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EXPLORING THE DRIVERS OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM AND ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS ON DESTINATION COMMUNITIES WITH A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO AMBUBACHI MELA, KAMAKHYA TEMPLE GUWAHATI

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ABSTRACT

Religious tourism is a vital contributor to cultural preservation and local economies, offering spiritual, socio-economic, and environmental dimensions. This study explores the drivers of religious tourism and its socio-economic and environmental impacts, with a special focus on Ambubachi Mela at Kamakhya Temple, Guwahati. Utilizing a descriptive research design, primary data was collected through structured questionnaires targeting local residents and tourists. Key findings reveal that spiritual connection, peace, and cultural curiosity are primary motivators for visiting religious sites. Despite the large influx of visitors during Ambubachi Mela, environmental impacts were minimal, as pre- and post-event analyses showed no significant differences. Socio-economic benefits were evident, including moderate to significant increases in employment, local business growth, and indirect economic contributions to small and medium enterprises. However, these benefits were unevenly distributed, and long-term infrastructure improvements were limited. Challenges such as poor crowd management and inadequate cleanliness underscore the need for better planning and resource allocation. The study highlights the importance of addressing barriers like time constraints and financial limitations while fostering sustainable tourism practices. These insights are crucial for enhancing the religious tourism experience, promoting socio-economic growth, and minimizing environmental impacts for events like Ambubachi Mela.

KEYWORDS: Religious Tourism, Cultural Preservation, Socio-Economic Impact, Environmental Impact, Ambubachi Mela, Sustainable Tourism, Crowd Management

1. INTRODUCTION

Religious tourism, also known as pilgrimage or faith-based tourism, is one of the most ancient and

enduring forms of travel. Traditionally, it involves individuals or groups journeying to sacred destinations for spiritual fulfilment, religious observance, or personal reflection. In recent years, religious tourism has broadened to attract not only devout pilgrims but also travellers with an interest in the cultural, historical, or architectural significance of these sites. This growing form of tourism plays a crucial role in local economies, supporting cultural conservation and boosting global tourism. Nonetheless, it also introduces a range of socio-economic and environmental challenges that affect host communities, requiring careful management to balance benefits with preservation efforts (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Raj & Griffin, 2015).

Understanding the factors that induce tourists to visit religious destinations is critical for effectively managing and promoting these sites. Religious motivations remain central for many tourists, particularly those who participate in pilgrimages. For instance, destinations like Mecca, the Vatican, and Varanasi attract millions of visitors each year, many of whom travel for spiritual rejuvenation, penance, or religious obligations (Timothy & Olsen, 2006).

In addition to faith-based motivations, other factors drive religious tourism. Cultural curiosity, for example, is a powerful inducement. Many tourists are drawn to the historical and architectural grandeur of religious sites such as the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris or the ancient monasteries of Tibet. These sites, while religious in origin, often transcend their religious purposes to become global symbols of culture and history (Vukonić, 1996). Secular tourists may not participate in religious rituals but are interested in the heritage, art, and traditions associated with these places.

Another important driver of religious tourism is the search for spiritual well-being or healing. Several religious destinations, such as Lourdes in France or Bodh Gaya in India, are associated with physical or spiritual healing. These destinations appeal to tourists seeking solace from illness, grief, or life crises. Increasingly, travellers are combining religious visits with wellness tourism, indicating a shift in the motivations and experiences associated with religious travel (Raj & Griffin, 2015).

Religious tourism plays a substantial role in the socio-economic development of destination communities. The influx of tourists during religious events or pilgrimage seasons brings a boost to the local economy by generating employment and stimulating the growth of related sectors such as hospitality, retail, and transportation. In destinations like Lourdes, religious tourism has transformed the town's economy, with hotels, restaurants, and shops thriving on the steady flow of pilgrims (Shackley, 2001).

Employment is one of the most direct benefits of religious tourism. Local communities often experience an increase in job opportunities related to tourism services, ranging from accommodations

and tour guiding to food services and religious artifact shops. These economic benefits extend beyond peak pilgrimage seasons, as many religious sites maintain year-round tourism activities (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). Additionally, infrastructure developments, such as improved transportation networks and public amenities, tend to follow the growth of religious tourism. This not only enhances the tourist experience but also improves the quality of life for local residents.

