



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



Beyond the Pilgrimage: Unveiling the hidden heritage and religious tourism prospects of Katwa Sub Division's, Purba Bardhaman Sacred Circuits

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Abstract

Katwa Sub-Division, nestled in the heart of West Bengal, is home to a rich tapestry of religious heritage, with numerous sacred sites drawing pilgrims and tourists alike. Despite its potential, the region's religious tourism sector remains underutilized, warranting an in-depth exploration of its prospects.

This study aims to identify and describe the existing religious tourism resources in Katwa Sub-Division, assessing their potential for sustainable tourism development. Specifically, it seeks to document the profile of visitors and identify the opportunities and challenges facing the sector.

The study employs a descriptive research design, incorporating field visits and surveys to gather data from key stakeholders. Preliminary findings indicate a diverse range of religious sites, specially Hindu temples, which attract a significant number of devotees and tourists. The region's unique blend of cultural and spiritual heritage presents opportunities for community engagement and sustainable tourism practices.

The study's results underscore the need for targeted marketing strategies and infrastructure development to harness Katwa Sub-Division's religious tourism potential, contributing to local economic growth and cultural preservation. By highlighting the region's strengths and challenges, this research provides a foundation for informed decision-making and sustainable tourism development in the area.

Keywords: Religious Tourism; Spiritual Heritage; Pilgrim Tourism; Cultural Heritage; Sustainable Tourism

1. Introduction

India's rich cultural and spiritual heritage has made it a hub for religious tourism, with millions of pilgrims and tourists visiting sacred sites across the country every year (KPMG, 2025). Katwa Sub-Division, located in West Bengal, is home to several important religious sites, including temples, mosques, and Buddhist monasteries. Despite its potential, the region's religious tourism sector remains underdeveloped, warranting an in-depth exploration of its prospects.

Studies have shown that religious tourism can have a significant impact on local economies, contributing to infrastructure development, job creation, and cultural exchange (KPMG, 2025). However, there is a lack of research on the specific challenges and opportunities facing religious tourism in Katwa Sub-Division. This study aims to bridge this gap by assessing the current state of religious tourism in the region and identifying areas for sustainable development.

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The selection of Katwa Sub-Division as the study area is justified by its unique cultural and spiritual significance, as well as its potential for tourism growth. The region's proximity to major cities like Kolkata and its rich history make it an attractive destination for pilgrims and tourists (Ahmed, 2016).

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to answer the following research question:

What are the prospects and challenges of religious tourism in Katwa Sub-Division, and how can sustainable tourism practices be developed to promote the region's cultural and economic growth?

Objectives

- 1.To identify and describe the existing religious tourism resources in Katwa Sub-Division.
- To assess the current infrastructure and services supporting religious tourism in the region.
- To analyze the profile of tourists visiting Katwa Sub-Division and their satisfaction levels.
- To evaluate the opportunities and challenges facing sustainable religious tourism development in Katwa Sub-Division.

2. Methodology

This study employs a **descriptive and analytical research design** to evaluate the religious tourism potential of the Katwa Sub-Division. The research was conducted through a multi-dimensional approach as follows:

2.1. Geographical Scope

The study area encompasses the Katwa Sub-Division of Purba Bardhaman, specifically focusing on five identified spiritual circuits: Katwa Gouranga Bari, Agradwip, Ketugram, Srikhanda-Koichor, and Dainhat-Sribati.

2.2. Data Collection

- **Primary Data:** Field surveys were conducted at major pilgrimage sites. Semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were administered to a diverse sample of 200 respondents, including domestic tourists, temple authorities, and local residents, to assess the tourist profile and community engagement.
- **Secondary Data:** Information was gathered from the West Bengal Tourism Development Corporation (WBTDC) reports, District Statistical Handbooks, historical manuscripts, and existing literature on the Nimbarka Sampradaya and Bengal's Shakti Peethas.
- **Identification of Circuits:** Sacred sites were categorized into "Spiritual Circuits" based on their geographical proximity and religious affinity (Vaishnava and Shakta traditions) to facilitate a structured analysis of tourism flow.

