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**PILGRIMAGE TO SABARIMALA—
HUMAN PROBLEMS AND ECOLOGY
(A Preliminary Report)**

**MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT
AND FORESTS**

**PUBLIC ACCOUNTS
COMMITTEE
2003-2004**

SIXTY-THIRD REPORT

THIRTEENTH LOK SABHA



**LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI**

SIXTY-THIRD REPORT
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE
(2003-2004)
(THIRTEENTH LOK SABHA)
PILGRIMAGE TO SABARIMALA HUMAN
PROBLEMS AND ECOLOGY
(A Preliminary Report)
MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS



Presented to Lok Sabha on 5.2.2004

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LOK SABHA SECRETARIAT
NEW DELHI

February, 2004/Magha, 1925 (Saka)

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COMPOSITION OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

(2003-2004)

Sardar Buta Singh

—

Chairman

Lok Sabha

- *2. Shri Haribhai Chaudhary
- 3. Shri Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi
- 4. Shri M.O.H. Farook
- 5. Dr. Madan Prasad Jaiswal
- 6. Shri Raghunath Jha
- **7. Shri Bhartruhari Mahtab
- 8. Dr. K. Malaisamy
- 9. Dr. M.V.V.S. Murthi
- 10. Shri Rupchand Pal
- 11. Shri Mohan Rawale
- 12. Dr. Nitish Sengupta
- 13. Shri Raghuraj Singh Shakya
- 14. Shri Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh
- 15. Shri Kirit Somaiya

Rajya Sabha

- 16. Shri Santosh Bagrodia
- 17. Shri Prasanta Chatterjee
- 18. Shri K. Rahman Khan
- 19. Shri Bachani Lekhraj
- 20. Dr. Alladi P. Rajkumar
- ***21. Shri S. Viduthalai Virumbi
- 22. Prof. Ram Gopal Yadav

SECRETARIAT

Shri P.D.T. Achary

—

Additional Secretary

* Sh. Haribhai Chaudhary, MP resigned w.e.f. 9th May, 2003 and re-elected w.e.f. 30th July, 2003.

** Sh. Bhartruhari Mahtab, MP. elected w.e.f. 30th July, 2003 *vice* Sh. Chinmayanand Swami ceased to be a Member on his appointment as Union Minister w.e.f. 24th May, 2003.

*** Sh. S. Viduthalai Virumbi, MP nominated on 15th December, 2003 *vice* Sh. C.P. Thirunavukkarasu, MP retired w.e.f. 6th October, 2003.

INTRODUCTION

I, the Chairman, Public Accounts Committee having been authorised by the Committee to present the Report on their behalf, do present this Sixty-Third Report of PAC (13th Lok Sabha) on “Pilgrimage to Sabarimala—Human problems and ecology”.

2. This Preliminary Report is based on the findings of the Public Accounts Committee during their Study visit to Kochi and Sabarimala Shrine in October, 2003 and January, 2004.

3. The Committee considered and finalised this Report at their sitting held on 3 February, 2004. Minutes of the sitting form Part II of the Report.

4. For facility of reference and convenience, the recommendations of the Committee have been printed in thick type in the body of the Report and have also been reproduced in a consolidated form in Appendix to the Report.

5. The Committee would like to express their thanks to the Officers of the Ministry of Environment & Forests for the cooperation extended by them in furnishing information to the Committee.

6. The Committee would also like to express their thanks to the Travancore Devaswom Board and Forest Officials of the State Government of Kerala for their cooperation in furnishing vital information to the Committee.

NEW DELHI;

4 February, 2004

15 Magha, 1925 (Saka)

SARDAR BUTA SINGH,

Chairman,

Public Accounts Committee .

PILGRIMAGE TO SABARIMALA—HUMAN PROBLEMS & ECOLOGY

A PRELIMINARY REPORT

CHAPTER I

Introductory

1.1 The Public Accounts Committee of Parliament undertook a study visit to Cochin and certain other places in October, 2003. The Committee had selected Para 3.1 of the Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (Report No. 5 of 2002) relating to the Ministry of Environment and Forests for the on-the-spot study during its visit to Cochin. This para *inter-alia* dealt with the survey on the faunal resources in the various eco-systems of the country with particular reference to the status survey of endangered species conducted by the Zoological Survey of India. The faunal survey covered the Western Ghats region also. The Committee desired to look into the reasons for the failure on the part of the Zoological Survey of India in completing the surveys which are of crucial importance for the preservation of bio-diversity in the country particularly in the tropical rain forests in the Western Ghats and the biosphere reserve of Nilgiri which includes Kerala.

In the course of its correspondence with the Ministry of Environment and Forests relating to the above subject for the on-the-spot-study, the Ministry informed the Committee through a written communication that the Zoological Survey of India did not conduct any survey of the faunal resources or endangered species in the Periyar Wild Life Sanctuary. It was a surprising information because the Periyar Sanctuary in Kerala is said to shelter a wide variety of wild life and is famous for its bio-diversity. The Committee, therefore, wanted to look into the reasons why such a survey has not been conducted by the Zoological Survey of India. In the course of this study, a serious issue was brought to the attention of the Committee relating to the pilgrimage to the world famous Sabarimala, located in this Sanctuary and the controversy relating to the impact of this pilgrimage on the eco-system of the sanctuary. Realizing the importance of this issue, the Committee decided to examine it in all its dimensions.

1.2 The Periyar Tiger Reserve in Kerala was created in 1978-79 as a centrally sponsored scheme of the Government of India which has a total area of 777 Sq. Kms. It is in this Reserve that the famous pilgrim centre, Sabarimala is situated. It is believed to be a temple of great antiquity and has become internationally known as a unique pilgrim centre which is visited by millions of devotees during the festival season beginning from 15th November and ending on 14th January every year. The uniqueness of this hill shrine lies in the fact that it is open to people of all faiths and according to the temple authorities people of other faiths also do visit the shrine every year in large number. As per the information given to the Committee by the Travancore Devaswom Board, a statutory authority created by an Act of the Kerala Legislature and entrusted with managing the affairs of the Hindu temples including the Sabarimala shrine in the

erstwhile State of Travancore, as many as 20 million devotees from all parts of the country visited this temple during the pilgrimage season (61 days) in 2002-2003. The Board has also informed the Committee that the annual increase in the number of pilgrims is around 20% and, thus, it is estimated that about 30 million pilgrims visited the shrine during the festival season in 2003-2004.

1.3 This massive inflow of pilgrims into the temple area has created serious problems of spatial and logistical management resulting in unimaginable miseries to the devotees. It has been brought to the notice of the Committee that there is a continuing conflict between the Devaswom Board and the Ministry of Forest, Government of Kerala on the land use in the temple area. According to the Devaswom Board authorities, the Forest Department of the Government of Kerala has refused to permit any kind of development in and around Sabarimala which has aggravated the problems of the pilgrims who are deprived of minimum basic amenities. But the Department of Forest, Government of Kerala has taken the position that the additional forest land demanded by the Board for augmenting the basic amenities for the pilgrims has been sanctioned.