Despite these economic benefits, the commercialization of religious sites raises concerns about cultural commodification. The transformation of sacred spaces into tourist attractions can lead to a dilution of their religious significance. For instance, at popular pilgrimage destinations, the spiritual experience may be overshadowed by the pressure of catering to large numbers of visitors, many of whom are not motivated by religious devotion. This can create tensions between maintaining the authenticity of the site and maximizing its economic potential (Shackley, 2001).

While religious tourism can foster economic growth, it can also contribute to environmental degradation, especially when large numbers of visitors converge on a destination. The environmental effects of religious events are particularly significant in terms of waste generation, water use, and ecosystem disruption. Popular religious sites such as the Kumbh Mela in India, which attracts millions of people, often face challenges related to pollution, waste management, and the overuse of natural resources (Singh, 2018).

Pre-event and post-event environmental impacts are particularly pronounced during large-scale religious festivals. For example, the Ganges River in India, revered by Hindus as a sacred water body, often becomes polluted during religious festivals as millions of devotees' bathe in its waters, leaving behind waste and disrupting the river's natural flow. Post-event cleanups often take significant time and resources, and in some cases, the environmental damage is irreversible (Mishra, 2014).

Sustainable tourism practices are critical for mitigating the environmental impacts of religious tourism. Destination managers and policymakers need to adopt measures to manage tourist flows, reduce waste, and ensure the conservation of natural and cultural resources. The promotion of eco-friendly pilgrimages, for instance, can help reduce the carbon footprint associated with religious travel. Encouraging the use of public transportation, recycling initiatives, and environmental education programs for both tourists and locals are key strategies for balancing the environmental and economic impacts of religious tourism (Raj & Griffin, 2015).

Religious tourism blends spiritual, cultural, and economic aspects, offering key benefits like job creation and infrastructure growth. To ensure sustainability, it's vital to understand tourist motivations and manage environmental impacts, especially during large events. Balancing these factors helps

preserve cultural heritage while promoting local development.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A literature review involves analysing prior research to gain a deeper understanding of a particular field of study. By reviewing established ideas, trends, and practices, researchers can generate new insights and approaches rooted in existing theoretical frameworks.

Liu (2003) in "Sustainable Tourism Development: A Critique," emphasizes the crucial role of community involvement in tourism planning. Through a review of over 120 sources, the study highlights that empowering local communities ensures equitable socio-economic benefits and supports long-term sustainability and cultural preservation.

Sunlu (2003) in the article "Environmental Impacts of Tourism," discusses tourism's dual effects on the environment. While it can degrade natural resources through pollution and overdevelopment, it also promotes conservation by raising ecological awareness and funding protection efforts. The paper examines tourism's global environmental impact and its potential to support sustainable development.

Sadeh et al. (2012) in their review "Factors Affecting Tourist Satisfaction and Its Consequences," analyse literature on tourist satisfaction, highlighting its role in destination loyalty and repeat visits. They identify destination image, tourist expectations, and perceived value as key satisfaction drivers. Satisfaction arises when experiences exceed expectations and cost. Their structural model shows that satisfaction reduces complaints and boosts loyalty, while dissatisfaction harms both. The study emphasizes aligning marketing with service delivery and calls for further empirical research to validate these findings.

Sharma (2012) in "Assessment of Environmental Impacts of Tourism in and around Bhopal," evaluates tourism's effects on the environment and local communities using surveys and observations from 881 respondents. The study emphasizes the need for eco-friendly planning, warning that unchecked tourism can harm the environment. It advocates for sustainable policies to make Madhya Pradesh a more tourist-friendly and environmentally responsible destination.

Singla (2014) in her case study "A case study on socio-cultural impacts of tourism in the city of Jaipur, Rajasthan," explores local perceptions of cultural tourism's impact on rural communities. Based on data from 471 respondents, the study finds that younger residents, recent settlers, larger families, and higher-income individuals view tourism more positively. In contrast, older, married, and economically inactive groups are more concerned about its negative effects. Education showed no significant impact on perceptions. The study highlights how socio-demographic factors shape attitudes toward tourism development.

