

The Issues and Perspectives of Religious Tourism Development at Ramrajatala Temple, Howrah



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Abstract: Religious tourism is a type of tourism exclusively or strongly motivated by religious reasons. This is one of the oldest forms of tourism. It can also be referred to as faith tourism or spiritual tourism. People go on religious holidays to confirm, deeper or reflect upon their faith. This paper investigates the issues and challenges of religious tourism and also its touristic significance of Ram Temple at Ramrajatala. The scope of socio-economic engagement during religious tourism and analysis of the communication issues pertaining to the religious location of Ramrajatala is dealt in this study. The data for this study was collected from tourists occupied in religious tourism activities. This study is generally based on primary data and secondary data.

Keywords: Religious tourism, culture, socio-economic development, infrastructure, market scenario.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is responsible for better interactions among nations and civilisations. Similarly, it helps in maintaining defensive surroundings, old monuments and cultural manifestations. This paper will focus on Ram temple which has different aspects like the famous idol of Lord Rama, four month long famous fair on the occasion of the Rama Puja, only one moustache idol of Lord Rama, busiest morning vegetable market and congested shops and transportation. It is a famous temple in Howrah District. This temple is a popular touristic attraction.

II. HISTORY

Lord Rama's Temple of Ramrajatala is one of the famous and oldest temples in Howrah district. The area has been named Ramrajatala due to this Temple. The respected Sanyal family was the zamindar who lived here at Satragachi approximately 250-300 years ago. Later they used the title Choudhury. The descendants of the family named Ayodhyaram Choudhury devoted himself to Lord Sri Ramchandra. It is said that one day he dreamt of Lord Ram and his wife Sita. After that he started puja of Lord Rama. Lord Rama's temple was built and this puja continues till now. But during that time, Saraswati Puja was very famous in this area and the villagers used to celebrate it about 300 years ago. Some of the villagers who were fond of Saraswati Puja, opposed the Ram Puja. Then late Ayodhyaram Choudhury met with two groups resulting in a decision that Ram Puja would continue same

as before and the goddess of wisdom Saraswati would be placed on the top of Lord Ram and Sita. Thus, both pujas are still continuing.

It became a custom to cut the bamboo from the bamboo grove of Sasthitala and perform the very first puja of bamboo at Choudhury para Shib Mandir on the day of Saraswati Puja. From the day of Saraswati puja, the preparation of Ram Puja started. Bamboos were cut to make the idol of Lord Rama on the same day. The bamboos were kept in the temple after navigating the entire area. One month is needed to make the idol from the time of Shivratri. This puja continues for few months and a large fair is held during the puja months. At the early stage, the puja and the fair were held for three days only. After that it continued for a fortnight and now it is celebrated for one month. Now Ram puja starts on Ramnavami tithi in Chaitra Baishakh month and continues up to the last Sunday of Shrabon month. The immersion of Lord Rama's idol is done on that last Sunday. This puja continues for four months. The fair is now the longest running fair in Bengali culture.

The temple is very old. The idol of Rama is 22 feet in height and 16 feet in width. There are 26 idols in the temple like Ram Sita, Laxman, Bharat, Satrugana, Shiva, Bramha, Saraswati and so on. This puja is very famous for the Ram Puja which is done almost all over India and continues throughout the year or the on the day of Ram Navami, but here worshipping is done in once in a year and lasts for four months. Many varieties of *Bhog* or food items are offered. The most interesting thing in this idol is that Rama has a moustache. It is also claimed that there is no political issue in this Puja.



PIC 1: IDOLS OF RAMRAJATALA TEMPLE (author photograph)

III. OBJECTIVES

To study of the tourism significance of this famous area of Howrah district named after the Rama Temple of Ramrajatala.

To examine the impact of Rama Temple on surroundings.

To examine the economic significance of this area.

To identify the religious faith among the tourists of different age groups.

To examine the potentials and prospects of religious tourism of this area.

IV. MAJOR HYPOTHESIS

No significant differences of experiences of sample tourist respondents regarding the duration of stay on the key destination selection determinants.

