# Impact of Religious Tourism on the Socio-Economy of the Kamarpukur Area, Hooghly, West Bengal, India

**Ramapada Sasmal,**
Department of Geography, Arambagh Girls' College, West Bengal, India
Email: ramapadasasmal@gmail.com

***Abstract:*** **Kamarpukur is a village of Goghat-II CD block in the Arambagh subdivision, Hooghly District, West Bengal, India. Kamarpukur is renowned for being the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna, the great 'Guru' of the Hindu monk Swami Vivekananda. Kamarpukur Ramakrishna Math built a temple at the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna. With this temple, the Gopeshwar Temple, the temple of Sri Raghuveera, the holy Mango Tree, Yogi's Siva Temple, etc., near the math area always attract religious visitors throughout the year, causing the development of religious tourism in this area. This tourism has become an important catalytic force for the socio-economic development in Kamarpukur.**

***Key Words:*** Religion, Tourist, 'Mela', Socio-economy, Food processing, Handicraft.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Tourism is the second largest industry in the world. It is one of the fastest-growing industries in India and has tremendous potential due to people's interest in travel and desire to explore the religious sites. Since the ancient period, the Indians have been attracted to spiritual tourism. Kamarpukur is renowned for being the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna, the great 'Guru' of the Hindu monk Swami Vivekananda. With the local and regional visitors, this place attracts national and international visitors, especially during the festival. So, Kamarpukur always becomes a centre of attraction for religious visitors throughout the year. Although not all international visitors are Hindu, they come because Sri Ramakrishna preached humanity through Hinduism. The gradual increase of pilgrims over the years caused urban development around this religious centre, which caused the socio-economic development of the area.

The name 'Kamarpukur' is derived from two words- 'Kmar' and 'Pukur'. The Bengali word 'Pukur' means pond, and 'Kamar' is the surname of the landlord of the 'Pukur'. Which means that the pond of the 'Kamar' family is Kamarpukur. In the name of this pond, the Village has been famous as Kamarpukur. The name of Kamarpukur became prominent, probably because the landlords had lived in this place for many generations.

The signs of ancient prosperity are still visible everywhere in this village. Several ponds, tanks, old buildings and dilapidated temples still bear witness to its old glory. With the financial help of the devotees, a beautiful temple with a marble statue was installed at the birthplace of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna in 1951 under the management of the Ramakrishna Mission. The construction of guest houses, a library, a dispensary and schools and the re-excavation of the tank called Haldarpukur, as well as the development of the surroundings, has made the place one of the beauty spots in the whole locality.

The gradual increase of tourists in the Kamarpukur region causes a change in the socio-economy, which is the main aim of this study. For this purpose, socio-economic parameters like settlement, hotels, shops and agricultural land would be studied.

## 2. PREVIOUS WORK:

**International Status:** The European World started exploration in the 18th century and built the concept of tourism in an industrial form (Perez 1974; Britton 1982; Dennison 1989). As a result, mass tourism started in the developing countries (Lea 1993; Brohman 1996; Khan 1997). Religious or spiritual tourism is of two types- i. pilgrimage and ii. general visitors of religious monuments and artefacts. Victor (1995) discusses the concept of "Ritual process: structure and anti-structure" relating to pilgrimages. Donald et al. (2004) explain the 'Tourism, Globalisation and Cultural' of the old civilisations. However, religious tourism is the pioneer form of modern tourism. From ancient to present, religious destinations are not only a part of belief and faith, but they have also become a vital contribution to the local economy and culture.