Chutia (2015) in its research paper "Prospects and Problems of Tourism Industry in Assam," analyzes the state's tourism potential amid globalization using secondary data. Assam offers diverse tourism opportunities, from wildlife to cultural and adventure tourism. However, challenges such as outdated policies, insurgency, poor infrastructure, and lack of trained guides hinder growth. Despite this, tourism provides significant employment and economic benefits. The study stresses the need for better infrastructure, policy reform, and stakeholder coordination to fully realize Assam's tourism potential.

Akihito (2017) in his study "Development of tourism and the tourist industry in India: A case study of Uttarakhand," explores tourism growth in the Kumaon region, highlighting its economic and social impact. Uttarakhand, known for its natural beauty and religious sites, has seen increased tourism, particularly from North and Southwest India. The case of Naukuchiatal reflects this growth, with diverse accommodations boosting local employment, though much of it remains seasonal. Improved road access has enhanced visitor flow, supporting local economies. The study emphasizes tourism as a key development driver for Uttarakhand, given its limited industrial base, and stresses the need for continued infrastructure investment.

Gambhir et al. (2021) in their study "Religious Tourism and Sustainable Development," examine how religious tourism in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand can support sustainable development. Using qualitative analysis, they highlight the need to balance tourism growth with socio-economic and environmental sustainability in these ecologically sensitive hill states.

Saini (2021) in her study "Role of religious sites in the development of tourism industry in India," explores the opportunities, challenges, and satisfaction levels in religious tourism using a digital survey of 96 respondents. Key factors include infrastructure, cultural heritage, and government support, while challenges involve waste, pollution, and overcrowding. The study recommends improving facilities, ecological balance, and cultural conservation. It concludes that religious tourism plays a vital role in India's economy and cultural preservation, requiring strategic efforts for sustainable development.

Tiwari (2021) in the study "Community Participation in Tourism Planning and Development: A Case Study of Local Communities in Ooty, Tamil Nadu," explores local attitudes toward tourism development. Based on responses from 360 residents, the study finds strong community support and willingness to participate in planning, despite concerns about environmental and moral impacts. Locals seek training, information, and inclusion in policymaking, showing interest in investing in tourism despite limited funds. The study highlights the need for community involvement to ensure sustainable and inclusive tourism development.

Basak and Barman (2023) in their study "A Study on Problems and Prospects of Eco-Tourism and Religious Tourism in Assam," analyze the opportunities and challenges of tourism in the region using primary and secondary data. They highlight Assam's potential for economic growth through eco- and religious tourism but note barriers such as language issues, inadequate infrastructure, lack of trained personnel, and poor promotion. The study recommends improving rural education, training tourism professionals, and enhancing infrastructure and connectivity. Emphasizing sustainability, the authors stress that tourism can boost employment, conserve the environment, and support Assam's overall development.

Dessai (2023) in their paper "Environment, Resources and Sustainable Tourism: Goa as a Case Study," examines the environmental and socio-cultural impacts of tourism and mineral overexploitation in Goa. While tourism boosts the economy, it strains resources and local cultures. The study highlights pollution, resource depletion, and the need for improved efficiency and recycling. It calls for sustainable tourism strategies to balance economic growth with environmental protection and cultural preservation, urging action from both state and international stakeholders.

Sehgal (2023) in his study on tourist satisfaction in Katra (J&K), examines service quality in hotels and restaurants, highlighting the importance of assessing satisfaction at the destination level. Based on data from 150 tourists (127 Indian, 23 foreign), the study identifies key satisfaction drivers such as staff performance, service encounters, and facility cleanliness. It emphasizes the role of both service providers and tourist engagement. Using models like Fornell's Customer Satisfaction Index, Sehgal proposes a "Tourism Satisfaction Index" for Katra to guide improvements. The study concludes that Katra's religious tourism has strong growth potential, calling for better infrastructure and private investment to ensure sustainable development and economic gains.