No significant associations are established among the services across the category of accommodation, transport and restaurant during their stay

V. METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on primary and secondary source. Primary data is collected from 100 samples of tourists. Market survey is done by questionnaires. The ward map of this area is collected from Howrah Municipality Corporation. Various cartographic techniques have been used to explain data.

VI. TOURISTIC SIGNIFICANCE

Majority of the tourists visit this place from the month of April to August. Highest percentage of tourists comes in the month of May followed by April, August, June and July. Most of the tourists are from Ramrajatala and other places of Howrah districts. Very few are from states like Maharashtra, Delhi and Tamil Nadu.

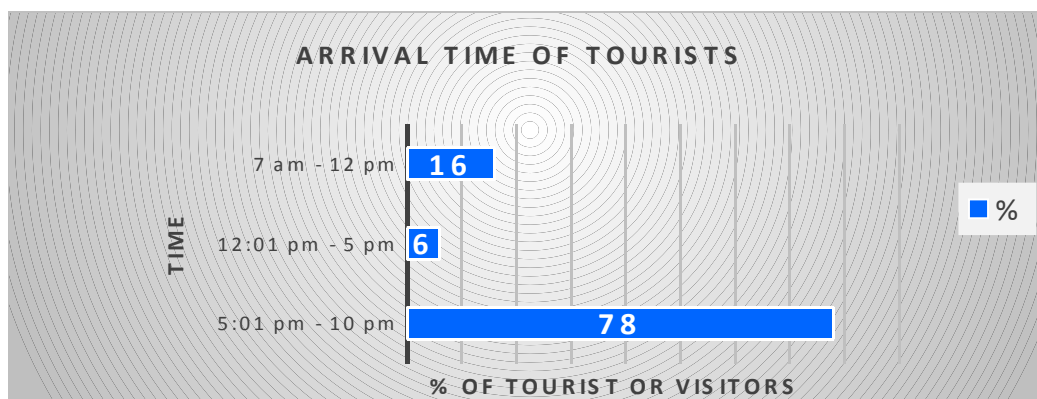


FIG 2: FLOW OF TOURISTS

About 16% of tourists arrived here from 7 am to 12 pm. About 6% arrived from 12 pm to 5 pm and about 78% tourists arrived from 5 pm to 10 pm. The fair opens in the afternoon, and due to this factor most of the tourists visit in the evening.

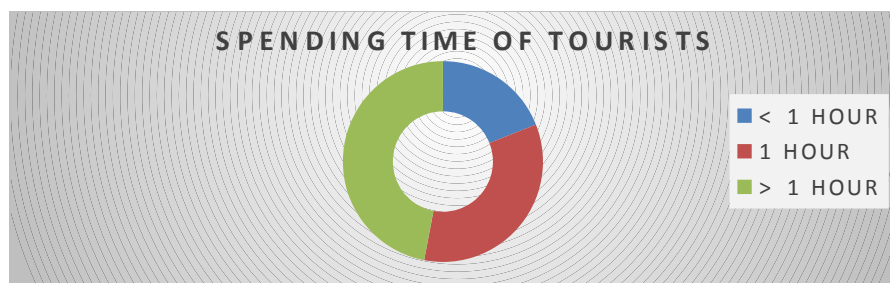


FIG 3: TOURIST ARRIVAL

Tourists who came here mostly spent their time for more than 1 hour. Remaining 34% spent for 1 hour and 19% spent less than 1 hour.

AREA OF RESIDENCE



FIG 4: SPENDING TIME

VII. SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF TOURISTS

About 36% tourists were from Ramrajatala, Howrah and remaining 64% tourists belonged to other wards of Howrah Municipality and blocks of Howrah district. There is a variation in tourists from Ramrajatala. About 16% tourists were from Chaudhury para, 20% were from Nandipara, 8% Sasthitala, 12% were from Doserpally, 8% Sankarmath and 36% other sites or paras at Ramrajatala.

