the eyes of common men by stating ,” Progress through Education”(‘*VidyaKonduPrabudharavuka*’) to the society. Guru also stated in 1917 that “from henceforth, Schools will be the main centre for worship”(‘*IniPradanaDevalayamVidyalayamayirikum*’).He also firmly believed that even a small portion of knowledge can bring about great changes in the society. In fact, it have the capability to install a sense of morality in the minds of people. On the eve of pilgrimage one of the topics of discussion is education where problems and prospects related with the same are discussed in details. As a result of which plans are being formulated to resolve the issues related with the society with special preference to women education and education among the backward classes.His concept of ‘Spirituality’ was steeped in the traditional Vedanta philosophy. According to him spirituality should be the basis of all social, moral and religious relations among the members of a society.²²The views of Guru always insisted upon adapting new dimensions in educational method by giving much stress to totality of knowledge and English education. SreeNarayana Guru wanted a person who is serious about education to undertake celibacy (Brahmacharya) as a discipline or as a way of life. Furthermore, he wanted education to stand as a backbone of the society by perfecting oneself from within. He considered education as an essential factor in strengthening a society through organisations. Sivagiri pilgrimage has always been a place to discuss on this topic having wide scope globally.Measures were also taken pertaining to the same by establishing schools, colleges and other educational institutions to redress the grievance regarding the problem related with education. Concessions were provided to women and backward classes to actively participate in the education system with the help of funding from organisations including S.N.D.P. and other individual entrepreneurs. As a

matter of fact, The SNDP Yogam had several important objectives among which first, was to administer and manage various temples and monasteries; second, to educate and uplift the downtrodden masses and improve their morality; third, to demand justice and fairness through the power of collective bargaining; and fourth, entirely practical but perhaps surprising coming from a yogi, was an emphasis on economic progress.²³ Thus this part of the society is attaining widespread attention as well as redress of grievances with such talks pertaining to education.

Next topics that are discussed in details is all about cleanliness and devotion to God. Cleanliness is often considered as next to Godliness, because of a reason and it is mainly due to the fact that such a consciousness can elevate the position of an individual personally as well as socially. This consciousness about cleanliness must not only be reflected in personal and social sphere but also in maintaining our surroundings in a clean and tidy manner. Environment and social collective cleanliness is the only way of development of a nation as a whole. An unclean environment and surrounding could not sustain and nurture a healthy population that had to play an instrumental role in eradicating social evils of the society. Guru envisioned this called for purity in mind, body and surroundings. Sanskritization process started by him can also be correlated to this particular ideology of maintaining cleanliness from within which can raise one's status in the society. Likewise in the present world which is highly characterized by pollution, dumping of waste in public areas, unnecessary use of plastics, petro chemical wastes etc one need to follow this particular principle to make advances in the society. In Sivagiri classes are given on the same and they have even taken it as a theme certain times to give a message to the world that it is of contemporary relevance as well and demands attention from the public. For example recently, In one of the sessions of pilgrimage eradication of plastic products was the main theme Besides the classes they also informs people about the ways they need to follow to maintain cleanliness from within as well as outside, self-help groups are formulated , necessary help is also provided to the public to maintain the same in terms of replacement of harmful elements with eco-friendly things, construction of toilets in necessary places was also part and parcel of the plan. As far as devotion to God is considered guru always insisted to worship God with a pure mind His concept of temple and worship was very much different from other reformers and religious leaders. Forecasting these future events only guru answered to one of his disciples: Let them come to Sivagiri at the time of the Europeans' new year. January 1 st . By our reckoning, that is roughly 16 th or 17 th in the month of Dhanu (Sagittarius).²⁴ That's a good time. In fact he only believed that connection must be direct between God and devotee and

should not be allowed to be exploited by intermediaries such as *purohits*, *pujaris* etc. Furthermore, he insisted that one should worship any God by following simplicity. The enactment of such an ideology can be found in the establishment Sarada Devi Temple (Goddess Saraswathy is worshipped here) in Sivagiri where the entire concept of temple and worship is redefined by Guru himself. Moreover, such a quality is absolutely necessary to inculcate social commitments and moral values in the society which in turn acts as a catalyst in the overall development of the society.²⁵

Organization and Agriculture, two criteria where Guru laid much stress since he knows their importance in the then society as well as in the society we all are living right now. After stating that one should progress through education he immediately asks the public to strengthen themselves through organization. So, immediately a doubt lurks in the minds of those who here this at the very first instance since the scope and utility of an organization who stands for the needs of the public is still an utopian concept for most of the public. Especially in a society which is segregated on political and communal lines by various communities and political parties the need for self-help organization is an absolute necessity as far as the basic rights and needs of people remains as a puzzled question among the public. Sivagiri pilgrimage can be considered as a venue where these questions are discussed in details. The action plan is formulated there and enacted through S.N.D.P. yogams²⁶ and other groups who stands only for the basic rights of people in the society transcending the idea of segregation and separatism experienced by people socially, politically, communally and economically. Funds are also being used in a rightful manner to fulfil this purpose in a much more fruitful way. Agriculture attains its place in history right from the ancient times. In fact, it played a major role in developing the society in a certain manner. According to SreeNarayana Guru, "One should do agriculture since it is the backbone of human race, moreover (no), it is the life of the world itself". From this very statement itself it is very much clear about the significance of agriculture to the entire human race. Being a country largely depended on agrarian economy India need to give much importance to sustaining its traditional agricultural activities. Now, a days one can witness facing the challenges of the new world agrarian society is facing much danger. Due to the lack of adequate financial assistance and due to their inability to pay their debts farmers are committing suicides. Furthermore, there is an outflow of agricultural products to urban countries and cities at a considerable cheap rate which again is destroying the entire structure of the agrarian society. This leaves them in a n economically backward condition forever. Sanyasins of Sivagiri along with other officials is