3. Result and Discussion

Katwa is a sacred pilgrimage site where the revered Shaktipeeths and Vaishnava Peeths converge, creating a unique spiritual landscape that embodies the fusion of diverse traditions and beliefs. The sacred sites around Katwa are grouped into five spiritual circuits, each offering a unique journey of devotion and discovery, these are

- 1)Katwa Gouranga bari Circuit
- 2)Agradwip Circuit
- 3) Dainhat -Sribati Circuit
- 4)Ketugram Circuit
- 5)Srikhanda and Koichor Circuit

3.1. Katwa Gauranga bari Circuit

3.1.1. Gauranga Temple

This sacred site marks a pivotal moment in Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's spiritual journey, where he took sannyasa in 1510. The tranquil atmosphere is filled with devotion and history, drawing pilgrims seeking spiritual upliftment. A small temple and memorial honor the spot where Mahaprabhu began his transformative journey, spreading bhakti across India. A must-visit for devotees, this site holds immense spiritual, cultural, and historical significance. Its sanctity must be preserved for the countless devotees who flock here, seeking connection with the Lord's teaching

Accessibility & Infrastructure

This temple is situated on Thana Road in the town of Katwa. Katwa is easily accessible via the Howrah-Katwa railway line, as well as through various bus routes connecting it to different parts of South Bengal; the temple itself is located within the town of Katwa. There are no facilities for overnight accommodation at the temple, nor are there provisions for public restrooms or clean drinking water. However, arrangements are available for devotees to receive Bhog Prasad (sacred food offering) during the afternoon.



3.1.2. Khepimaa Temple

In Katwa, West Bengal, Khepi Maa, revered as Khyapa Kali, has been worshipped for over 500 years, embodying the town's joys and sorrows. This sacred tradition is deeply ingrained in locals, who believe Khepi Maa fulfills their prayers. Adorned with 4 kg of gold, she's worshipped as Dakshina Kali with Tantric rituals. The Kali Puja night Mahapuja draws devotees from afar, with goat sacrifices and a grand procession. Khepi Maa's immersion procession showcases the town's devotion and heritage, with devotees seeking blessings from the 'richest goddess'. The area's congestion and narrow roads don't deter pilgrims, who flock to this sacred site, believed to grant wishes and offer solace. As the goddess is immersed, emotions run high, and devotees bid farewell, hoping to return soon. This timeless tradition continues to unite the community, fostering faith and cultural heritage.



Accessibility & Infrastructure

The Khepima Temple is situated right next to Gouranga Bari; consequently, it is easily accessible for those visiting Gouranga Bari. Here, too, there are no arrangements for pilgrims to stay overnight, and a lack of public toilets is noticeable. Arrangements are available for the midday Bhog Prasad.

3.1.3. RadhaKanta Dev Bari

The Radhakanta Bari in Katwa, a revered Vaishnavite pilgrimage site in East Burdwan, West Bengal, is renowned for the sacred darshan of Sri Sri Radhaman and the revered small twin idols. This ancient Vaishnava center exudes spiritual sanctity, drawing devotees seeking solace and enlightenment. Notably, the Radhakanta Bari in Katwa is distinct from the esteemed scholar and social reformer, Radhakanta Deb, who hailed from Kolkata's Shobhabazar royal family. The site's tranquil ambiance and rich heritage make it a cherished destination for spiritual seekers, fostering a deep connection with the divine. Its significance extends beyond the physical realm, resonating with the hearts of devotees.



Figure 5 Radhakanta Deb

Accessibility & Infrastructure

The Gopinath Temple can be reached very easily by alighting at Agradeep Station on the Howrah-Katwa railway line. The temple premises feature excellent public toilet facilities and a provision for drinking water; however, there are no arrangements for overnight accommodation. This temple also offers the facility to partake of Prasad (sanctified food) during the afternoon.

3.1.4. Madhaitala Asram

Located in Katwa, Madhayitala Ashram is a cornerstone of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, marking the site where the tyrant Madhai found redemption through Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's mercy. Its heritage is anchored by a 500-year-old continuous kirtan and the sacred Madhavi tree where Mahaprabhu rested before his sannyasa. The complex houses the Samadhi of Madhai and the ancient Nitai-Gaura Temple, preserving architectural relics of the Bhakti movement. Pilgrims visit to honor the lotus footprints of Lord Chaitanya and experience the "Dhama's" unique energy of spiritual reform. Just 2 km from the site of Mahaprabhu's renunciation, it remains a vital stop for those seeking spiritual cleansing. Its historical relevance lies in the transformative power of devotion, turning a place of penance into a sanctuary of peace.

Accessibility & Infrastructure

This temple is situated on the banks of the Ganges, 2 kilometers away from Gauranga Bari. It offers facilities for overnight stays, public restrooms, and the provision of Bhog Prasad (sanctified food) at lunchtime.