1.4 The Committee in its meeting held in Cochin on 20th October 2003 heard the representatives of the Devaswom Board and the Government of Kerala as well as the representative of the Union Ministry of Environment and Forest and directed them to sit together and find a workable solution to the problems being faced by the Pilgrims at Sabarimala and report back to the Committee. The Committee also decided to visit Sabarimala during the peak season in order to get a closer view of the problems of the pilgrims. Accordingly the Committee reached Sabarimala on 13th January, 2004 and stayed on there till the morning of 15th January. While at Sabarimala, the Committee held a meeting with the representatives of the Government of Kerala as well as of the Devaswom Board. The Minister in charge of Devaswom, Government of Kerala (Shri G. Kartikeyan) also attended the meeting. A detailed discussion took place on the issue of lack of basic amenities and the inhuman conditions in which the pilgrims stay at the temple precincts and the surrounding areas. The environmental issues relating to the pilgrimage also came up for discussion.

1.5 In view of the seriousness of the problem involving the inflow of more than a crore of pilgrims and the inability of the authorities to provide the basic amenities to them due to various reasons and the apprehension of this Committee that the present conditions at Sabarimala may lead to some great tragedy, the Committee decided to bring it to the urgent notice of Parliament through a preliminary report on the subject. Accordingly under Rule 276 read with Rule 277(2) of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha, this report has been prepared. This report contains the brief description of the problem and the preliminary observations of the Committee. The detailed analysis of the issues and the findings and final recommendations will be contained in the final report which will be prepared and presented later. The purpose of presenting this preliminary report is to draw the immediate attention of Parliament and the Government of India to the serious problems being faced by the millions of devotees who visit Sabarimala every year and urge the State agencies to take immediate steps to ameliorate the inhuman conditions prevailing there.

The Problems

2.1 Shri Dharma Sasta temple at Sabarimala in the State of Kerala where the Presiding deity is Lord Ayyappa is situated on a hilltop deep in the dense forest which is a part of the Western Ghats and is over 200 kms. from Cochin. This ancient hill shrine has attracted pilgrims over many centuries. In the earlier stages, the number of pilgrims was less due mainly to the lack of road communications and hazardous nature of the trek through dense forest which was infested with wild animals. But as per a report submitted to the Committee (Sabarimala Enclave Management prepared by the School of Sciences, Mahatma Gandhi University, 2001) by the Department of Forest, Government of Kerala, there has been a phenomenal increase in the number of pilgrims during the past 40 years. According to the estimate submitted to the Committee by the Devaswom Board about 3 crores of pilgrims have visited the temple during the festival season beginning from November 15, 2003 and ending on 14th January, 2004. Although the deity is worshipped as per the Hindu rituals, people of other faiths also perform pilgrimage to this shrine which makes it a unique pilgrim centre. In terms of the number of pilgrims visiting this temple, Sabarimala is one of the major pilgrim centres in the world.

2.2 The temple is accessed by a foot path starting from the foot hill Pampa which gets its name from the river flowing around it. This river has great spiritual association with the holy shrine at Sabarimala. The distance between the foothill and the temple located at the top of a steep hill is around 5 kms which is covered on foot by the pilgrims. According to the report mentioned above the total area available at Pampa which is a base camp is only 10 acres and during the peak season this area becomes an ocean of humanity. Similarly, the total area available at the temple site (Saanidhanam) is only 50 acres which has to hold a few lakhs of devotees every day during the season.

2.3 The Committee during the journey up the hill saw thousands of devotees sleeping on hard ground in the forest in the night without any protective roof all along the hilly footpath. At Sannidhanam, it was a shocking sight to see countless number of people of all ages curled up pressing against each other and sleeping on the hard ground and the Members of the Committee had to literally walk over their bodies. On enquiry, it was found that these pilgrims have been staying there for a number of days in this condition. The Committee learnt that there were no toilet facilities or clean drinking water or hygienic food available to them. Every inch of available space around the temple was occupied by the devotees, many of whom have come from different States. The whole area was stinking as it was not possible to undertake any kind of cleaning of the open drains with the extremely limited infrastructure available there. Accommodation being extremely limited in the temple precincts each room was occupied by 40 to 50 people. This was disclosed before the Committee by Shri Selva Ganapaty, a Member of Parliament who was a pilgrim and who attended the meeting as a special invitee.

2.4 Two extremely rough, stony and steep tracks connect Pampa and Sannidhanam. Most of the pilgrims trek barefoot along these tracks. These tracks are too narrow to contain the heavy flow of pilgrims. The Committee found that railings have been put up only on some stretches of the track and some very steep stretches have no railings at all. These railings are very useful and essential for the pilgrims to hold on to while climbing up and down the steep slopes. In the absence of these railings, there is always a danger of old men and children falling. A fall can be very fatal indeed. On enquiry as to why the railings have not been put up all along the track, the Committee was told by the Devaswom Board officials that the Department of Forest has prohibited further fixing of the railings on the ground that it will obstruct the movements of elephants and leopards. The Committee in its meeting at Cochin on 20th October, 2003 had asked the officials of the Forest Department of the government of Kerala whether they have ever seen any leopard or tiger on these tracks. But, they were non-committal in their reply.

2.5 The Committee has been informed by the Devaswom authorities that their requests for permission to widen these tracks have been turned down by the Department of Forests on the ground that it will lead to destruction of forest. The Committee found long queue of pilgrims standing in hot sun. The temple authorities informed the Committee that during the peak season the pilgrims have to stand in the queue for 12 to 18 hours in the hot sun without any toilet facility, water or food or any protective roof. A proposal to construct a queue complex to avoid this situation has reportedly been rejected.

2.6 The Committee did not find any toilet facilities anywhere along the hill track. It is amazing that such elementary facilities have not been provided on this route which is used by millions of pilgrims. It is particularly distressing to note that no such facility exists for women pilgrims either. Besides, there is no proper arrangement for the supply of clean drinking water on the route. The festival season falls in summer and the sun is extremely hot in the hills. The demand for water is very high, but the authorities have not been able to make any worthwhile arrangement to supply clean drinking water to the pilgrims. As a result, they depend on poor quality bottled and other water available in the makeshift stalls which have sprung up at different points on the route at exorbitant rates. This causes serious health hazards.

2.7 The Committee has also been informed that adequate medical facilities are not available either on the route or at Sannidhanam. Climbing the hill is a very arduous job which can aggravate heart conditions, but since the facilities for immediate medical care are not readily available on the route serious problems can arise.

2.8 It has been brought to the notice of the Committee that the major source of water supply is the river Pampa which gets extremely polluted during the festival season. The pilgrims take a ritual bath in this river before climbing the hill. But the huge mass of pilgrims who converge at Pampa use the river for cleaning themselves after easing themselves in the vicinity of the river. They are compelled to do it because adequate toilet facilities are not available in this area. The same water which gets polluted with human excreta and other filth due to mass defecation of pilgrims in and around the river is said to be used for cooking as well.