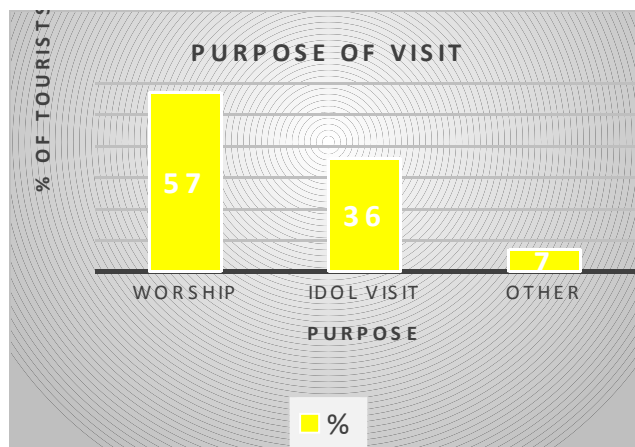


FIG 5: RESIDING AREA

The main purpose of visit to this place is worship and 36% of them just came to see the idol and attended the fair. About 13% of the tourists came here by foot, 23% used 2-wheeler, 18% used 4-wheeler and 3% came here by train.

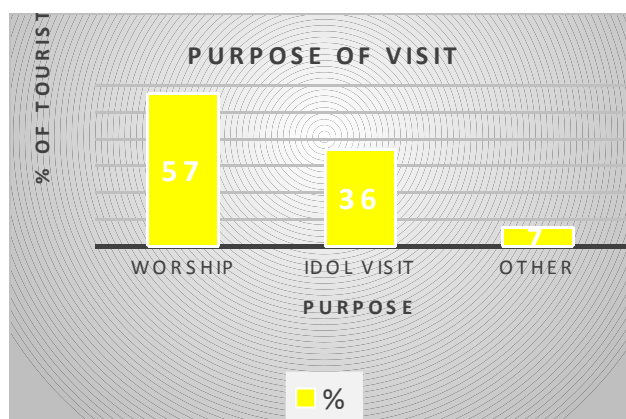


FIG 6: LOCALITY

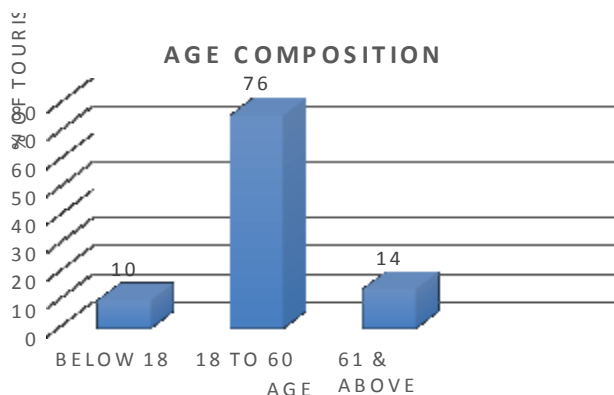


FIG 7: PURPOSE OF COMING

About 17% tourists visited alone, 61% tourists visited with their family, 20% came with their friends. The fair is visited by most of the visitors and only 7% of them never visited the famous fair of this area. There is a vegetable market in the morning. 56% of the visitors visited the marketplace but rest of them did not because they visited this place in the evening. 10% of the tourists were below 18 years age group, 76% were of 18-60 years age group and 14% belonged to more than 60 years age group. Most of the tourists were female but the percentage of male tourists was 44%.