Figure 6 Madhaitala Asram



Figure 7 Puspa Samadhi

3.2. Agradwip Circuit

3.2.1. Gopinath Temple

A Timeless Celebration of Devotion Agradwip, a quaint town in Purba Bardhaman, reverberates with spiritual fervor as it hosts the esteemed Gopinath Mela annually. This grand fair, held on Chaitra's Krishna Paksha Ekadashi, draws an astonishing 10-12 lakh devotees, transforming the area into a vibrant pilgrimage hub. The tradition commemorates Sri Chaitanya's 1515 AD visit, when he enshrined Lord Krishna's idol, Gopinath, and entrusted its service to Gobinda Ghosh. The unique Chire Mahotsav ritual, perpetuating Gobinda Ghosh's funeral rites performed by Gopinath himself, adds to the fair's allure.

Accessibility and Infrastructure

The Gopinath Temple can be reached very easily by alighting at Agradeep Station on the Howrah-Katwa railway line. The temple premises feature excellent public toilet facilities and a provision for drinking water; however, there are no arrangements for overnight accommodation. This temple also offers the facility to partake of Prasad (sanctified food) during the afternoon.



Figure 8 Gopinath Temple



Figure 9 Gopinath & Radharani

3.2.2. Kathia Baba Ashram

Swami Janaki Das Kathiyababa Tapoban Ashram embodies the Dvaitadvaita Vedanta philosophy of Vaishnavism, rooted in the Nimbarka Sampradaya. This revered lineage, tracing back to Sri Nagji Maharaj, emphasizes spiritual discipline and self-control. The Kathiyababa saints don a sacred wooden belt, symbolizing their ascetic vows. Nestled beside Nimbarka Sarovar, the ashram's charitable trust supports local education and handicrafts, fostering community welfare. The ashram's serene ambiance and spiritual teachings attract seekers, guiding them towards inner peace and enlightenment. Through its philanthropic endeavors, the ashram weaves a fabric of compassion, serving the community with dedication and love.

Accessibility & Infrastructure

This Temple can be reached very easily by alighting at Agradeep Station on the Howrah-Katwa railway line. The temple premises feature excellent public toilet facilities and a provision for drinking water, there are also arrangements for overnight accommodation. This temple also offers the facility to partake of Prasad (sanctified food) during the afternoon.



Figure 10 Kathia Baba



Figure 11 Kathia Baba Ashram

3.3. Dainhat -Sribati Circuit:-

3.3.1. Dainhat Samajbari:

The Samajbari of Dainhat, a revered heritage site near Katwa, West Bengal, stands as a testament to the region's rich history. This 1740-built cremation temple, situated on the Bhagirathi River's banks, served as the Bardhaman royal family's sacred funerary shrine. Maharaja Kirti Chand, who expanded the kingdom in 1728, rests here. The site, linked to ancient Indrani city, was a key religious hub. Recognized by the West Bengal Heritage Commission (2006), Samajbari's neglect is evident, but its historical significance remains unshaken. Accessible by road from Katwa, this hidden gem awaits exploration, offering a glimpse into Bengal's regal past. Efforts to restore its former glory would preserve the site's cultural essence, allowing future generations to appreciate its significance. As a sacred space, Samajbari continues to inspire reverence, echoing the whispers of Bengal's illustrious past.

Accessibility and Infrastructure



Figure 12 Dainhat Samajbari

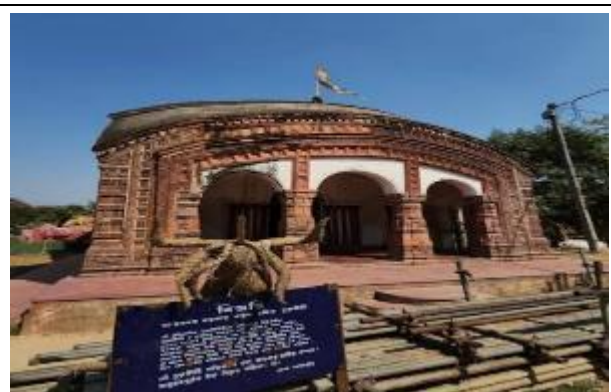


Figure 13 Teracota Sclupture

This temple is situated on the banks of the Ganges, 7 kilometers away from Gauranga Bari. However, strictly speaking, the temple premises lack public toilets, drinking water facilities, overnight accommodation, or arrangements for receiving Prasad.