2.9 The representatives of the Travancore Devaswom Board informed the Committee that the development of Sabarimala has suffered on account of its inclusion in the Periyar Tiger Sanctuary. Once it became a part of the Sanctuary, the strict law of conservation came into force and the forest authorities do not allow any kind of repairs or maintenance work in the temple area. On being asked about what remedial measures could be thought of, the Board representative stated that the only remedial measure possible is to delink Sabarimala from the Sanctuary. They also said that their views were ignored when the decision was taken to include Sabarimala in the Sanctuary. The representative of the State Government did not make any comment on the proposal made by the Travancore Devaswom Board.

2.10 The Committee asked the representative of the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests at the meeting held in Cochin on 20th October, 2003 whether Sabarimala falls within the core of the Sanctuary. He replied that it does not fall in the core, but is situated in the buffer zone.

Different Perspectives

3.1 The Committee in its discussions with the State Government officials and the Devaswom Board authorities as well as through its own observations of the ground situation tried to understand the totality of the problems of Sabarimala and the respective viewpoints of these two principal players in respect thereof. The officials of the Devaswom Board led by its President, Dr. N. Babu presented two sets of papers to the Committee. The first note submitted to the Committee on 20th October, 2003 at Cochin contains the legal status of the Board, a brief history of the temple at Sabarimala and the nature of the problems being faced by the pilgrims. This note also contains a request that the holy Sabarimala shrine and its surrounding areas should be delinked from the Periyar Sanctuary for the proper development of Sabarimala. The Annexes 1 and 2 attached to this note respectively contain details of the forest land which is under the possession of the Board at present and the land which it has demand.

3.2 The note reads as follows:

**Notes submitted before the Hon'ble Public Accounts Committee
of Lok Sabha on 20-10-2003**

TRAVANCORE DEVASWOM BOARD is an autonomous body constituted under the Travancore Cochin Hindu Religious Institutions Act XV of 1950. It is entrusted with the task of administering 1208 temples including the Holy Sree Sabarimala Dharma Sastha Temple. Constitution of the Board was based on a covenant entered into by The Maharaja of Travancore (an erstwhile princely State) in May 1949, which was concurred and guaranteed by the Govt. of India.

Sree Sabarimala Dharma Sastha Temple, situated amidst the reserved forest area in Ranni Taluk of Pathanamthitta district is internationally famous, attracting millions of pilgrims from all over India and abroad. The unique feature of this temple is that it is open for worship to people of all faiths irrespective of caste, creed or social status. This, indeed, is a very rare and unusual instance of communal harmony and excellent example of real national integration. This temple is situated at a height of 467 metres above MSL in the dense forest area which is the southern most part of the Periyar Tiger Reserve.

The Maharaja of Pandalam, a small erstwhile kingdom, is believed to have close relation with Lord Ayyappa. During the time of Tippu's invasion, the Pandalam Raja surrendered his entire kingdom including Sabarimala to the King of Travancore and thus this sacred temple and the entire surrounding forests of 18 hills ultimately came to the hands of the Travancore Devaswom Board. Prior to promulgation of the (Conservation) Act of 1980, the Board could provide adequate facilities to the lakhs of pilgrims trekking to the Holy Hills. But thereafter the situation has changed against the

interests of the pilgrims. The State Forest Department, time and again, does not even consider the legitimate rights and privileges of TDB with regard to utilization of even the area under the title of the TDB (13.35 acres) not to mention the area under lease and possession (168.35 acres) and the area under permission (63.00 acres).

During the Malayalam Era 1178 (2002-03AD) the number of devotees who had darshan of the Lord exceeded 3 crore. The TDB found it extremely difficult to cater to their minimum, basic requirements and facilities with regard to sanitation, drinking water, shelter etc. Thus the TDB, the Central & State Governments failed miserably in fulfilling, their moral responsibility to care the millions of devotees. Thousands of them had to wait in long queues for 12 to 18 hours in hostile trekking slopes, open to sun and rain. It is the earnest desire of the TDB that such misfortunes do not recur. In order to make this possible, a very lenient attitude towards the pilgrims is essential on the part of the forest authorities. At the same time the welfare of the wild lives has also got to be given due consideration. In order to dovetail both these requirements, it is imperative to suitably delink the minimum required area for Sabarimala development, from the Periyar Tiger Reserve. While estimating this 'minimum' area, it may kindly be borne in mind that there is a steady 15% increase of devotees year after year and judicious planning for atleast the next 50 years be formulated.

In this context, it may kindly be recalled that despite concerted and continuous efforts of thousands of police personnel, NGOs, Govt. Departments, service organizations like the Ayyappa Seva Sangam etc., some tragedies did occur in Sabarimala pilgrimage in the past. The worst among them was during January, 2000 when 52 pilgrims lost their lives at the Pampa hill top due to stampede. Unless sufficient land is made available to the Board, prevention of over crowding, stampedes and such other untoward incidents cannot be prevented effectively.

Although the Sabarimala temple will be open only for about 150 days every year, there is regular movement of men and materials along the routes throughout the year. Men are at work regularly. Tractor traffic is also regular between Pampa and Sannidhanam for transportation of different lands of materials. Therefore honestly, wildlife movements in these areas are few and far between.

The Holy Sabarimala shrine and its premises are located in the southern most boundary of the Periyar Tiger Reserve. It is in the buffer zone adjacent to Ranni Forest Division. There is a network of motorable roads in this forested area. Therefore there is ample scope and justification for delinking these fringe areas from the Reserved Forest.

The Holy Thirumala under the TTD of Andhra Pradesh is a comparable pilgrim centre to the Holy Sabarimala. Needless to point out that Thirumala is also situated in a Reserved Forest; but there is absolutely no hindrance to the ever-increasing developmental activities giving rise to enviable facilities for the lakhs of devotees being blessed by Lord Venkateswara.

If the prayer contained in this representation is favourably disposed of the TDB hereby assures that the land allotted will be utilized in eco-friendly manner to suit the eco-system and environment, thereby protecting the wildlives as well as the interests of the devotees alike.

In the name of Lord Sree Dharma Sastha who is the embodiment of mercy to the devotees belonging to all the faiths and on behalf of the millions of pilgrims crowding in this sacred centre of love and peace, the Travancore Devaswom Board solemnly appeal before the august Public Accounts Committee of Lok Sabha to take expeditious steps to make available sufficient delinked land enabling to ensure basic amenities to the lakhs of Sabarimala pilgrims.

Enclosure: Details of land in 2 annexures.