3. RESEARCH GAP

A significant research gap exists in the limited exploration of the socio-economic and environmental impacts of Ambubachi Mela at Kamakhya Temple. While broader studies on religious tourism in India exist, localized benefits like employment, business growth, and infrastructure development remain underexplored. Detailed analyses of pre- and post-event environmental changes, including waste management and pollution control, are lacking. Additionally, the cultural exchange between pilgrims and locals, its impact on traditions, and the equitable distribution of economic benefits are insufficiently studied. Existing research also overlooks the practicality of infrastructure improvements and the effectiveness of environmental management practices during the festival.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- a) To identify the factors inducing tourists to visit a religious destination.
- b) To examine the pre and post environmental effects on the destinations after the religious events.
- c) Analyse the economic benefits that religious tourism brings to local communities, such as employment opportunities, infrastructure development, and local business growth.

5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the factors that induces the tourists to visit the religious destination?
2. What are the environmental effects on the destination after the religious event?
3. What are the economic benefits that religious tourism brings to local communities?

6. HYPOTHESES

H₀: There is no significant environmental impact or difference before and after the religious event in Kamakhya Temple.

7. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The study on "Exploring the Drivers of Religious Tourism and Its Socio-Economic and Environmental Impacts on Destination Communities," focusing on Ambubachi Mela at Kamakhya Temple, is both academically and practically significant. It examines the motivations behind religious tourism and its role in cultural preservation and human behaviour. The research highlights the socio-economic benefits, such as employment, business growth, and infrastructure development, while assessing environmental impacts like waste management and pollution. By addressing these factors, the study bridges gaps in existing literature and provides actionable insights for policymakers to promote sustainable tourism, balancing economic growth with environmental and cultural preservation.

8. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study explores the drivers of religious tourism and its socio-economic and environmental impacts, focusing on the Ambubachi Mela at Kamakhya Temple. It highlights the motivations of visitors, providing insights for policymakers and stakeholders to enhance tourism experiences and sustainability. The research addresses environmental impacts, emphasizing strategies to manage waste, resource depletion, and overcrowding, critical for culturally and ecologically sensitive sites like Kamakhya. Additionally, it examines the economic benefits, such as employment, local business growth, and infrastructure development, showcasing religious tourism as a tool for regional growth. This study offers practical recommendations to balance cultural preservation, economic gains, and environmental sustainability.

9. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research is an art of scientific investigation. It is an academic activity as such the term should be in technical sense. Research methodology is a systematic way to solve the problem. It gives an idea about various steps adopted by the researcher in a systematic manner with an objective to determine the research problem and the logic behind them.

The research methodology that has been adopted for the survey in this study is as under:

9.1 Research Design: The research design is descriptive in nature. It is descriptive in the sense that it tries to reveal the present state. In other words, the research is descriptive because it tries to find out “what is”.

9.2 Source of Data Collection: The data comprises of primary data only. Primary data has been collected from the respondents through a questionnaire.

9.3 Sample Design:

- **Sampling Technique:** Simple random sampling technique has been used in collecting the required data from the samples.
- **Research Instrument:** Two Structured questionnaire, one for local residents and other for tourists has been used for collecting the required information from the sample selected. The questionnaires contain both open ended questions as well as close ended questions.

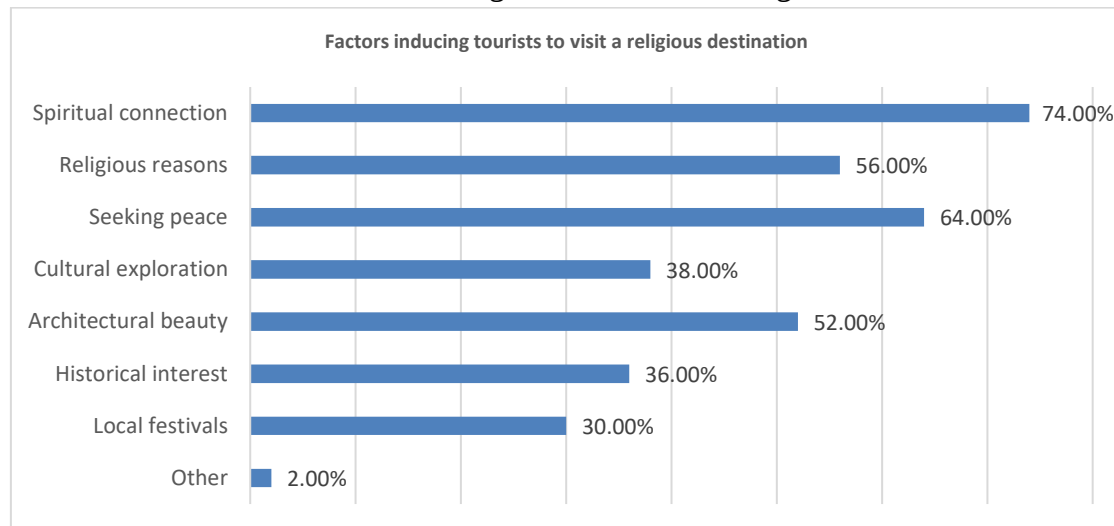
The information that has been collected, has been arranged in systematic manner by applying suitable techniques and statistical tools or diagrams.