3.3.2. Sribati Shiva Temple

The Sribati Terracotta Temple Complex, located near Katwa in West Bengal's Purba Bardhaman district, is a stunning example of 19th-century temple architecture. Built in 1836 by the Chandra family, this complex comprises three Shiva

temples, each housing a Shiva Linga: Bishweshwar (black stone), Bholanath (white marble), and Chandreshwar (black stone). The central temple showcases the Pancharatna style, while the two side temples follow the Deul architectural style.

The temples' walls are adorned with intricate terracotta panels depicting Bengali culture and mythological stories. Visitors can explore the complex, located about 10-12 km from Katwa, between 6:00 AM to 12:30 PM and 4:00 PM to 8:00 PM. Nearby, the ruins of the old zamindar house, Chandrabari, are also worth a visit. To get to Sribati, take a bus or auto-rickshaw from Katwa Railway Station. This hidden gem is a testament to West Bengal's rich historical and architectural heritage.

Accessibility and Infrastructure

This temple situated 20 kilometers from Katwa, this temple offers a serene setting but very few amenities. Visitors should note that the premises lack essential public facilities, including toilets, drinking water, overnight lodging, or options for receiving Prasad.



Figure 14 Shiva Temple



Figure 15 Teracota Sulpture

3.3.3. Radha Gobindo Temple

The Radha-Gobinda Temple in Jagadanandapur, West Bengal, is a breathtaking blend of brick and stone architecture, standing tall at 82-ft high with multiple spires. This 19th-century temple complex boasts a Har-Gauri shrine, Natmandir, and Rasmancha, adorned with intricate carvings and sculptures. Founded by Madhusudan Ghosh Chowdhury, it honors Radha-Gobinda Jiu and other deities. The temple comes alive during the vibrant Dol-Holi festival, celebrated with music, dance, and color, attracting crowds from surrounding villages. The temple's unique architecture and rich history make it a must-visit destination. Its serene ambiance and cultural significance are sure to leave a lasting impression.

Accessibility & Infrastructure

This temple situated 9 kilometers from Katwa, this temple offers a serene setting but very few amenities. Visitors should note that the premises lack essential public facilities, including toilets, drinking water, overnight lodging, but offer Prasad bhog in afternoon.



Figure 16 Radha-Gobinda Temple



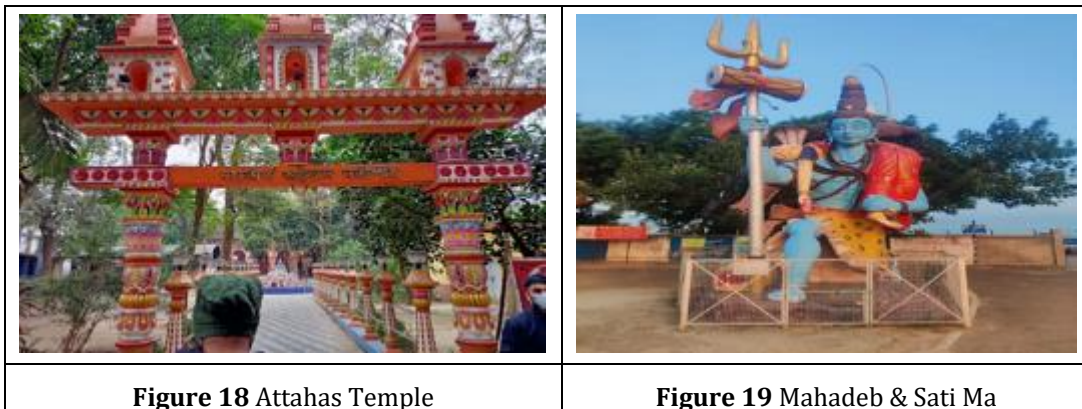
Figure 17 Radha-Gobinda Ji

3.4. Ketugram Circuit

3.4.1. Attahas Temple(Satipeeth)

Attahas Temple, a revered Shakti Peeth, is nestled in Birbhum, West Bengal, near the serene Ishani River. This sacred site, where Goddess Sati's upper lips are believed to have fallen, exudes spiritual tranquility, drawing devotees from afar. The temple's 15-18 feet wide stone deity, symbolizing the lips, is a testament to its ancient heritage. Legend has it that Hanuman fetched lotuses for Lord Rama's worship of Goddess Durga here. The temple, renovated recently, boasts stunning stucco-styled images and separate shrines for Goddess Parvati and Lord Shiva. The annual Phullora Mela festival attracts global devotees, while Navratri celebrations fill the air with music and dance. Worshipping at Attahas Temple is believed to offer protection, career growth, and marital bliss. The temple is accessible by air (Kazi Nazrul Islam Airport, 113 km), rail (nearest station 29.7 km), and road (buses and local transport available).