Camp: Kochi

Date: 20-10-2003

Sd/-

Dr. N. Babu

President

Travancore Devaswom Board

Thiruvananthapuram 695 003

Kerala State

**Details of land available with the TDB in and around
Sabarimala are shown below**

Sl. No.	Details of Land	Area under Title in acres	Area under and permission in acres	Area under possession in acres	Total area in acres
1.	Sabarimala	13.35	50.00	50.00	113.35
2.	Saramkuthi		13.80	3.00	16.80
3.	Vedipura		6.50		6.50
4.	Malikappuram		4.70		4.70
5.	Pamba		10.00		10.00
6.	Triveni		10.00	10.00	20.00
7.	Chakkupalam		12.35		12.35
8.	Cheriyavattam		1.00		1.00
9.	Marakkuttam		50.00		50.00
10.	Valiyanavattam		10.00		10.00
Total		13.35	168.35	63.00	244.70

Along the routes

1.	Pamba-Sabarimala (Traditional routes)		7.00	7.00
2.	Subramaniam Road	7.00	2.00	9.00
3.	Sabarimala Uppupara		10.00	10.00
4.	Sabarimala-Kunnoor Dam		6.00	6.00
5.	Chandranadam Road		2.00	2.00
6.	Cheriyavattam Neelimala (Thiruvabharanam route)		2.00	2.00
7.	Erumeli to Pamba (Azhutha)		50.00	50.00
8.	Sathram Poonkavanam		8.00	8.00
Total		7.00	87.00	94.00

ANNEXURE 2

Statement showing the details of land in possession and enjoyment by TDB including the land requested for queue complex, parking at Thriveni etc.

S. No.	Details of Land	Area under Title in acres	Area under lease & permissive use in acres	Area under possession in acres	Total in acres	Area now requested in acres	Remarks
1.	In and around Sabarimala detailed in the letter in page No. 3	13.35	168.5	63.00	244.70		
2.	Along routes		7.00	87.00	94.00		
3.	For Queue Complex in the land in between Chandranandan road & traditional pathway at Sabarimala					26.00	Periyar Tiger Reserve
4.	5 metres width on either side traditional pathway from Pampa to Sabarimala					12.00	-do-
5.	Parking at Thriveni					61.75	Ranni Division
6.	For sewage treatment and other works under Pampa action plan					5.00	Periyar Tiger Reserve
Total		13.35	175.35	150.00	338.70	104.75	

3.3 The Board submitted another note in the meeting held on 14th January, 2004 at Sabarimala which contains 16 demands many of which relate to additional allotment of forest land. The note is as follows:—

"At the outset, the Travancore Devaswom Board expresses its sincere feelings of gratitude towards the Hon'ble Chairman and Members of the Public Accounts Committee for conducting study visit to the holy Sabarimala on 13th and 14th January, 2004.

3.4 In the context, in continuation of the 'Note' submitted by the Board before the Hon'ble Public Accounts Committee on 20-10-2003, we wish to briefly state below our immediate requirements in order to cater to the minimum needs of the lakhs of pilgrims trekking the Holy Hills for worship:—

1. Long before promulgation of (Conservation) Act 1980 certain area was allotted for utilization of specific development purpose by the Travancore Devaswom Board. But, unfortunately, the State Forest Department does not allow such utilization.
2. Forest Department has not even considered the legitimate rights and privileges of Travancore Devaswom Board and included the area of Travancore Devaswom Board in the sanctuary at the time of constitution of Periyar Tiger Reserve.
3. The pilgrims are compelled to stand in queue for 12 to 18 hours without food and water, facilities for sanitation, exposed to sun and rain during peak days. Applied area for construction of Queue Complex in an eco-friendly manner (10.8 ha.) in between Chandranandan Road and traditional pathway from Marakkootam may be allotted early.
4. The traditional pathway is narrow and insufficient to contain the influx of pilgrims during season. Heavy rush is experienced and also pick pocketing is very common. There were instances of accidents. There is possibility of stampede also. Hence, on either side of the pathway, a minimum of 5 M space may be allotted.
5. The number of latrines and bathrooms now available are insufficient in and around Sabarimala and Pampa. Permanent or mobile latrines are to be provided along the traditional routes and Sabarimala Road. Sufficient water and sewage lines are to be provided to connect the sewage to the sewage treatment plants at Pampa and Sabarimala. Out of the area allotted, maximum has already been utilised. Therefore, additional 5.00 ha. is essentially required in this part of the hill for the said purpose. Open defecation is the main reason for environmental pollution.
6. The water source now relied upon is from Triveni Check Dam; 70% and 30% from Kunnar Dam. During January, scarcity of water is acute. A small check dam at Ambalakkayam, 1.5 km away from Saramkuthy will provide enough unpolluted water with minimum expenditure through out the season for which 2.00 ha is necessary for construction of check dam, storage tanks, installation of pipe lines etc.

7. During season, the Holy Pampa River becomes grossly polluted due to insufficient inflow of water. Possibility of releasing water from Kakki or Pampa reservoir is remote and the only solution is to make a series of small vented check dams in all tributaries of Pampa and Kakki rivers well below the catchments of reservoirs and above the Triveni area and releasing sufficient water to drain the polluted water as and when necessary. This will also increase the water retaining capacity of the soil.
8. Parking problem is quite a hard and difficult issue. 25.00 ha of land at Triveni under the Ranni Forest Division is requested for diversion. This area is out of Periyar Tiger Reserve and is located in Pampa.
9. About 50,000 metric tones of different kinds of ingredients for Nivedyam and other materials have to be transported from Pampa to Sabarimala every year in order to satisfy the requirements of the pilgrims. The means of transportation now adopted are donkeys, men and tractors. During peak seasons, continuous movement of donkeys causes hardship to the thousands of devotees climbing up and down. In order to avoid donkey transport, Hon'ble High Court of Kerala has suggested an alternate route via Ambalakkadavu and this may be allowed. Consolidation of Subramanian Road and Chandranandan Road will also facilitate transportation by mini trucks. If so hazardous use of tractors can either be minimized or avoided.
10. Additional area is required at Cheriyanavattom to augment the sewage treatment plant and space for sprinkling of treated water. Applied for 1.005 ha. of land for diversion. This may be allowed.
11. Roads to Pampa is to be widened as much as possible to contain the heavy traffic experienced during the peak season. Lakhs of vehicles (both heavy and light) will converge at Pampa, which often creates traffic congestion and miseries to the pilgrims.
12. Vandiperiyar-Uppupara and Sathram Roads are also to be widened. Base camps will have to be provided at Uppupara for the pilgrims coming from Tamil Nadu.
13. Land at Nilakkal (110 ha.) with State Farming Corporation of Kerala may be transferred to Travancore Devaswom Board in order to develop the area as a base camp.
14. To provide minimal accommodation for the pilgrims converging from different parts of the country for Makaravilakku at Pampa and Sabarimala is another Herculean task for which also additional land is required.
15. Accommodation for duty staff of Travancore Devaswom Board, Police personnel and Central and State Government Departments are to be made both in Pampa and Sabarimala.
16. Considering the large inflow of pilgrims, ample medical facilities have to be provided. For this purpose also, additional space is unavoidable.

3.5 To sum up, I wish to state that in tune with the ever-increasing inflow of devotees of Lord Sree Dharma Sashta to this unique forest temple, the Travancore Devaswom Board is duty-bound to provide them with minimum facilities. Since this sacred Temple is situated in the southernmost fringe of the Periyar Tiger Reserve, it is easy and practicable to delink 500.00 hectares of forest land from the Reserve. The Board once again undertake to protect, the entire allotted area in an eco-friendly manner with least disturbance to the flora and fauna existing there.