always taking care to promote agriculture among the society free from pollution and other absurdities created by the life in society. Their life pattern itself shows their intimacy with nature. The people in Sivagiri mostly use products created in their own place. Furthermore, they cultivate various types of crops in and around the mutt. The water they use is also pure as it is taken from the river source nearby. Besides this, during the pilgrimage period they are seriously discussing on the problems and other related issues of agrarian sector of the world, where solutions are subsequently charted out and used in practical life. Once, as demanded by guru himself, the pilgrimage committee arranged a conference on 'Agriculture and Trade', which was however, was inaugurated by the then Kerala Agriculture Minister P.J. Joseph.²⁷ Thus, Sivagiri is sending a message to the public stating about the relevance of preserving agrarian sector in the present society and the way it can resolve issues of the society, if utilized in the rightful by giving importance to it.

Trade, Handicrafts and Technical training are said to be the last three goals of Sivagiri pilgrimage. Trade in the recent times is acting as the backbone of the economy in the society. We are living in an advancing world where new products are launched each day into market, with high specifications. Those products which are being launched is marketed through globalization and other ways of marketing strategies that are being adapted for better trade and commerce related activities. In the vicinity of such advances in the field of trade, one should not forget about following ethics in trade standards that is the message Guru as well as pilgrimage is sending to us in details. Trade is considered as the only way to uplift the condition of the downtrodden and enhance their livelihood which in turn can elevate their status to that of so called high castes economically. This is also a fact of discussion in the venue of pilgrimage, besides they also provide ample opportunity in these 3 days to do business in a small scale.²⁸ At the meantime, Guru and his teachings is always against the buying and selling of alcohol and other harmful items which are totally harmful for the society. One of the main themes of recent yearly session was a kerala free from alcoholism. Lectures were conducted on the same and measures were formulated to whip out this social awkwardness from the society itself. The concept of handicrafts attains much importance when we tend to understand that the concept of 'khadi' came into the mind of Gandhi when he visited Sree Narayana Guru in kerala, at the same time when he arrived here Guru was on a venture to propagate the idea of self-sufficient society with the help of entrepreneurship, cottage and small scale industries. Handicrafts is that concept which have a direct impact upon the lower sections of the society as they were abandoned from

'white collar jobs' almost completely. Guru also stated that one could not sustain in a society with education alone, in order to survive they need to support themselves with some jobs. This is the exact area where handicrafts and the related activities came in handy. Even now Indian handicrafts crave the attention of foreigners who visit here every now and then. Furthermore, it had also become a part and parcel of tourism as well. One should be thankful to Guru for putting forward such an idea which has its impact upon the future of India and its economy. Sivagiri pilgrimage also promotes this in a wide scale through promotion of works done in that way and suggesting measures to further enhance its scope in future trade market. Technical education and mechanisation is the last but not the least goal of Sivagiri pilgrimage it imparts a kind of tool in the hand of advancing world to progress at a rapid rate. Even when we look at any invention it is very much clear that it is the net result of a scientific invention. Hence, at the mean time it accelerates development and helps people to keep up with the challenges offered by the advancing world. Hence, Sivagiri pilgrimage takes special care to invite persons who are proficient in various fields to impart new knowledge and their technicalities to the world. A society which is technically aware can advance at a rampant rate than its other counterparts.

Sivagiri pilgrimage is a venue to impart cultural and economic progress as once said by Guru. Though it provides opportunity to some to do small business there and adorns the pilgrimage with cultural programmes and other culture related activities from time to time as one could not separate culture from the society, if one is like a certain way in the society then it is mainly because of his culture. Likewise, 5 purities observed for the pilgrimage is also of high significance as it is modelled from other religions such as Buddhism stating the purity of Body, mind, food, word and action. Guru here states that body purity is of utmost importance followed by the purity of mind and word. One can also witness its practical enactment all throughout the pilgrimage. Thus, Sivagiri pilgrimage is stated to contribute a lot in creating national amity and national integration.²⁹ * Furthermore, it is also a clear depiction of secularism adopted by Guru as well the concept for which the whole pilgrimage is created, that is to create solidarity and unity among the society based on the concept of universalism and humanity, where devotees who arrive here attain mental and spiritual awakening along with the knowledge to advance in a materialistic world.