Accessibility & Infrastructure: The Attahas Temple is situated 23 kilometers away from the town of Katwa. Excellent facilities are available here for pilgrims, including overnight accommodation, a police outpost, and well-arranged provisions for drinking water and restrooms; additionally, arrangements are also in place for serving Prasad (sacred food) during the afternoon.



3.4.2. Bahulakshmi Temple

Bahula Shaktipeeth, nestled on the Ajay riverbanks in Ketugram, West Bengal, is a revered sacred site where Mata Sati's left arm is believed to have fallen. This divine abode, located about 145 km from Howrah, near Katwa Junction, radiates spiritual energy. Devi Bahula, flanked by Kartikeya and Ganesha, and Baba Bhairav as Bhiruka, embodies prosperity and protection. The temple comes alive during Navratri and Mahashivratri, drawing devotees seeking blessings. 'Bahula' signifies the Goddess's benevolent arm, bestowing prosperity and fulfilling wishes, leaving no one empty-handed. The sacred site's serene ambiance and the Goddess's gracious presence captivate hearts, inspiring faith and devotion.

Accessibility & Infrastructure: This temple is situated 17 kilometers away from the town of Katwa. Arrangements for Bhog Prasad (sacred food offerings) are available here for pilgrims at lunchtime; however, there are no adequate public toilet facilities, nor are there any arrangements for overnight accommodation.



3.5. Srikhanda and Koichor Circuit

3.5.1. Sripat Srikhanda

.Sripat Srikhanda, a revered Vaishnav pilgrimage site in West Bengal's Purba Bardhaman district, resonates with spiritual significance. Located near Katwa, this sacred village is Narhari Sarkar Thakur's abode, a distinguished associate of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and a renowned Vaishnav poet . Srikhanda harmoniously blends Vaishnav, Shakta, and Shaiva traditions, showcasing Bengal's rich cultural tapestry. The village cherishes its medieval literary legacy, vibrant Borodanga festival, and convenient connectivity via the Bardhaman-Katwa railway line. With 285 Vaishnav poets and saints calling it home, Sripat Srikhanda is a treasure trove of spiritual heritage and history.

Accessibility & Infrastructure: This temple is situated 9 kilometers away from the town of Katwa. Arrangements for Prasad (sacred food offerings) are provided at noon for visiting devotees. Additionally, there are clean toilet facilities, as well as arrangements for overnight stays, subject to prior permission.



Figure 22 Natua Gaur



Figure 23 Madan Mohan Ji

3.5.2. Jogadya maa temple(Satipeeth)

Shri Jogadya Shaktipeeth, nestled in Kshirgram, West Bengal, is one of the revered 51 Shakti Peethas, where Goddess Sati's right toe is believed to have fallen . This sacred site comes alive on Baishakhi Sankranti, when Goddess Jogadya emerges from Kshir Dighi, a sacred pond, for worship. The deity, an incarnation of Goddess Sati, is revered alongside Lord Shiva as Kshirkanta. The temple complex, comprising old and new structures, is steeped in mythological significance, with tales of Mahiraavan's abduction of Rama and Lakshmana. Located 45 km north of Bardhaman, Kshirgram beckons devotees seeking spiritual solace and connection with the divine. The goddess's periodic emergence from Kshir Dighi adds to the site's mystique, making it a cherished pilgrimage destination.

Accessibility & Infrastructure: This Temple is situated 23 kilometers away from the town of Katwa. Excellent facilities are available here for pilgrims, including overnight accommodation, and well-arranged provisions for drinking water and restrooms; additionally, arrangements are also in place for serving Prasad (sacred food) during the afternoon.