3.6 A map to the scale of 1:50,000 for 500 ha. in and around Sabarimala and Pampa with natural boundaries, intended to delink from Periyar Tiger Reserve and Ranni Division along with boundary description is appended herewith.

Boundary description of the area intended to be delinked and allotted to Travancore Devaswom Board from Periyar Tiger Reserve and Ranni Division

Area	:	500.00 hectares
District	:	Pathanamthitta
Taluk	:	Ranni
Panchayath	:	Perunad

North:— The boundary commences from the point just above the Urakkuzhi Spring at 660 M contour lines starts from the Kumbalamthodu then along the 660 metre contour where it reaches Kakkathodu.

West:— Along Kakkathodu boundary runs up to the points where it joins Pampa River. Then run along Pampa River and then through Pandarathodu up to the starting points.

South:— From the points where the Pandarathodu starts boundary runs along the contour 400 metres and reaches Trivenithodu. Along Trivenithodu up to Triveni, then along Pampa where the Njunanjar joins.

East:— Along Njunanjar up to the point where Urakkuzhithodu merges. Along Urakkuzhithodu up to Kumbalamthodu where the boundary starts at 660 M contour.

3.7 Apart from these written notes, Dr. N. Babu, the President of the Travancore Devaswom Board in his oral presentations emphasised the point that Sabarimala and its sacred forest was included in the Periyar Sanctuary in 1978 ignoring the views of the Board which is the principal agency responsible for providing basic amenities to the pilgrims who visit the holy shrine. The general drift of his presentation was that the Department of Forest of the Government of Kerala has adopted an unreasonable attitude towards the basic needs of Sabarimala's pilgrims and thus turned down all proposals submitted by the Board in this regard. In the meetings at Cochin as well as Sabarimala he drew the attention of the Committee to the accidents which took place at Sabarimala during the festival season in 2000 in which 52 people died in stampede. According to him, this happened because of overcrowding and if sufficient land were made available, such accidents could have been avoided.

3.8 The Committee heard the views of the representatives of the Government of Kerala also. They submitted a brief note containing a synopsis of the recommendations made by various committees which have studied the problems relating to Sabarimala pilgrimage at different times. They also circulated a report on Sabarimala Enclave Management prepared by the School of Social Sciences, Mahatma Gandhi University, for the Kerala Forest Department. The position taken by the Government of Kerala in regard to the problems of pilgrims is that what pilgrims expect at Sabarimala is not a "leisure sojourn" but a "modicum of facilities to enable them to complete the pilgrimage to their satisfaction". They are also of the view that the demand made by the Travancore Devaswom Board for additional land is never-ending and unreasonable. According to the Government of Kerala, the Forest Department has already released 55.9 hectares of the Travancore Devaswom Board. So, they request the Committee to advise the Travancore Devaswom Board to adopt a strategy for sustainable and eco-friendly development of Sabarimala pilgrimage facilities. The note is as follows":

A NOTE ON SABARIMALA PILGRIMAGE MANAGEMENT AND ECOLOGICAL CONSERVATION OF THE SURROUNDS

Background

Sabarimala Ayyappa Temple is one of the most famous forest shrines in the whole country visited by about 50 lakhs pilgrims every year during the festival seasons. The temple is situated in the dense forests of Periyar Tiger Reserve and constitute the largest sacred landscape in the world. Because of its strategic positioning, ecological considerations need to be given top most priority while planning any development activity in Sabarimala. It has to be accepted that it is impossible to infinitely step up the pilgrim facilities to commensurate with their ever-increasing number and demands. In this respect, a farsighted approach in tune with the sanctity of tradition is necessary. What pilgrims expect at Sabarimala is not a leisure sojourn; all that they expect is a modicum of facilities to enable them to complete the Pilgrimage to their satisfaction.

The Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) handles activities from management of the temple to providing amenities to pilgrims. In the beginning (before 1960), the TDB possessed only 5.26 ha. of forest land at Sannidhanam. Till date, Forest Department has released 55.09 ha. to TDB. Even then, consequent to the never-ending demand from TDB to divert more forest land year after year, several high level committees have been constituted and several studies were carried out.

I. Rajagopal Committee

The then *Hon. Speaker of Lok Sabha, late Shri. G.M.C. Balayogi* constituted a committee under the chairmanship of Shri. O. Rajagopal, Minister of State Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs to visit Sabarimala and to conduct a detailed study on TDB's demand for forest land. The other members were Shri. Ramesh Chennithala MP and Shri. Francis George MP. The Committee suggested the following Plan of Actions:

1. *Development of Nilackal as a base camp to decongest Pampa.* Proper development of this camp will reduce the present hardships and problems considerably.
2. A detailed survey of the unauthorised construction around Pampa and Sannidhanam may be carried with the object to minimize it.
3. A long term detailed master plan for the entire temple complex and facilities must be prepared.

It is to be noted that most of the actions suggested as above has not been fulfilled. The joint survey of forest land now utilised by TDB has not been taken up yet. TDB has prepared a Master Plan for the development of Sabarimala pressing their demand for more forest land without consulting other agencies including Forest Department.

II. Study by Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI)

The Government of Kerala in turn has directed KFRI to study the requirements of the facilities for pilgrims and its impact on the Wildlife and Environment. They submitted the report with the following conclusions and recommendations:

1. *The TDB may look into improving the facilities within the context of the land presently available through modernization and rationalization.*
2. TDB may imbibe a pilgrim centered approach rather than revenue centered.
3. The State Government may take appropriate action to initiate a Master Plan for Sabarimala in tune with Environment Management System an ISO 14001.

III. The Report of the Legislative Committee on Environment (The 13th Report—1996—98)

The Legislative Committee on Environment has visited Sabarimala shrine and its surrounding areas with a view to study the impact of the pilgrimage and the related developmental activities upon the environment. They suggested the following:

1. A base camp should be developed at **Nilackal** as in the case of Thirupathi. (page 43 & 44).
2. The existing concrete structures around the Srikovil shall be demolished (page 44).
3. The entire area surrounding the temple should be converted into forests (page 44).
4. The facilities at Triveni and Sannidhanam shall be remodeled to suit the Sanctity of the temple (p. 46).

From the above studies and recommendations, the emerging idea for a better management of Sabarimala Pilgrimage is the decongestion of Pampa and Sannidhanam.

Strategies for meeting the above requirements

1. *The Rajagopal Committee in its report strongly suggested the development of Nilackal as a base camp to decongest Pampa.* It is a win-win situation; advantageous to both pilgrims and environment. With the development of Nilackal as the base camp all vehicles shall stop there and the pilgrims are to be transported to Pampa and back by KSRTC/TDB vehicles. Camping and parking facilities shall be provided at Nilackal so that the flow of pilgrims to Sannidhanam can be regulated.
2. The present utilization of the buildings and the area at Pampa need to be surveyed and redesigned for rational land use. Pampa shall be redeveloped as a transit camp by providing only essential facilities and amenities. Sannidhanam, and adjoining areas shall be set apart exclusively for pilgrimage and related religious and cultural activities.
3. This arrangement will considerably reduce pollution, the hardships of the

pilgrims and the commercialization of the surrounding areas of the shrine and forest path.