CONCLUSION

While concluding it is feasible enough to state that Sivagiri pilgrimage is unlike any other pilgrimages in terms of the message it conveys to the public as well as the sense of modernity it imparts upon the people. Profound knowledge on 8 goals already set forth by Guru is imparted to the public and that also by experts in the concerned fields of study. It also acts as a venue to experience various types of cultures and religious austerity among the masses who visit here year after year, the recent one being 30 lakh people in 2016-17 pilgrimage. Auspiciously, Sree Narayana Guru Jayanthi and Sree Narayana Guru Samadhi are considered as public holidays in Kerala.³⁰ Furthermore, it discusses issues related with social religious political and economic state of the nation and states effective measures to overcome the issues related with the same. Furthermore, it is highly instrumental in providing profound knowledge on scientific inventions which however is beneficial for the society. Funding is done by state central governments along with various organizations including that of S.N.D.P. Approximately, 1 crore turnover of money is there each year with some 20 to 30 lakh as remnant balance which is again utilized for other humanitarian purposes.³¹ According to the authorities certain suggestions such as commitment on simplicity, re-modification of the concept based on the modern challenge, digitalizing and recording talks, facility enhancement based on requirements etc. need to be enacted to make it more better and socially oriented in the coming years which is trying to enhance people both spiritually and materialistically.

ENDNOTES

1. Avyyananda(ed.),*SivagiriMaziga: Sreenarayana Dharma SanghamTrustinteMukhaPathram*(mal.),Varkala,2015,p.7.
2. Interview conducted with Visalanandha Swami at SivagiriVarkala on April 6th 2017
3. V.V.Vijayan,*GuruvinteTheerthadanaSankalpam*(mal.),Palakkad,2013,p.8.
4. P.Chandramohan, *Developmental Modernity in Kerala NarayanaGuru,SNDPYogam and Social Reform*,New Delhi,2016,p.11.
5. Census of Travancore,1875, pp.255-256.
6. P.Subadhra,*SreeNarayana Guru Mahapravachakanayamaitreyan*(mal.),Kottayam, 2016,p.40.
7. KottukoyikkalVelayudhan,*SreeNarayana Guru SamagravumSampurnavumayaJeevaCharitram* (mal.),Kootayam,2007.p.181.

8. Sachidhanandaswami, *SreeNarayana Guru Darsanam 21-am Nuttandil*(mal.), Varkala, 2000, p.52.
9. SreeNarayana Dharma Prakasini, *GuruVeekshanamMasika*(Magaz.), Vol.4, Issue3, March 5, Thiruvananthapuram, 2017, p.33.
10. C.Meera, *SREE NARAYANA GURU A Pioneer Educationist*, SIVAGIRI THE VOICE OF SREE NARAYANA DHARMA SANGHOM TRUST(Quarterly Magazine), Voi.8, Issue 3, Jan-March, Varkala, 2016, p.35.
11. SathyabhaiSivadas, *TRIBUTES TO THE WOMAN From a Great Guru*, SIVAGIRI THE VOICE OF SREE NARAYANA DHARMA SANGHOM TRUST(Quarterly Magazine), Voi.8, Issue 3, Jan-March, Varkala, 2016, p.26.
12. C.Meera, *op.cit.*, p.26.
13. Sachidhananda Swami, *op.cit.*, p.37.
14. Interview with an inhabitant conducted at SivagiriVarkala, May 8th, 2017.
15. Rhithambharananda, *Inter Religious Understanding*, SIVAGIRI THE VOICE OF SREE NARAYANA DHARMA SANGHOM TRUST(Quarterly Magazine), Vol.9, Issue 1 & 2, July-Sept/Oct-Dec, Varkala, 2016, p.15.
16. Interview with Swami Visalanandha conducted at SivagiriVarkala, May 11th, 2017
17. Field study conducted at SivagiriVarkala on 09-05-2017
18. The Hindu, December 31st, 2005, p.1.
19. Field study conducted at SivagiriVarkala on 31-12-2016
20. V.V. Vijayan, *op.cit.*, p.7.
21. AsokanCharuvil, *Guru 'Ivide' yundu*, SivagiriSreenarayanaDharmSanghamTrustinteMukhaPathram, Issue 38, Vol.4, Varkala, April, 2016, p.14.
22. C.Meera, *op.cit.*, p.37.
23. J Indira, Rajeev Sreenivasan, *Sri Narayana Guru : A Short Biography*, Language Institute, Kerala, 2003, p.24.
24. *Ibid.*, p.31.
25. Field study along with Interview conducted in SreeSarada Devi Temple in Sivagiri Varkala on 0-01-2017.
26. Yogams , otherwise known as committees or organizational groups are usually formulated with a special purpose , which can be political, religious, social or economical in nature. It

can also be a combination of the above said criterions. In this context such a ‘yogam’ is constituted to address certain social obligations.

27. Malayala Manorama, 2nd January 1987, p.6.
28. Interview conducted with seasonal merchants of Sivagiri Varkala dated 30-12-2016.
29. T. Bahaskaran, *Theerthaana Annim innim*(Mai.), Sivagiri, p.16.
30. General Administration (Coordination) Department ., *Kerala Gazette.*, , Government of Kerala, 2015.
31. Financial reports of the Committees substantiated by the verdicts of pilgrim centre authorities, 2016-17.