**National Status:** Religious tourism in India is an ancient culture, and it is an older concept and habit than the Western. Vidyarthi (1961) explains about the sacred complex, social organisation and religious beliefs of Gaya from the ancient period to the present of the Sanatan community of India. Bharati (1963) gives us an overview of Indian pilgrimages. He discusses how the Brahmanic revival absorbed the rural non-Brahmin cults of India in the Middle Ages. Ensink (1974) studied the 'Problems of the study of Pilgrimage in India'. He observed that most of the religious tourists of India are Vedic believers. Saraswati (1984), writing on three spectra of Hindu pilgrims: oral cultural traditions (Commoners), textual cultural traditions (Brahmins) and transcendental cultural tradition (Ascetics). Deshpande (2003) describes Pondicherry as a place of religious tourism with several sites of religious and spiritual interest. Feldhaus (2003) describes how complex rituals and deities articulate and create a cultural region of Maharashtra that people conceptualise. Saraswati (2009) expresses pilgrimage as a self-organised complexity and identifies four principles of the Hindu tradition of pilgrimage as the Cosmic, the life, the organising and the transforming principles and reflects on each. Sinha (2009) postulates that the selection of a site is a part of Geomancy, and Hindus duplicated the harmony they found in the landscape into the architecture of Temple shikaras and stepped tanks, creating tirthas out of it. Presently, religious tourism is a focus of Indian national tourism policy. Yoga is another emphasis to develop tourism in India. There are yoga hubs in Mysore and Rishikesh. The Indian Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of AYUSH try to create many "yoga tourism hubs".

**Regional Status: The** Effect of tourism on the quality of life of people in the Kamarpukur region has been studied by Roy et al. (2017). The authors also highlight the importance of tourism for women's empowerment. Roy (2012) also studied the influence of rural tourism on the socio-economic structure of this region of West Bengal. There is a lacuna in the field of studying religious tourism and its effects on socio-economy and lifestyle. For this reason, a thorough field survey on religious tourism of the Kamarpukur region was undertaken to prepare a complete scenario of its effect on local people's lives and environment.

## 3. LOCATION OF STUDY AREA:

Kamarpukur is a village in the Goghat II CD block in the Arambag subdivision of the Hooghly District in the West Bengal state of India. It is the block headquarters of the Goghat–II community development block (Fig. 1). 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.