4. Rajagopal Committee in its report has recommended permissive use of forest land between Pampa and Sannidhanam by providing temporary facilities. With Nilackal as the major base camp and Pampa as the transit camp this arrangements are quite sufficient to meet the demands of the pilgrims.

Conclusion

Various studies conducted by experts confirm the realization that what we need at Sabarimala is a sensible and humanitarian approach, which can solve the problems of both humans and nature. The Supreme Court in WP C No. 212/2001 has directed the Central, State Governments and TDB not to carry out any non-forest activity at Sabarimala, which are not permitted by the Central Government under Forest (Conservation) Act. Therefore the TDB may kindly be advised to adopt a strategy for sustainable and eco friendly development of Sabarimala pilgrimage facilities in consonance with the principles of conservation of ecology rather than developing concrete building inside the forests around the shrine. The Lord Ayyappa who rides tiger prefers to live in real forests; not in concrete jungles! Let Sabarimala and Periyar Tiger Reserve, the common heritage of the human race stay together and grow together for a better world.

References

1. Rajagopal Committee Report.
2. The report of the Legislative Committee on Environment (The 13th Report—1996—98).
3. Environmental Impact Assessment of diversion of forest land at Sabarimala by Kerala Forest Research Institute.
4. Sri Sabarimala Development: A Perspective Plan. By Prof. N. Balakrishnan Nair.
5. Report on Sabarimala Enclave Management. School of Social Sciences, M.G. University.
6. Conservation, Development and Incompatibilities: Transitions of a sacred geography. S. Sivadas, School of Social Sciences, M.G. University.

3.9 The whole emphasis of the report on Sabarimala Enclave Management is on the need to protect the eco-systems from the harmful effects of pilgrimage. Para 8 of the report says:—

"The preponderance of market economy explicit in the current rituals and observances besides the mounting frequency of pilgrim tour as well as the high density of population have made the affair ecologically unsustainable. Even a liberal assessment of the human impacts shows that it is far beyond the supportive and assimilative capacities of the natural and socio-economic environment of the region. The pilgrimage, pilgrimage-related activities, current population density

and variety of negative impacts are placing increasing stress on the eco-systems of the Enclave. There is substantial threat of environmental degradation, deforestation and biodiversity loss."

3.10 The general drift of this report is that the pilgrimage to Sabarimala at its present level is a great ecological threat.

The report says:—

"The number of people and volume of activities have crossed the critical limits and thresholds of the forest eco-system. The impact of even one percent of the current rate of population density, human activities and wastes is beyond the carrying capacity of the Enclave and cannot be supported and absorbed without degrading the natural environment of the sanctuary and social, economic and cultural systems of the fringe area if we go by "an indirect measure of the maximum level of stress that the eco-system can maintain."

3.11 In the meeting held at Sabarimala on 14th January, 2004, a Secretary to the Government of Kerala told the Committee that in fact the Forest Department of Kerala and the Travancore Devaswom Board are helpless players and it is the Supreme Court which had directed both the Centre and the State and the Travancore Devaswom Board not to carry out any non-forest activity at Sabarimala which are not permitted under the Forest (Conservation) Act. He stated that the State Government and the Central Government are duty bound to enforce the directions of the Apex Court. The Members reacted to the Statement by saying that the miseries of the pilgrims and the inhuman conditions in which they perform pilgrimage cannot be ignored by any responsible Government and the Apex Court should be approached with a properly worked out plan to alleviate the sufferings of the pilgrims. The Chairman clarified that the Committee gave utmost importance to the question of preserving the forest and its eco-system. At the same time the Committee cannot be indifferent to a situation where millions of pilgrims suffer due to lack of basic amenities. The Members were of the view that in order to solve the problems of the pilgrims a short term and a long-term plan should be formulated. They said that the possibilities of modern technology could be fully used in the matter of providing sanitation facilities in the entire area of pilgrimage.

CHAPTER IV

Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1 The visit to Sabarimala on the occasion of Makarsankranti this year gave a rare opportunity to the Public Accounts Committee to gain a first-hand view of the manifold problems being faced by the pilgrims who visit in millions this unique and world famous pilgrim centre. The detailed deliberations which were held with the agencies of the Government of Kerala as well as the Travancore Devaswom Board helped the Committee understand the issue in its totality. Serious environmental concerns have been voiced by the Forest Department although no empirical evidence has been brought out by them of the adverse impact of the phenomenal increase in the flow of pilgrims on the eco-system of the sanctuary. The notes and report submitted as well as the oral presentations made by the agencies of the State Government before the Committee point to only a possibility of adverse impact on the ecology of the sanctuary. The study commissioned by the Forest Department of the Government of Kerala shows that the phenomenal increase in the number of pilgrims has taken place during the past forty years. So, it should have been possible for any study group to assess and quantify the damage to the eco-system which is supposed to have taken place during this phase of the pilgrimage. But, the Committee has not been shown any report which quantifies the damage to the ecology that has taken place due to this phenomenal increase in the flow of pilgrims.

4.2 The Committee recognises the crucial importance of conservation of the eco-system. They do not approve of any unrestrained attempts to destroy the forest for whatever purpose.

4.3 However, the Committee do not consider that the problems relating to the Sabarimala pilgrimage should be looked at merely from the environmental angle. Unfortunately, this problem has been dealt with by some of the stake holders within such a narrow compass. The conflicting perspectives of the Forest Department and the Travancore Devaswom Board on the issue of a proper solution to the problems of the pilgrims and the overall development of Sabarimala as a national pilgrim centre have come in the way of any serious and genuine attempt in this direction. The Committee understand that the conditions which they have seen in the whole area of pilgrimage have continued to exist over a long period of time and these get worse every year as there is an increase of around 20% in the number of pilgrims visiting the temple every year.

4.4 The Committee is horrified at the inhuman conditions in which the pilgrims stay at Sannidhanam. The total lack of sanitation, clean drinking water, hygienic food, toilet facilities etc. in a place visited reportedly by 2 to 3 crores of pilgrims within a short span of two months cannot be explained away by saying that the concept of 'comfort' is alien to the ethos of Sabarimala pilgrimage. This is an extraordinary situation. It is true that the pilgrims who visit Sabarimala do endure all kinds of hardships. They are driven by a deep devotion which makes them brave all kinds of

adversities. But it is clearly impermissible for responsible authorities to use it as a convenient pretext for inaction and leave them to fend for themselves. The Committee is totally dissatisfied with the present conditions prevailing in Sabarimala.