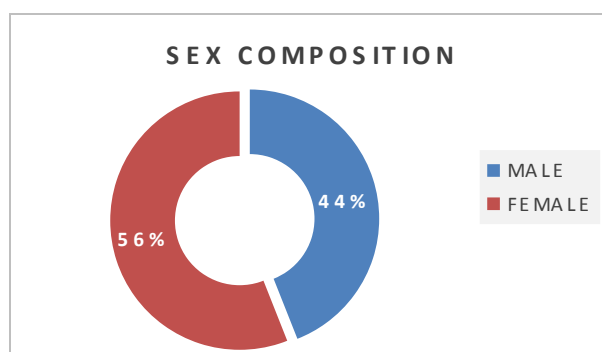


FIG 8: MODE OF TRANSPORT

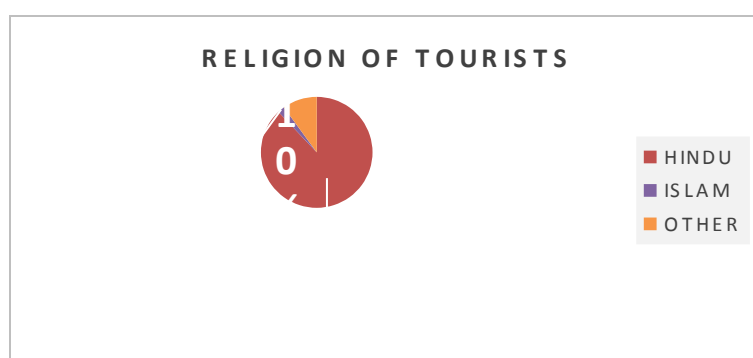


FIG 9: AGE GROUP

Tourists came here from different castes like General caste (47%), OBC (22%), SC (21%) and ST(10%). 88% are Hindu followed by Islam and other religious group. There is a variation found in occupational structure. Most of them were housewife. Workers of governmental jobs and private jobs were also in good number. Students and retired persons also visited this place.

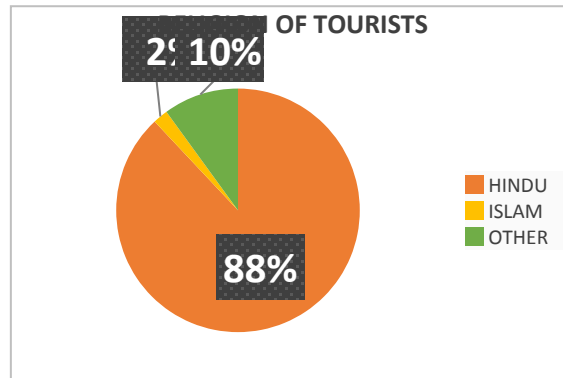


FIG 10: SEX COMPOSITION

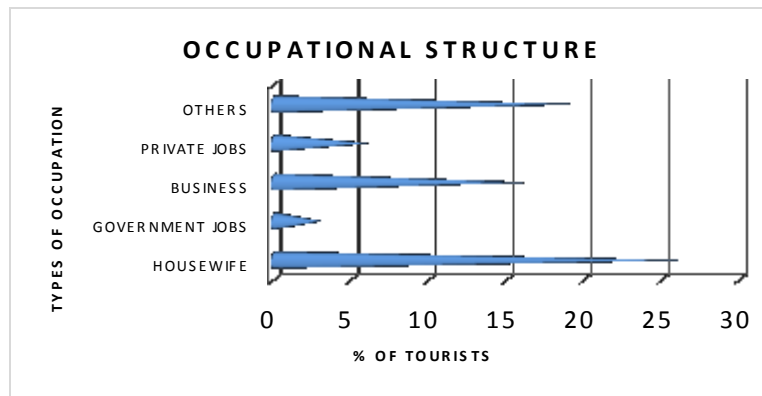


FIG 11: RELIGIOUS GROUP

VIII. MARKET SURVEY

Most of the shop owners were from 18-60 years age group. 7% of them belonged to below 18 years and rest of them were above 60 years.

87% of the shop keeps were male and only 13% were female.

80% shop keepers lived at Ramrajatala and remaining lived in other localities. So most of the shopkeepers were local people.

Most of the shops were established very recently as 70% were below 50 years old. But 17% were established about 51 to 100 years ago and 13% were established more than 101 years ago.

Shops were located near the temple. 47% of them were situated more than 1 minute distance. 23% shops were situated only at 1 minute distance and 30% were situated just near the temple.