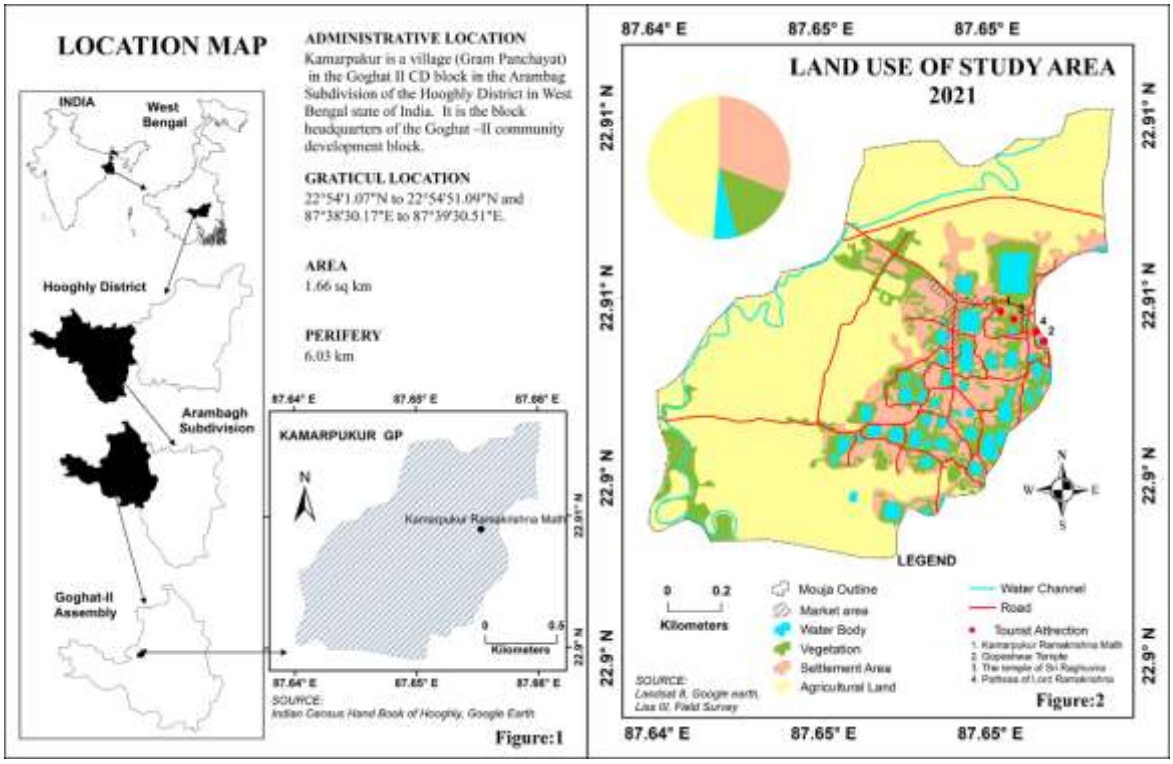


Fig 1: Location map of the study area; Fig 2: Land use map of the study area.

## 4. METHODOLOGY:

The work has been done in three different steps, i.e., pre-field study, field survey and post-field analysis. In the pre-field study, different maps like USGS Landsat 8, IRS Liss III, Mouza map of Kamarpukur GP, different traffic flow data and pollution data, etc., are collected from different offices and websites like Ramkrishna Mission office of Kamarpukur, Goghat PS, Smoke cure centre, Bhuban Website, USGS Website, etc. In field surveys, different data from shops, hotels, socio-economy, etc. are surveyed and measured. The GPS data are collected for field verification of land use data. In the post field study, different satellite images are processed and analysed with the help of ArcGIS 10.3, QGIS 3.18 and Map Info 7.5 softwares. The data are analysed with the help of Microsoft Excel 13.

## 5. OBSERVATION

### *5.1. Tourist Spots and Festivals:*

Kamarpukur is predominantly visited by devotees, who seek harmony and tranquillity amidst the calm of this little village. Devotees visit the Ramakrishna Math and the adjoining places, which are believed to be the abode of Ramakrishna, and often also travel to Jairambati, the birthplace of Ramakrishna's wife. The following are places to visit (Fig. 2).

*5.1.1. Kamarpukur Ramakrishna Math*: This was built in 1951 by the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. A temple has been built on the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna, and a marble statue of him is installed. Nandala Basu designed the architecture of this temple. Accommodation is also available in the math for visitors.

*5.1.2. Gopeshwar Temple:* This oldest temple is located to the east of the house (ancestral) of Sri Ramakrishna. The temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, was planned by Sukhlal Goswami, who and his forefathers were ardent followers of Lord Shiva.

*5.1.3. The temple of Sri Raghuveera:* It is an east-facing temple. Previously, this temple was a small hut. The floor and walls were made of mud and shaded with straw. The present temple has been constructed exactly on the same spot with the same dimensions. In the temple, the 'Salagrama Sheela' (round stone emblem) of Raghuvira (Rama), the earthen jar representing Goddess Sitala, the Rameswara Sivalinga, and the image of Gopala and the 'Salagrama Sheela' of Narayana are worshipped every day.

*5.1.4. The Mango Tree:* The mango tree planted by Sri Ramakrishna stands in the Ramakrishna temple and still yields fruit. This tree is one of the attractions for the tourists.

*5.1.5. Yogi's Siva Temple:* It is situated to the north of the residence of Sri Ramakrishna. In front of the temple, his mother had a divine vision. She saw a beam of light emerge from the image of Siva, fill the temple and swiftly enter her body. When she regained consciousness, she felt that the light was still in her womb and that she had conceived. As a result, Sri Ramakrishna was born.

*5.1.6. The Primary School:* The school was held in the spacious nat-mandir in front of Sri Durga Temple of Lahas house. Sri Ramakrishna also joined this School at the age of five. This also has a great attraction for the tourists.