4.5 The Committee understand that the Periyar Tiger Sanctuary was created in 1978. It is said that this sanctuary shelters rare animals and birds. But the Committee has been informed by the Ministry of Environment and Forest that no faunal survey of this sanctuary has been conducted so far. It is not very clear as to how Sabarimala got included in the sanctuary when it was created. It is not clear whether there was a proper study done of all issues relating to the Pilgrimage before the decision to include the shrine and its sacred grove in the sanctuary was taken. The Committee will, of course, examine these issues in detail later before the final report is prepared. However, the Committee feel that a realistic view of the human problems, the problems of spatial and logistics management arising out of the mass influx of pilgrims in to the temple area in future years should have been taken by the authorities before deciding to include it in the sanctuary. It is absurd to suggest as the report on Sabarimala Enclave management does, that the huge mass of pilgrims coming to Sabarimala should be stopped at different points far away from the temple area and the flow should be regulated in such a way that only a manageable crowd remain at the temple premises at any given time. On the face of it, it is not a workable proposition. It has been represented to the Committee by the Travancore Devaswom Board that inclusion of the temple area in the sanctuary is really coming in the way of all developmental activities in Sabarimala and, therefore, the temple area should be delinked from the sanctuary and developed without causing environmental degradation. The Committee was informed by the representative of the Ministry of Environment and Forest that Sabarimala does not fall in the core area of the sanctuary and it is situated in the buffer zone. The Committee having considered this suggestion in its totality is of the view that it should be seriously considered by the Government. If necessary, an equal area of forest could be added to the sanctuary from any other forest division in lieu of the temple area. The reality of the pilgrimage and the massive flow of pilgrims into the temple area have to be recognised and a realistic solution to the core problems should be found. The long term development of Sabarimala, then, could be undertaken on the basis of a Master Plan in consonance with the broader considerations of the ecology of the region. The implementation of this Master Plan could be done under the supervision of an expert body.

4.6 The Committee is of the view that certain short term measures should be taken in the meantime to alleviate the miseries of the pilgrims on account of the lack of toilet facilities, clean water, food, medical facilities etc. In the deliberations of the Committee at Sabarimala, the Members were of the view that the possibilities of modern technology should be fully used to provide sanitation facilities and undertake waste management, cleaning of the river system etc. Similarly, watershed schemes can be implemented at appropriate places in order to raise the level of water table. The Committee has been informed that 70% of the requirement of water for drinking and other purposes in Sabarimala is drawn from the river Pampa which gets totally polluted during the festival season. It should not be a difficult task to undertake the cleaning of this river using scientific methods.

4.7 Similarly, the hill tracks from Pampa to Sannidhanam need to be reasonably widened. The Committee found these tracks too narrow and rough. These should be widened and made a little less rough so that at least the attention of the trekking pilgrims is not constantly distracted by the pricks of sharp-edged stones and thorns.

4.8 The Committee has witnessed the huge rush of devotees who surge forward to have darshan of the deity. Many of them do not get even a glimpse of the deity due to this rush and the police pushes them away the moment they reach in front of the sanctum sanctorum. This is a very unsatisfactory state of affairs. The Travancore Devaswom Board authorities and the police should find a way to help all the devotees to have a satisfying darshan.

4.9 The Committee has been informed through a communication from the Ministry of Environment and Forests that in response to the direction from the Committee, the Ministry has set up a three member committee consisting senior officials from the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, the Forest Department of the Government of Kerala and the Travancore Devaswom Board to review the environmental and pilgrimage related problems at Sabarimala. The Committee hope that the report will be submitted soon.

4.10 The Committee left the Sannidhanam with a feeling that the problems relating to the development and management of Sabarimala can be solved if there is an effective political intervention. An essentially bureaucratic approach which has been followed in this matter has not produced any worthwhile result and the problems have only got worse.

4.11 Sabarimala with its uniqueness ranks as one of the major pilgrim centres of the world. But it has not received much of national attention so far as its development into a national pilgrim centre has suffered due to the absence of a perspective in the stakeholders. Sabarimala should be developed like Vaishnodevi temple in Jammu or other major Pilgrim Centres in India. The Committee recommend that a committee consisting of the Minister of Environment and Forests, Government of India, the Minister of Forests and the Minister of Devaswom, Government of Kerala should be constituted at the apex level to give necessary impetus to the process of development of Sabarimala. The Committee feel that this high level political body can sort out many of the tangled problems which have remained unsolved all these years.

NEW DELHI;
4 February, 2004
15 Magha, 1925(S)

SARDAR BUTA SINGH,
Chairman,
Public Accounts Committee.

PART II

MINUTES OF THE SEVENTEENTH SITTING OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE (2003-2004) HELD ON 3RD FEBRUARY, 2004

The Committee sat from 1500 hrs. to 1530 hrs. on 3rd February, 2004 in Committee Room 'D', Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.

PRESENT

Sardar Buta Singh

— *Chairman*

MEMBERS

Lok Sabha

2. Shri Haribhai Chaudhary
3. Shri Raghunath Jha
4. Dr. M.V.V.S. Murthi
5. Shri Rupchand Pal
6. Shri Mohan Rawale
7. Shri Raghuraj Singh Shakya
8. Shri Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh
9. Shri Kirit Somaiya

Rajya Sabha

10. Shri Prasanta Chatterjee
11. Shri K. Rahman Khan

SECRETARIAT

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Shri P.D.T. Achary | — <i>Additional Secretary</i> |
| 2. Shri S.K. Sharma | — <i>Joint Secretary</i> |
| 3. Shri Raj Shekhar Sharma | — <i>Deputy Secretary</i> |
| 4. Shri B.S. Dahiya | — <i>Under Secretary</i> |
| 5. Shri N.S. Hooda | — <i>Under Secretary</i> |

Representatives of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India

- | | | |
|--------------------|---|---|
| 1. Shri R.P. Singh | — | Pr. Director of Audit
(Scientific Departments) |
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2. At the outset, the Chairman welcomed the Members and Audit Officers to the last sitting of the Public Accounts Committee (2003-04). The Committee, then took up for consideration the following draft Reports:

- (i) ** ** ** **
- (ii) Draft Preliminary Report on "Pilgrimage to Sabarimala—Human Problems and Ecology."

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The Committee thereafter adopted both the Reports unanimously and authorised the Chairman to finalise the draft Report and present the same to Parliament in the current session it self.

4. At the end, the Chairman gave his thanks to the Speaker, Members, Audit officials and Officers of Lok Sabha Secretariat for their co-operation in the functioning of the Committee. On behalf of the Members of the Committee Shri Kirit Somaiya, MP, thanked the Hon'ble Chairman for his conducting the sittings of the Committee in a befitting manner.

5. A copy of the verbatim proceedings of the sitting has been kept on record.

The Committee then adjourned.

