

Impact of Religious Tourism on the Environment in Kamarpukur Area of Hooghly District, West Bengal, India

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Abstract

Kamarpukur is located in the Goghat II CD block of the Arambagh subdivision in the Hooghly District, West Bengal, India. This place is renowned for being the birthplace of Sri Ramkrishna, the great 'Guru' of the Hindu monk Swami Vivekananda. The religious visitors are attracted to this place throughout the year. The religious tourism in the Kamarpukur GP has become an important catalytic force for the development of the local people's socio-economic structure. Simultaneously, it has been found that the unconscious and unscientific growth of infrastructure, such as hotels and shops, the use of plastic in uncontrolled ways, and the huge traffic flow throughout the year cause adverse effects on the environment, especially on the air and agricultural land. To overcome this problem, Ecotourism should work for the sustainable development of the area.

Keywords: Pilgrim, Tourism, Environment, Economy, Pollution.

1. Introduction

From the ancient period, Indians have been attracted to spiritual tourism, which always affects the local and regional environment. Kamarpukur, a village of Hooghly District, West Bengal, India, is renowned for being the birthplace of Sri Ramkrishna, who is the great 'Guru' of the Hindu monk Swami Vivekananda. With the local and regional visitors, this place also attracts national and international visitors, especially during the festival periods. So, Kamarpukur always attracts religious visitors throughout the year, which has a great impact on the local and regional environments of the area.

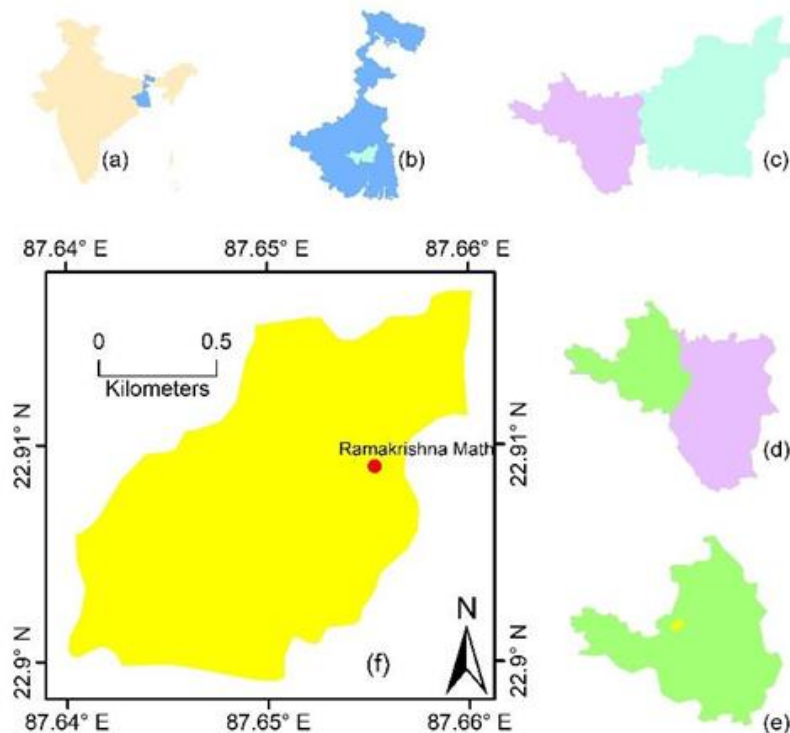
The name 'Kamarpukur' originates from the title of a local landlord who had lived in this area for many generations. The landlord, whose title was Kamar, dug a 'pukur' (big pond) that was used by the villagers. Gradually, the pond was known as Kamarpukur and in the name of this pond, the village was named Kamarpukur village.

The signs of ancient prosperity are still visible everywhere in the Kamarpukur area. Several ponds, tanks and old buildings and dilapidated temples still bear witness to its old glory. A beautiful temple of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was established in 1951 on his birth ground. There are also guest houses, a library, a dispensary and a school governed by the Kamarpukur Ramakrishna Math and Mission. The famous Haldepukur (a big pond) has been reformed by the Mission. All these works become possible through the

donation of devotees and local people. With the development of the surroundings, the place has really become one of the beauty spots in the whole locality that attracts tourists.