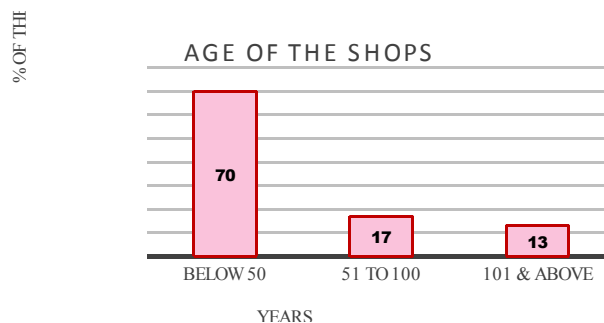


FIG 12: ESTABLISHMENT OF SHOPS

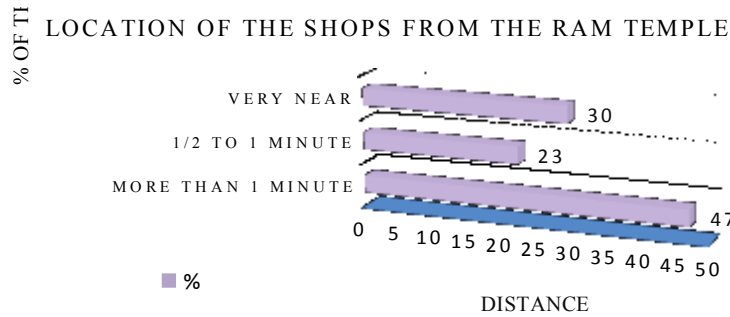


FIG 13: LOCATION OF SHOPS

90% shops opened at 7 to 10 am and 10% opened after 10 am. 83% shops closed at 9 pm and 17% are closed after 9 pm.

The main source of the goods of the shops was Barabazar of Kolkata because of less distance and importance. Suppliers were also available in this area. 33% shop keepers collected their goods from suppliers.

There was a variety in different types of shops. 10% were sweet-shops, 3% were worship-things, 7% were flower shops, 10% were cosmetic shops, 7% were grocery shops. Other important shops like garment, restaurants etc. were also found.

Sale of goods varied from season to season. During Ram Puja the sale of the shops was highest. 20% of the shops were moderate and 2% of the shops were low in amount of sales. During other season, the sale in 81% shops was of moderate category followed by 6% high sale, and 13% had low amount of sale.

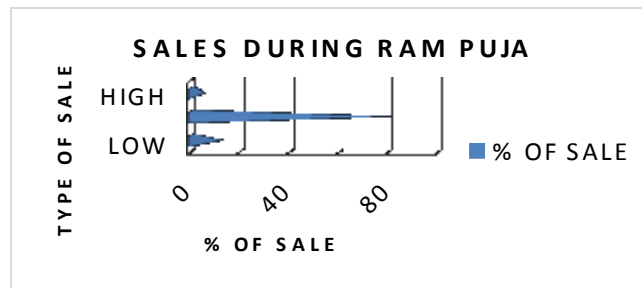


FIG 14: PEAK SEASON

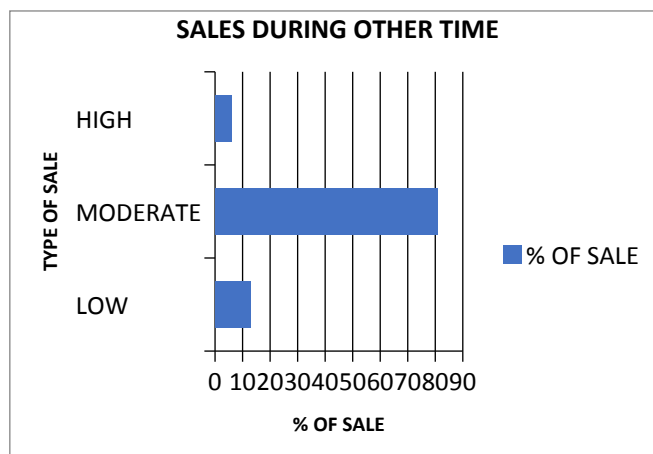


FIG 15: LEAN SEASON

IX. MAIN FINDINGS

This place has a great religious touristic significance during the months of April to August.

The Temple has got locational advantage.

This place attracts tourists mainly in four months.

The survey revealed that the tourists are mostly local in origin.

Most of the tourists come with family or friends.

The temple is regarded as cultural heritage site in Howrah district.

The fair has great importance because it is held for long duration.

There is no idol in the temple from August to March.

X. CONCLUSION

Howrah is the second largest city in West Bengal. The history of Howrah city is said to have taken place over the past 500 years, as mentioned in historical documents, Bengali literature and in the documents of early European travellers. There are many temples in Howrah. Ram temple is famous for its unique characteristics. The glory of this temple is notable. The advancement of technology and lifestyle can hardly change people's faith and belief. Better transport network and accommodation in hotels can enhance the inflow of tourists in peak season. This place has potential to become one of the popular tourist spots as well as cultural heritage sites.

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