Tourism, fundamentally an economic activity has emerged as a fast growing industry all over the world. Tourism is not an isolated activity at present time, but a group of industries working together, complimentary to each other, spread over many sections of the society. Tourism generates employment opportunities and livelihood to millions and millions of people, creates foreign exchange, promotes and develops national integration, balanced regional development, rejuvenate the art and culture, melt down prejudices and suspicions that exist between different nations and enhance international peace. Pilgrim tourism is one of the fastest growing tourism in the world. In pilgrim tourism, the dimension of religion forms the basis of tourism by offering the reward of purification of the soul and attainment of objectives related to the problems of daily life.

Tourism in India is developing at a faster pace due to several reasons. India, a land of geographical diversity, is blessed with a long history of rich civilization and culture. It is a potential tourism paradise with a wide variety of attractions ranging from beautiful beaches, hill stations, fort, monuments, art, festivals, forest and religious centres. The popularity gained by Kerala tourism in the global market is attributable to geographical diversity, cultural heritage, social security and peace. Famously called the “God’s Own Country”, Kerala has been successful in creating a place of its own in the tourism sector.

Kerala is blessed with world renowned pilgrim centres such as Sabarimala, Malayattoor, Cheraman Masjid and a host of other famous pilgrim centres which are a source of attraction to the tourist community. Apart from being a tourist destination, the most striking feature of Kerala is that it is India’s most literate, advanced peaceful and cleanest State. Pilgrimage is a major part of its cultural tourism in Kerala. Though thousands of pilgrims had been visiting these centres from time immemorial, the potential of these centres as tourist destinations had not been recognized properly and no effort had been taken to tap and market the potential of pilgrim tourism so far.
With the immense developments in the transport and communication sectors, increase in the disposable incomes and various other reasons, the number of tourists visiting these centres has multiplied over the years. But the tourists who come to these destinations are seldom satisfied with the infrastructural and other facilities as well as services provided to them. In order to reap full benefits from pilgrim tourism, plans, policies and strategies have to be formulated at the administrative level. This study “Pilgrim Tourism in Kerala – An Evaluative Study” focuses on problems faced by pilgrim tourists and host community as well as the prospects of pilgrim tourism in the state of Kerala. The study identifies the factors that attract potential tourists to pilgrim centres of Kerala, reviews the facilities and services offered to the tourists in each of the main pilgrim centres and evaluates the tourist satisfaction level, besides assessing the functioning of DTPC and other agencies involved in the promotion of pilgrim tourism in Kerala. Besides it evaluates the social, economic and environmental impact of pilgrim tourism from the perspectives of pilgrims as well as host community by ascertaining whether significant differences exist between centres or religions regarding various aspects of pilgrim tourism.

Using a combination of stratified, judgement and purposive sampling, the study divides the whole population of Pilgrims to Kerala and host community into 3 strata, viz. South, Central and North Zone. A judgement sampling among selected three centres each from each zone to represent most popular ones in terms of number of pilgrims and revenue generated was applied. Purposively due importance was given to religious representation as well as geographical significance and equal representation of pilgrims/ members of host community at each centre were ensured. Data collected, using two separate structured questionnaires, from 432 pilgrims (48 from each centre) and 270 members of host community (30 from each centre) has been analysed to test hypothesis that there are no significant differences either between centres or between religions regarding cost of facilities, infrastructural support, negative aspects of pilgrim tourism and environmental impact of pilgrimage. Applying a vivid set of statistical tools such as tests of association, ANOVA, dimension reduction in the form of Principal Component Analysis etc. the study highlights the drawbacks in promotion of pilgrim tourism in the state of
Kerala before suggesting remedial measures the policy makers should look forward in tapping the potential of the state.

**Keywords:** Tourism, Tourists, Pilgrim Tourism, Pilgrimage, Pilgrim Centres, Host Community, Infrastructure Facilities, Environmental Impact, Cost of Living Index