Gradually increasing pressure of tourists causes environmental degradation like air pollution, agricultural land degradation, bio-degradation etc. of the local area. But there are no historical records regarding the environment and tourists. It causes problems in understanding the periodic change of environment caused by tourism. This study tries to show the nature of environmental degradation due to tourism in this area and finds the solution. The main aim of this study is to develop ecotourism for the sustainable development of the environment. For this purpose, the local socio-economic conditions, nature of tourist flow and local environmental problems like air pollution, land degradation etc. will be studied.

Figure 1: Location map, (a) West Bengal in India; (b) Hooghly District in West Bengal; (c) Arambagh subdivision in Hooghly district; (d) Goghat II CD block in Arambagh subdivision; (e) Kamarpukur GP in Goghat CD Block II; (f) Kamarpukur Ramkrishna Math and Mission in Kamarpukur GP



2. Previous Work:

Tourism was established as an industry by the Western world in colonial countries (Perez 1974; Britton 1982; Nash 1989). They try to develop mass tourism in developing countries (Lea 1993; Brohman 1996; Khan 1997). Victor (1995) classifies two main subtypes of religious or spiritual tourists: one who travels for religious or spiritual purposes is called a pilgrim, and the other travels to visit religious monuments is known as a visitor. Donald (2004) has defined Religious tourism in ancient civilizations or cultures.

Bharati (1963), Ensink (1974), Saraswati, and McKim (2009) described an overview of Indian Hindu tourism in the Middle Ages. Saraswati and Vidyarthi (1984) explain the structure, cause and consequence of Hindu pilgrims. Vidyarthi (1961) describes the relation of Hindu pilgrims with the different structures of the temples. Various indigenous and foreign scholars contribute to Indian pilgrimages. Lochtefeld

(2009) studied in Hardwar, Joseph (1965) studied in Pushkar, and Diana (1982) studied in Benares. Deshpande (2003) studied in Pondicherry.

Presently, the Indian Government focuses on religious tourism mainly in northern India. Mysore and Rishikesh are the major destinations for yoga for international tourists. These places led to the creation of many yoga schools offering teacher training and promotion of India as a "Yoga tourism hub" by the Indian Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of AYUSH.

Much research has been conducted regarding the effect of tourism on the socio-economy in the Kamarpukur area (Roy and Das, 2017; Sasmal, 2025). Most of the scholars neglected the effects of religious tourism on the environment. In this paper, the researcher tries to understand this correlation.

3. Location of Study Area:

Kamarpukur village is located (Fig. 1) in the Goghat II CD block of the Arambag subdivision in Hooghly District, West Bengal, India. The study area is extended from 22°54'1.07"N to 22°54'51.09"N and 87°38'30.17"E to 87°39'30.51"E.

4. Data and Methodology:

The work was conducted in three distinct steps: pre-field study, field survey, and post-field analysis. In the pre-field study, different types of maps were collected from different sources. In the field surveys, different data of shops, hotels, socio-economy, etc. are surveyed and measured. The GPS data are collected for field verification of land use data, and in the post-field study, the collected data are analyzed.

Table 1: Source of data	
Data Type	Data Source
• Tourists and visitors	• Kamarpukur Ramakrishna Mission Library
• Traffic flow	• Mission parking record
• Hotel area and structure	• Field survey
• Air pollution	• Field survey of the vehicle pollution certificate.
• Soil pollution	• Soil Testing Lab of Kamarpukur Mission
• Plastic pollution	• Field survey
• Land use	• USGS Landsat 8; IRS Liss III
• Market Shop	• Field survey

Software used: Arc GIS 10.3, QGIS 3.18, Map Info 7.5 softwares and MS Microsoft Excel 13.