*5.1.7. Matri Mandir:* This temple is located in Jairambati village of Bankura District. Jairamabati Math takes care of this temple. It is believed that Ma Sarada was born at the Centre of the temple.

*5.1.8. Kalpataru Day:* The followers believe that Ramakrishna revealed himself as a human incarnate (God) on the earth on 1 January 1886. In memory, this day is celebrated annually (1 January) by the Kaamarpukur Math and lay followers of the associated Ramakrishna Mission and the worldwide Vedanta Societies.

*5.1.9. Shilpa mela:* In this festival, the local villagers made artisans, stone carving products, terracotta articles, jewellery, and sold them.

***5.2. Tourists:***

Different types of tourists are found in this region throughout the year. Tourists are mainly local visitors and regional visitors. National and international tourists are found at the time of festivals. The weekends show more pressure from tourists than the weekdays. International visitors are mainly observed during the Kalpataru celebration (Fig. 3).

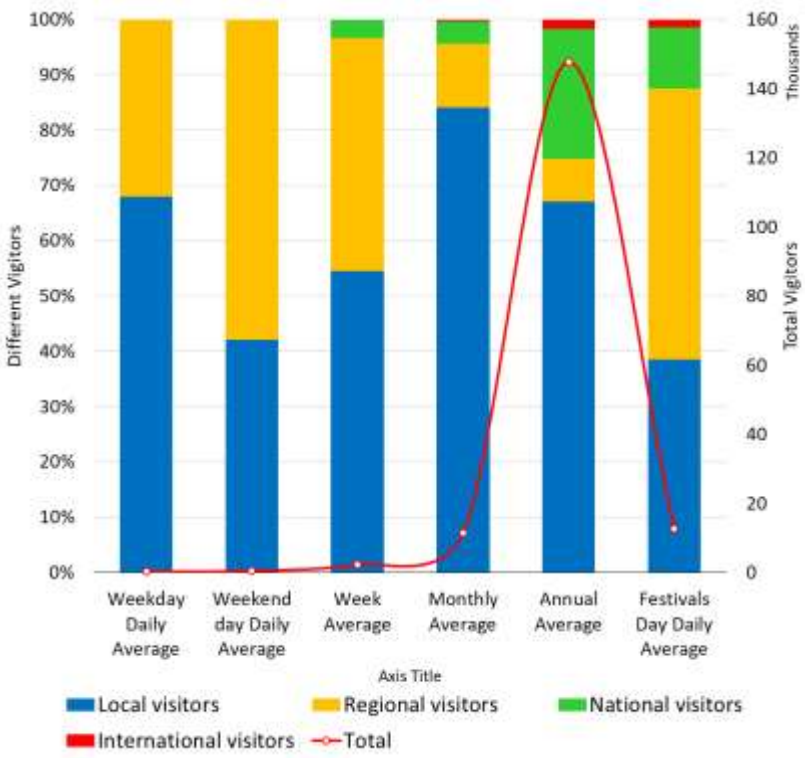


Fig 3: Tourist flow in Kamarpukur

**5.3. Socio-economic status:**

*5.3.1. Soil Testing Laboratory:* The soil testing laboratory was established at Kamarpukur in 1983. The objective was to encourage the farmers to follow a scientific agricultural method for higher production, balanced use of plant nutrients to maintain the soil health and to adopt a cost-effective agricultural system.

*5.3.2. Food Processing Unit:* This Food Processing Unit was established in 2001 with the support of the Ministry of Food Processing, New Delhi and the Directorate of Food Processing Industries and Horticulture, Government of West Bengal, to promote cottage industries with locally available perishable fruits and vegetables. The aim was to minimise wastage, promote new income opportunities for the small farmers and minimise unemployment. Eight different items like Pickle, Jam, Jelly, Sauce, Squash, Kasundi, Papad and Snacks are being produced.