- **Tools for Analysis:** Bar diagram, pie diagram, SPSS (Paired Comparison Test).

10. Analysis And Interpretations

Objective 1

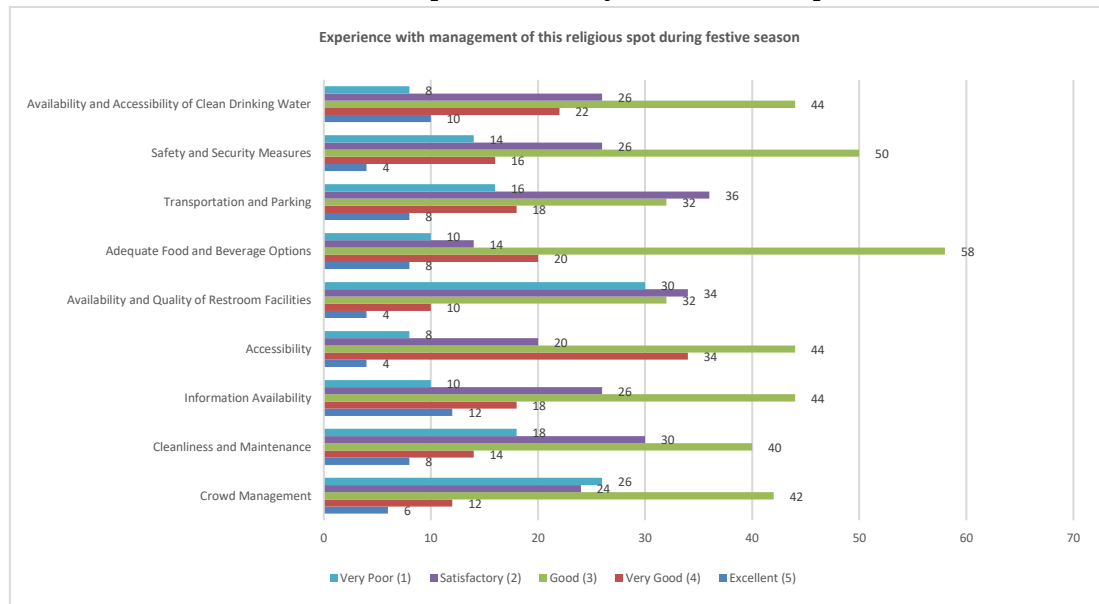
Table 10.1: Factors inducing tourists to visit a religious destination.



Interpretation 10.1:

The chart highlights that the primary motivator for visiting religious destinations is spiritual connection (74.00%), followed by seeking peace and tranquillity (64.00%) and religious reasons (56.00%). Other motivations include architectural beauty (52.00%), cultural exploration (38.00%), historical interest (36.00%), and local festivals or events (30.00%), with only 2.00% citing other reasons.