5. Tourist Attraction:

The Kamarpukur Math and Mission, where the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna is located, is the main attraction for tourists. They also visit the surrounding areas which bear the memory of Sri Ramakrishna. The Gopeshwar temple, which is dedicated to Lord Shiva and where Sri Ramakrishna got spiritual samadhi first, is located towards the east of the ancestral house of Sri Ramakrishna. The ancestral house of Sri Ramakrishna is located south of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. The Raghuvira temple of the family of Sri Ramakrishna is dedicated to Prabhu Sri Ram, who was the family Lord of his ancestors. The temple

is located near the ancestral house of Sri Ramakrishna. A mango tree near the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna was planted by him and still yields fruit. Yogi's Siva Temple in the north of the residence of Sri Ramakrishna is famous, where his mother had a divine vision related to him. Sri Durga Mandap of the Lahas family attracts the pilgrims. Because this temple was used as the Pataskala (primary school) of Sri Ramakrishna. Matri Mandir is built on the place of Sri Sarada Ma, the wife of Sri Ramakrishna. It is located in Bankura District and is about 10 km to 12 km away from Kamarpukur Math.

Kalpataru Utsav is an annual religious festival organized by monks of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. The event commemorates the day on 1 January 1886, when his followers believe that Ramakrishna revealed himself to be an Avatar, or God incarnate on earth. It is held each January. On this day a huge number of tourists throughout the world come to this place. Silpa Mela in this village attracts tourists. In the Silpamela, local villagers made artisans, stone carving products, terracotta articles, jeweler and sold them at this mela. Besides these, the birthday of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Sarada Ma is also celebrated here.

6. Connectivity:

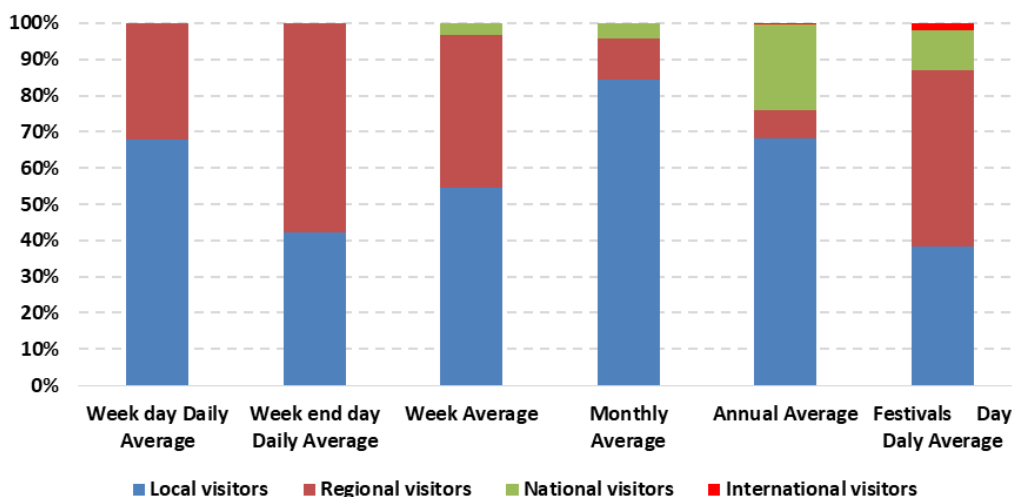
The area is connected with the Highway and Railway. The State Highway 7 (West Bengal) passes through the Kamarpukur area. The Howrah-Goghat railway passes through the Arambagh town. The road distance of Kamarpukur Ramkrishna Math and Mission from Arambagh Town is about 16 km, and from Goghat rail station is about 8.2 km. The distance between Kamarpukur Ramkrishna Math and Mission and Sarada Math and Mission is about 5.3 km.

7. Observation:

7.1. Tourists and visitors:

Different tourists visit Kamarpukur throughout the year. The local and regional tourists are common visitors here. National and international tourists are found at the time of festivals. The weekends become cloudy with the local and regional visitors, and the International visitors are mainly found at the time of the Kalpataru celebration (Fig. 2).

Fig 2: Tourists and visitors in the Kamarpukur



7.2. Traffic flow:

Different types of motor vehicles, like two-wheelers, four-wheelers, and buses, are prevalent in Kamarpukur (Fig. 3). The weekday vehicle flow is lower than on weekends. On the weekends, the number of two-wheelers increases more than the other weekdays. During prayer at Ramakrishna Mandir in the evening, the total number of motor vehicles increases to its maximum number. At the time of different festivals like the Kalpataru celebration, the number of total vehicles greatly increases.