Figure 24 Shri Jogadya Shaktipeeth Mandir



Figure 25 Shri Jogadya Ma

4. Major Findings

- **Rich Religious Heritage:** Katwa Sub-Division has a rich religious heritage with numerous sacred sites, including temples, mosques, and Buddhist monasteries, which attract a significant number of pilgrims and tourists.
- **Diverse Tourist Profile:** The study reveals that tourists visiting Katwa Sub-Division are diverse in terms of age, occupation, and place of origin, indicating a broad appeal of the region's religious tourism potential.
- **Infrastructure Challenges:** The existing infrastructure supporting religious tourism in Katwa Sub-Division is inadequate, with limited accommodation options, poor road connectivity, and insufficient tourist facilities.
- **Limited Awareness:** There is a lack of awareness about Katwa Sub-Division's religious tourism potential among potential tourists, indicating a need for targeted marketing and promotion strategies.
- **Community Engagement:** The study highlights the importance of community engagement and participation in religious tourism development, with local stakeholders expressing willingness to contribute to the sector's growth.
- **Sustainable Tourism Potential:** Katwa Sub-Division has significant potential for sustainable tourism development, with opportunities for eco-tourism, cultural tourism, and community-based tourism initiatives.
- **Challenges and Opportunities:** The study identifies challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of skilled manpower, and environmental concerns, but also highlights opportunities for collaboration and partnership among stakeholders to address these issues.

Suggestions for the Development of Religious Tourism in Katwa Sub-Division

To harness the full potential of the five spiritual circuits in Katwa and address the existing challenges, the following strategic interventions are suggested:

- **Infrastructure Upgradation and Connectivity**
- **Last-Mile Connectivity:** Improve road conditions leading to interior sites like **Attahas Temple** and **Sribati**, which currently face accessibility issues. Introducing dedicated "Pilgrim Shuttles" connecting Katwa Junction to the five major circuits would facilitate smoother transit.
- **Accommodation Facilities:** Encourage the development of eco-friendly guest houses and "Yatri Niwas" (Pilgrim Shelters) through Public-Private Partnerships (PPP). This would cater to the diverse tourist profile and encourage overnight stays rather than day-trips.
- **Integrated Digital Mapping and Promotion**
- **Unified Digital Portal:** Develop an official "Katwa Spiritual Circuit" website and mobile app featuring interactive maps, temple timings, historical significance, and virtual tours of sites like **Gouranga Bari** and **Jogadya Maa Temple**.
- **Thematic Branding:** Market the region using its unique identity as the "Confluence of Shakti and Vaishnavism." Utilizing social media influencers and travel bloggers to highlight the **Gopinath Mela** and **Sribati Terracotta** architecture can bridge the current awareness gap.
- **Heritage Conservation and Aesthetic Enhancement**
- **Restoration Projects:** Immediate intervention is required by the West Bengal Heritage Commission to restore the **Dainhat Samajbari** and the **Sribati Terracotta Complex** to prevent further decay of these 18th and 19th-century marvels.
- **Signage and Interpretation Centers:** Install multilingual (Bengali, Hindi, English) information boards at each site explaining the mythological and historical context, such as the significance of the **Nimbarka Sampradaya** at Kathia Baba Ashram.
- **Community-Based Tourism (CBT) Models**
- **Skill Development:** Train local youth as certified tourist guides and storytellers. This empowers the community and provides tourists with authentic insights into local rituals like the *Chire Mahotsav*.
- **Promotion of Local Handicrafts:** Establish "Heritage Haats" (markets) near the major circuits to sell local crafts and Srikhandas' traditional items, ensuring that tourism revenue directly benefits the local economy.
- **Sustainable and Event-Based Management**
- **Waste Management:** Implement strict "Green Pilgrimage" protocols, especially during high-footfall events like the **Phullora Mela** and **Kali Puja**, to protect the ecology of the Ajay and Bhagirathi riverbanks.
- **Circuit-Based Packages:** Collaborate with travel agencies to offer curated 2-day/3-night "Spiritual Trail" packages that cover all five circuits, ensuring a balanced distribution of tourist footfall across the sub-division.

5. Conclusion

The Katwa Sub-Division represents a rare and potent "Spiritual Confluence," where the profound traditions of Vaishnavism and Shaktism coexist within a compact geographical area. The study highlights that while the region possesses world-class heritage assets—such as the 500-year-old Khepi Maa tradition, the Satipeeths at Attahas and Bahula, and the terracotta marvels of Sribati—its tourism potential remains largely untapped due to systemic infrastructure deficits and limited digital visibility. The findings indicate that the "circuit-based" approach is the most viable model for development. By addressing "last-mile" connectivity and fostering community-based tourism, Katwa can transition from a localized pilgrimage spot to a prominent destination on the national tourism map. Ultimately, the preservation of Katwa's sacred landscape requires a symbiotic relationship between state-led conservation, private investment in hospitality, and active participation from the local community to ensure that spiritual heritage becomes a driver for sustainable socio-economic growth.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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