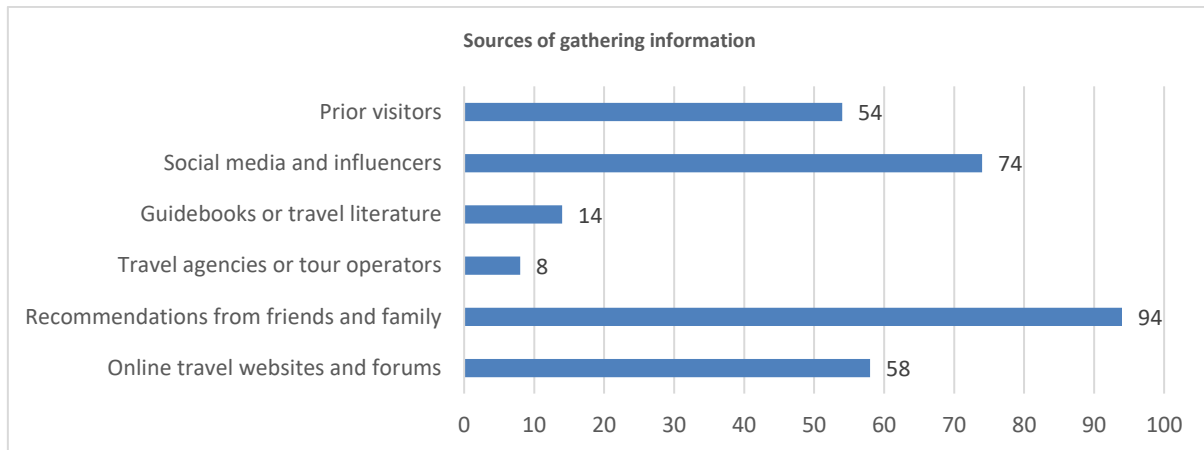
Table 10.2: Overall experience with the management of this religious spot during the festive season on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents "Very Poor" and 5 represents "Excellent."



Interpretation 10.2:

- **Crowd Management:** Many rated 1–2, showing dissatisfaction with crowd control.
- **Cleanliness & Maintenance:** Mostly rated 3–4, indicating acceptable but improvable efforts.
- **Information Availability:** Skewed toward 4–5, suggesting high satisfaction.
- **Accessibility:** Predominantly rated 3–4, showing decent accessibility.
- **Restroom Facilities:** Mixed ratings, with many at 3 and some lower.
- **Food & Beverage Options:** Largely rated 4–5, reflecting high satisfaction.
- **Transportation & Parking:** Evenly distributed, indicating mixed experiences.
- **Safety & Security:** Mostly rated 4–5, showing strong satisfaction.
- **Drinking Water:** Higher ratings (4–5) dominate, reflecting good service.

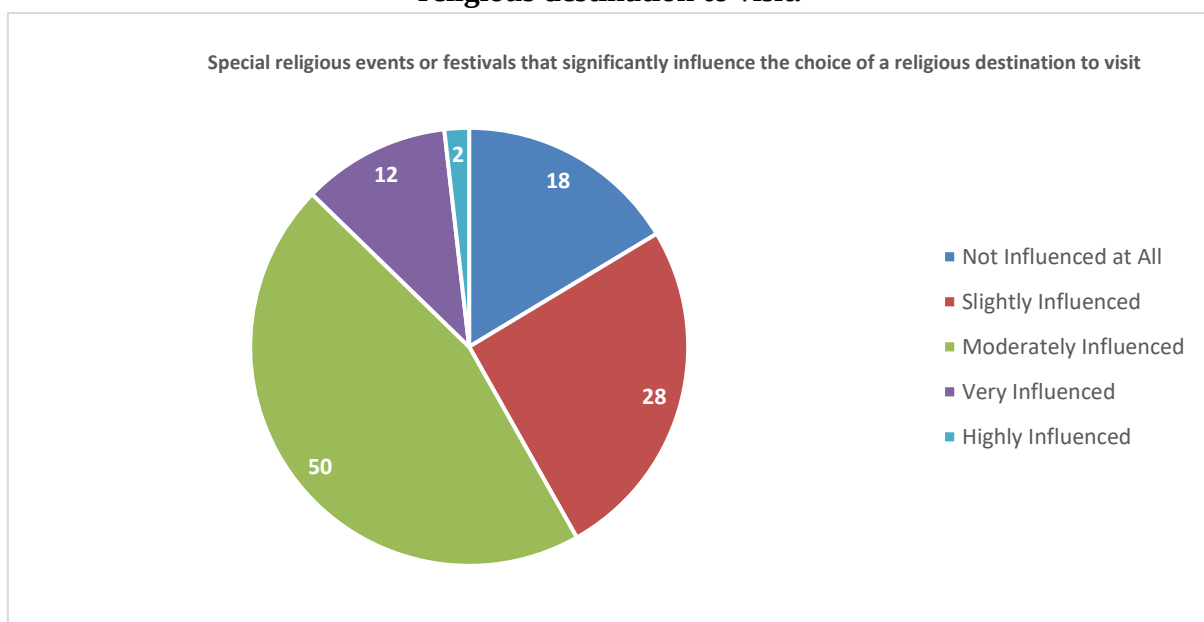
Table 10.3: Sources of gathering information about religious destinations