APPENDIX

Conclusions and Recommendations

Sl. No.	Para No.	Ministry/Deptt. Concerned	Conclusion/Recommendations
1	2	3	4
1.	4.1	Environment & Forests	<p>The visit to Sabarimala on the occasion of Makarsankranti this year gave a rare opportunity to the Public Accounts Committee to gain a first-hand view of the manifold problems being faced by the pilgrims who visit in millions this unique and world famous pilgrim centre. The detailed deliberations which were held with the agencies of the Government of Kerala as well as the Travancore Devaswom Board helped the Committee to understand the issue in its totality. Serious environmental concerns have been voiced by the Forest Department although no empirical evidence has been brought out by them of the adverse impact of the phenomenal increase in the flow of pilgrims on the eco-system of the sanctuary. The notes and report submitted as well as the oral presentations made by the agencies of the State Government before the Committee point to only a possibility of adverse impact on the ecology of the sanctuary. The study commissioned by the Forest Department of the Government of Kerala shows that the phenomenal increase in the number of pilgrims has taken place during the past forty years. So, it should have been possible for any study group to assess and quantify the damage to the eco-system which is supposed to have taken place during this phase of the pilgrimage. But, the Committee has not been shown any report which quantifies the damage to the ecology that has taken place due to this phenomenal increase in the flow of pilgrims.</p>
2.	4.2	-do-	<p>The Committee recognises the crucial importance of conservation of the eco-system. They do not approve of any unrestrained attempts to destroy the forest for whatever purpose.</p>

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3.	4.3	Environment and Forests	<p>However, the Committee do not consider that the problems relating to the Sabarimala pilgrimage should be looked at merely from the environmental angle. Unfortunately, this problem has been dealt with by some of the stake holders within such a narrow compass. The conflicting perspectives of the Forest Department and the Travancore Devaswom Board on the issue of a proper solution to the problems of the pilgrims and the overall development of Sabarimala as a national pilgrim centre have come in the way of any serious and genuine attempt in this direction. The Committee understand that the conditions which they have seen in the whole area of pilgrimage have continued to exist over a long period of time and these get worse every year as there is an increase of around 20% in the number of pilgrims visiting the temple every year.</p>
4.	4.4	-do-	<p>The Committee is horrified at the inhuman conditions in which the pilgrims stay at Sannidhanam. The total lack of sanitation, clean drinking water, hygienic food, toilet facilities etc. in a place visited reportedly by 2 to 3 crores of pilgrims within a short span of two months cannot be explained away by saying that the concept of 'comfort' is alien to the ethos of Sabarimala pilgrimage. This is an extraordinary situation. It is true that the pilgrims who visit Sabarimala do endure all kinds of hardships. They are driven by a deep devotion which makes them brave all kinds of adversities. But it is clearly impermissible for responsible authorities to use it as a convenient pretext for inaction and leave them to fend for themselves. The Committee is totally dissatisfied with the present conditions prevailing in Sabarimala.</p>
	4.5	-do-	<p>The Committee understand that the Periyar Tiger Sanctuary was created in 1978. It is said that the sanctuary shelters rare animals and birds. But the Committee has been informed by the Ministry of Environment and Forest that no faunal survey of this sanctuary has been conducted so far. It is not very clear as to how Sabarimala got included</p>

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in the sanctuary when it was created. It is not clear whether there was a proper study done of all issues relating to the Pilgrimage before the decision to include the shrine and its sacred grove in the Sanctuary was taken. The Committee will, of course, examine these issues in detail later before the final report is prepared. However, the Committee feel that a realistic view of the human problems, the problems of spatial and logistics management arising out of the mass influx of pilgrims into the temple area in future years should have been taken by the authorities before deciding to include it in the sanctuary. It is absurd to suggest as the report on Sabarimala Enclave management does, that the huge mass of pilgrims coming to Sabarimala should be stopped at different points far away from the temple area and the flow should be regulated in such a way that only a manageable crowd remain at the temple premises at any given time. On the face of it, it is not a workable proposition. It has been represented to the Committee by the Travancore Devaswom Board that inclusion of the temple area in the sanctuary is really coming in the way of all developmental activities in Sabarimala and, therefore, the temple area should be delinked from the sanctuary and developed without causing environmental degradation. The Committee was informed by the representative of the Ministry of Environment and Forest that Sabarimala does not fall in the core area of the sanctuary and it is situated in the buffer zone. The Committee having considered this suggestion in its totality is of the view that it should be seriously considered by the Government. If necessary, an equal area of forest could be added to the sanctuary from any other forest division in lieu of the temple area. The reality of the pilgrimage and the massive flow of pilgrims into the temple area have to be recognised and a realistic solution to the core problems should be found. The long term development of Sabarimala, then, could be undertaken on the basis of a Master Plan in consonance with the broader considerations of

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			the econology of the region. The implementation of this Master Plan could be done under the supervision of an expert body.
6.	4.6	Environment and Forests	<p>The Committee is of the view that certain short term measures should be taken in the meantime to alleviate the miseries of the pilgrims on account of the lack of toilet facilities, clean water, food, medical facilities etc. In the deliberations of the Committee at Sabarimala, the Members were of the view that the possibilities of modern technology should be fully used to provide sanitation facilities and undertake waste management, cleaning of the river system etc. Similarly, watershed schemes can be implemented at appropriate places in order to raise the level of water table. The Committee has been informed that 70% of the requirement of water for drinking and other purposes in Sabarimala is drawn from the river Pampa which gets totally polluted during the festival season. It should not be a difficult task to undertake the cleaning of this river using scientific methods.</p>
7.	4.7	-do-	<p>Similarly, the hills tracks from Pampa to Sannidhanam need to be reasonably widened. The Committee found these tracks too narrow and rough. These should be widened and made a little less rough so that at least the attention of the trekking pilgrims is not constantly distracted by the pricks of sharp-edged stones and thorns.</p>
8.	4.8	-do-	<p>The Committee has witnessed the huge rush of devotees who surge forward to have darshan of the deity. Many of them do not get even a glimpse of the deity due to this rush and the police pushes them away the moment they reach in front of the sanctum sanctorum. This is a very unsatisfactory state of affairs. The Travancore Devaswom Board authorities and the police should find a way to help all the devotees to have a satisfying darshan.</p>
9.	4.9	-do-	<p>The Committee has been informed through a communication from the Ministry of Environment and forests that in response to the direction from the Committee, the Ministry has set up a three</p>

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			<p>member committee consisting senior officials from the Ministry of Environment and Forest, Government of India, the forest Department of the Government of Kerala and the Travancore Devaswom Board to review the environmental and pilgrimage related problems at Sabarimala. The Committee hope that the report will be submitted soon.</p>
10.	4.10	Environment and Forests	<p>The Committee left the Sannidhanam with a feeling that the problems relating to the development and management of Sabarimala can be solved if there is an effective political intervention. An essentially bureaucratic approach which has been followed in this matter has not produced any worthwhile result and the problems have only got worse.</p>
11.	4.11	-do-	<p>Sabarimala with its uniqueness ranks as one of the major pilgrim centres of the world. But it has not received much of national attention so far as its development into a national pilgrim centre has suffered due to the absence of a perspective in the stakeholders. Sabarimala should be developed like Vaishnodevi temple in Jammu or other major Pilgrim Centres in India. The Committee recommend that a committee consisting of the Minister of Environment and Forest, Government of India, the Minister of Forest and the Minister of Devaswom, Government of Kerala should be constituted at the apex level to give necessary impetus to the process of development of Sabarimala. The Committee feel that this high level political body can sort out many of the tangled problems which have remained unsolved all these years.</p>