Fig 3: Traffic in the study area

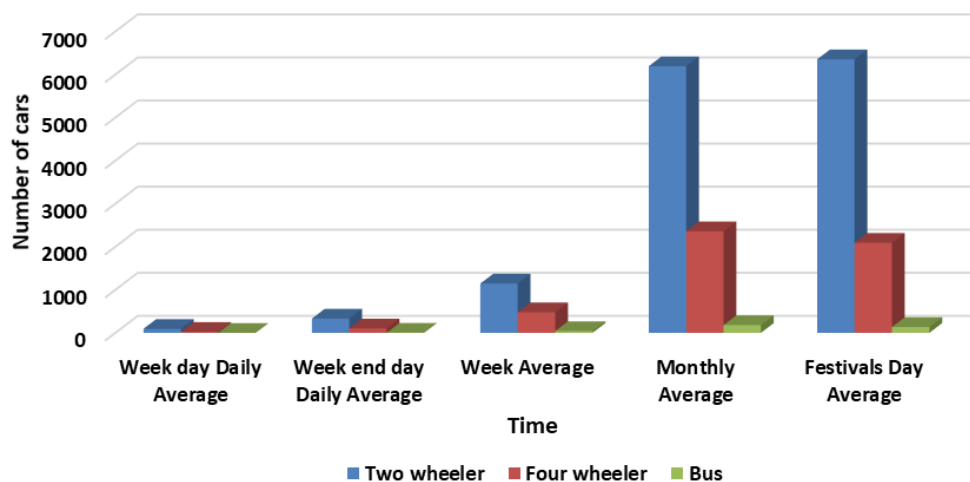
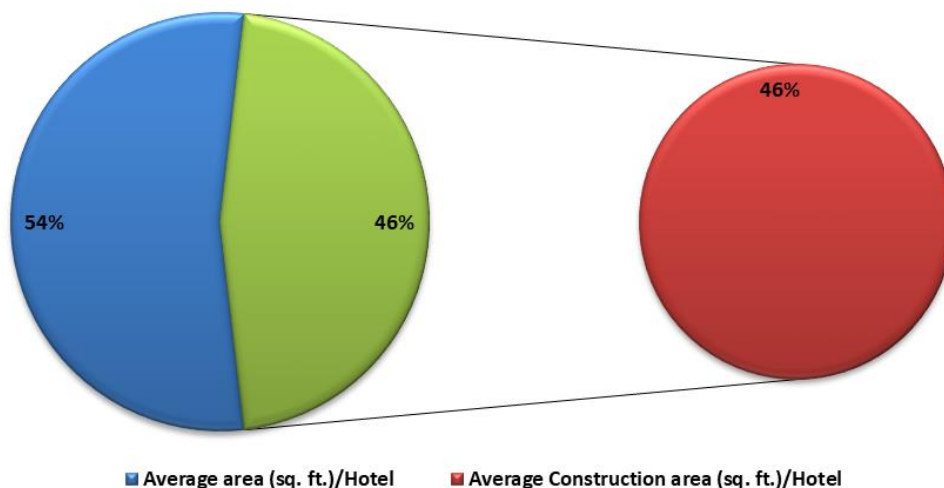


Fig 4.a: Area of the constructed hotels



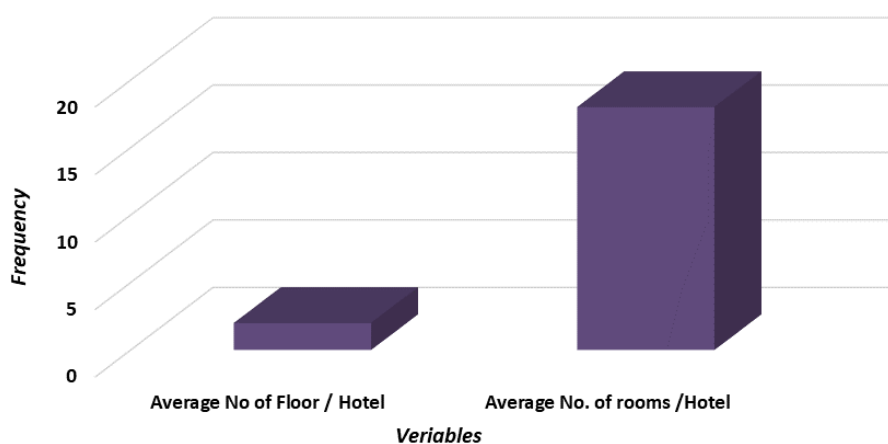
7.3. Hotel construction:

As the tourism in Kamapukur is gradually developing, the number of hotels (Fig. 4.a & 4.b) is also increasing at high levels. The increasing demand for accommodation causes hotel construction. Previously, the demand for accommodation was mainly found during festival times. But presently, this demand for accommodation has been found throughout the year. There are about 62 hotels found in the Kamarpukur area.

7.4. Market Place and Shops:

In the Kamarpukur region, tourists mainly visit shops of handicraft (the incense sticks, jute bag, jams, jellies, pickles, etc., made by local women under Pallimongal Project of Ramkrishna Mission), books (life motivating spiritual books of Sri Ramkrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Sarada Ma and other religious Hindu books like Upanishad and Vedyanta) and sweets. Sri Ramakrishna Dev specially loved two types of sweets, i.e., 'jelabi and bonde'. So, the spiritual love and devotion increase the demand for these two special types of sweets among tourists very highly. Different types of shops are mainly found in front of Ramkrishna Mandir.

Fig 4.b: Structure of the hotels

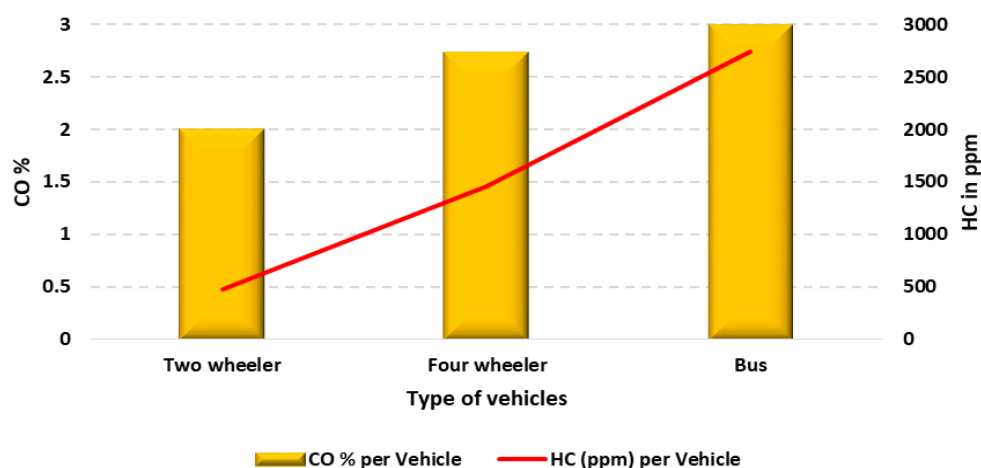


8. Analysis:

8.1. Air Pollution:

This huge amount of motor vehicles causes emission of huge CO and HC (Fig. 5) in the environment, which causes air pollution. The different types of vehicles have different types of pollution levels. The level of air pollution increases on weekends and at the time of festivals due to higher traffic concentration than the other times.

Fig 5: Ejection of CO and HC by the motor vehicles in the study area



8.2. Land Degradation:

The continuous construction of hotels degrades the agricultural land of the surrounding area of Ramkrishna Mission. Kamarpukur GP covers about 1.66 sq km. The agricultural land, vegetation, water bodies and settlement cover 48.77%, 15.01%, 5.35% and 30.86% respectively of the total land area (Fig. 6).

Fig 6: Landaus map of the Kamarpukur GP.