Interpretation 10.3:

The chart indicates that recommendations from friends and family (85.5%) are the most common source of information for planning visits to religious destinations. This is followed by social media and influencers (67.3%), online travel websites and forums (52.7%), and prior visitors (49.1%). Less popular sources include guidebooks or travel literature (12.7%) and travel agencies or tour operators (7.3%).

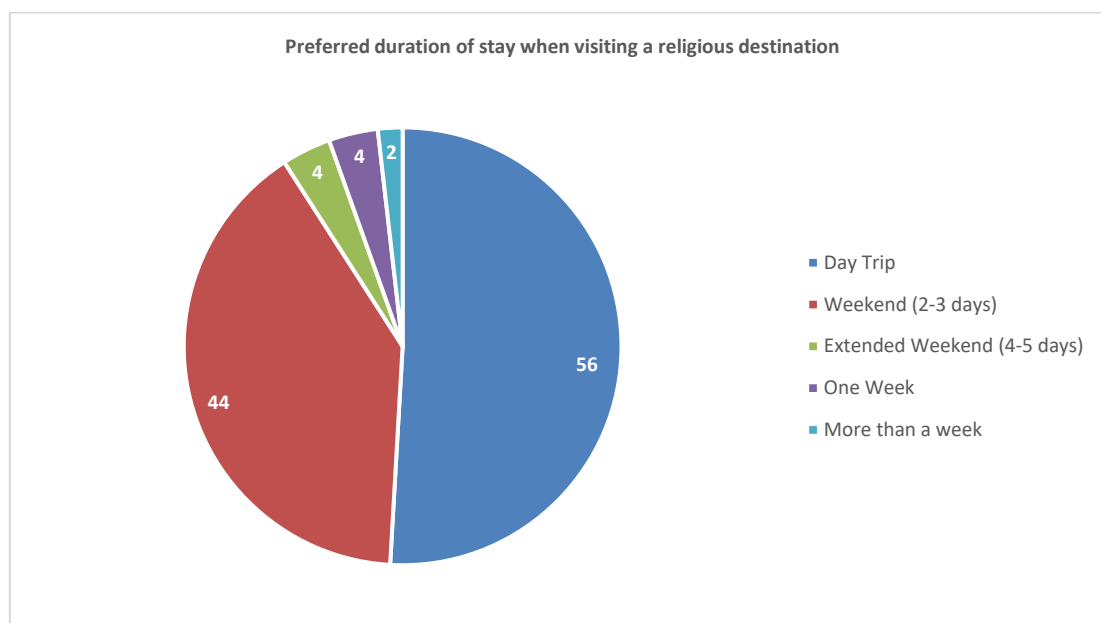
Table 10.4 Special religious events or festivals that significantly influence the choice of a religious destination to visit.



Interpretation 10.4:

The chart shows that 50 respondents are moderately influenced, 28 respondents are slightly influenced, 18 respondents are not influenced at all, 12 respondents are very influenced, and 2 respondents are highly influenced by special religious events or festivals when choosing a religious destination to visit.