*5.3.3. Mini Jute Spinning Unit:* This project was started in 1987, in collaboration with the erstwhile Jute Technological Research Laboratories (now NIRJAFT), Department of Science & Technology of the Government of India and that of the Government of West Bengal. The idea was to bring the processing unit to the level of jute growers to help the jute farmers and to provide employment to some rural youths.

*d. Jute Handicraft Project:* The Ramakrishna Mission Pallimangal, Kamarpukur, with the help of the National Centre for Jute Diversification (NCJD), Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, has been successfully implementing the project of jute handicraft since the year 2000. Now it has taken a new dimension; as soon as a group of young, enthusiastic, but poor women, after being trained successfully, have been engaged at the Pallimangal Workshop as production-based wage workers. On average, they earn more than Rs. 3500 per month individually, whereas others earn above Rs. 2000/- per month. Some of them work at Bhurkunda, Hazipur and individually at their houses. Those women working at the workshop at Kamarpukur are provided with mid-day supplementary nutrition at free cost. Different types of fancy bags, decorating items, mobile phone bags, money purses, table mats, pen holders, desk calendars, greeting card caps, office files, etc., are being produced and sold at our showroom with good response. These products have great appeal among tourists throughout the year.

*e. Incense Stick Project:* This project has been continued since its inception in the year 1980. Many destitute women have been trained and are earning under the project, either working at the Kamarpukur workshop or in their homes. After being trained, many women collect raw materials from the workshop and prepare incense sticks at home in their free time after their household work, thus they also support their family economically. The products are sold under the brand name of "Sridham

Dhoop". More than 10 different types of incense sticks are being manufactured at present. Out of those, 'Pure Sandal-wood', herbal type 'Arghya', and one as a mosquito repellent have become very popular with the customers.

Besides the above-mentioned projects, some other projects are also run under this programme - Weaving Project, Apiculture Programme, Mushroom Production Programme, Solar Energy Programme, etc., and all these programmes are gradually uplifting the rural economy.

## 6. ANALYSIS:

Gradual increase of tourists in the Kamarpukur, a market developed in the surroundings of the Math area. The people migrate and build their settlements in this area. Increasing population growth demands more food. The soil testing laboratory helps with higher agricultural production, which indirectly helps to fulfil the local food demand.

The huge production of vegetables under the guidance of soil testing laboratories encourages the farmers to process food. Because tourists are attracted to processed food like Pickles, Jam, Jelly, Sauce, Squash, Kasundi, Papad, and Snacks are being produced. About 4532 tonnes of fruits and vegetables like tomato, green mango, potatoes, pineapples, etc. are wasted every year during the season. This is the cumulative amount of intensive subsistence farming. The farmers are unable to store their small amount of production in the cold storage, as it is not cost-effective. The food processing unit helps to produce food products in small amounts, and the farmers benefit from extra earnings after their agriculture.

The major population of Kamarpukur lives below the poverty line. Their unique traditional way of life, heritage culture, folklore, and handicrafts have a potential prospect to uplift the regional as well as local economy (Roy, 2014). Religious tourism has accelerated this prospect in Kamarpukur. The Mini Jute Spinning Unit, Jute Handicraft Project, and Incense Stick Project were developed as a part of the tourism economy of this area.

## 7. CONCLUSION:

The communication of Kamarpukur with Kolkata and other parts of West Bengal plays a catalytic role in the rapid development of tourism in this area (Ray, 2012). The continuous flow of tourists in and around Kamarpukur throughout the year helps to rejuvenate the local socio-economic condition. Ramakrishna Mission 'Pallimangal' project plays a great role in this connection. 'Pallimangal' is the Bengali word, meaning rural welfare. Ramakrishna Mission Pallimangal, Kamarpukur, Hooghly has been working in villages since its inception for the upliftment of the poor and downtrodden with an emphasis on the womenfolk through its health, education, economic, social and cultural development programmes under the direct supervision of its headquarters at Belurmath, Howrah.

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