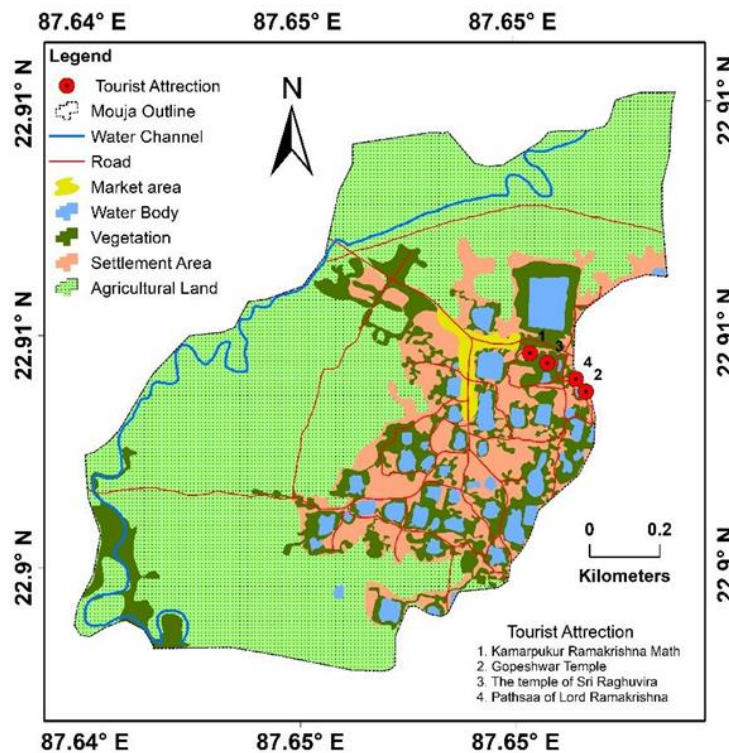
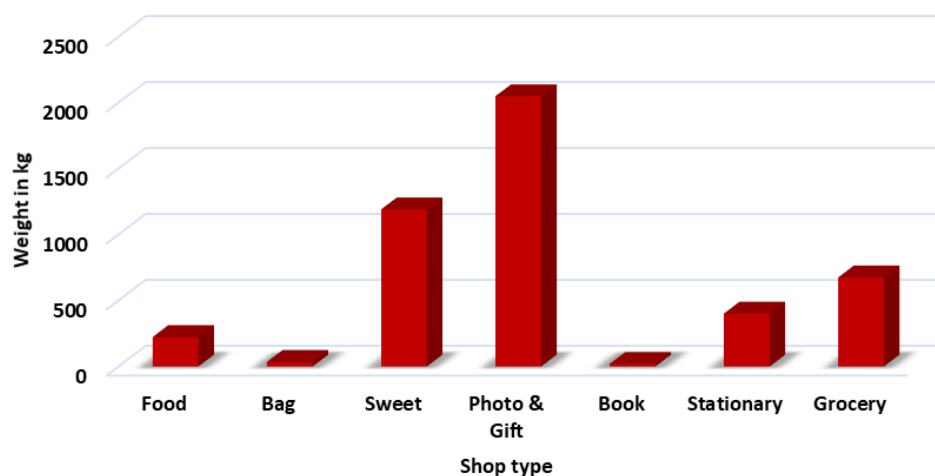


Fig 7: Use of plastics in the market area of Kamarpukur



8.3. Plastic use and soil degradation:

During festival times and weekends, the sales in different shops increase and the number of plastic waste also increases. In this region sweet shops and gift item shops mainly cause huge plastic pollution (Fig. 7). These all shops mainly present in the local residence. Tourists carry these plastics with them and

sometimes unscientifically throw these plastics in the land which causes drainage problems. At the time of festivals tents are built on the nearby land for tourists and plastic waste from them causes soil contamination. Microplastics could enter the food chain and, therefore, potentially contaminate food for human consumption, inevitably leading to high health risks.

8.4. Water pollution:

During festivals, the unhygienic sanitary infrastructure in the area leads to polluted water bodies, including local ponds and drains. These ponds are used by local people in their daily life. The number of local ponds in this region is about 48.

9. Conclusion:

The religious tourism in the Kamarpukur GP becomes an important catalytic force for the development of the socio-economic structure of local people. Simultaneously, it has been found that unconscious and unscientific growth of infrastructure like hotels and shops and huge traffic flow throughout the year cause adverse effects on the environment specially on air and agricultural land. To overcome this problem Ecotourism should be developed for the sustainable development of the environment. To prevent soil degradation of the area a soil testing laboratory was established at Kamarpukur in 1983. The laboratory caters to the needs of the farmers of Hooghly and surrounding other districts.

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