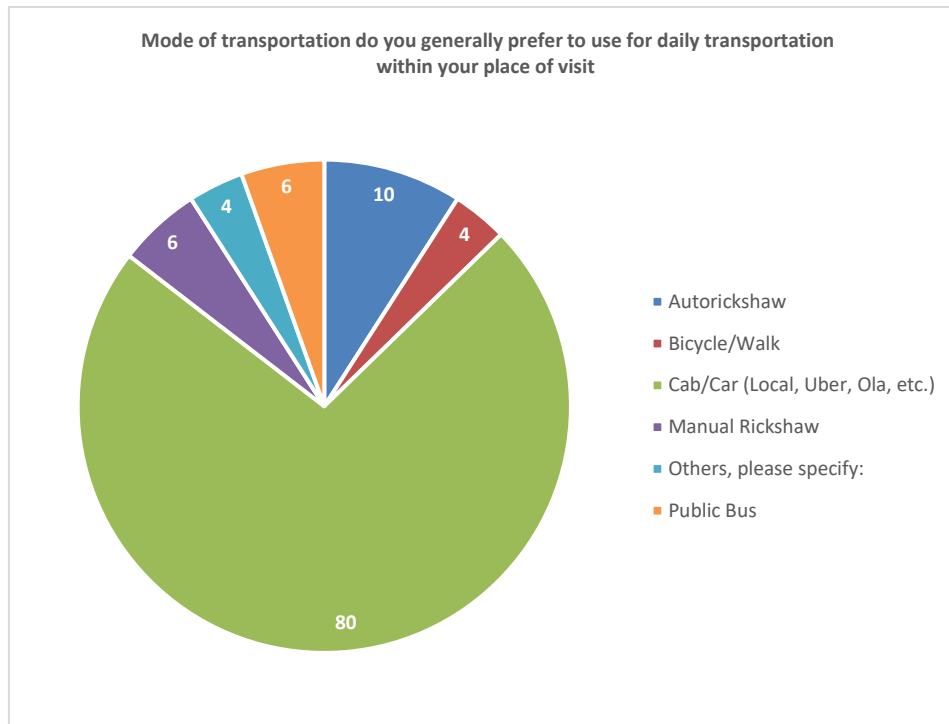
Table 10.5: Preferred duration of stay when visiting a religious destination



Interpretation 10.5:

The chart indicates that the majority of respondents (56) prefer a day trip when visiting a religious destination, followed by 44 respondents who prefer a weekend (2–3 days). A smaller number of respondents (4 each) opt for an extended weekend (4–5 days) or one week, while only 2 respondents prefer a stay of more than a week.

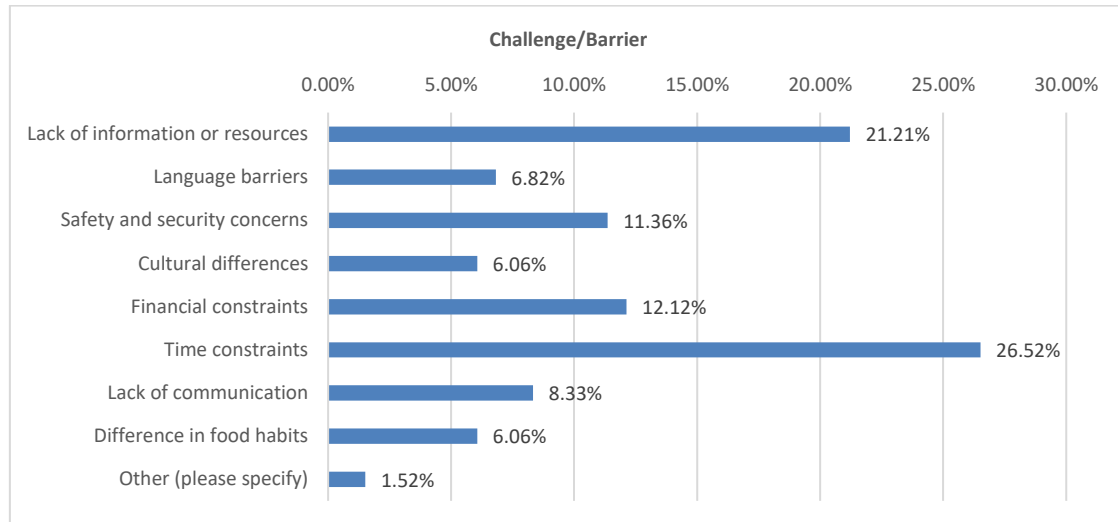
Table 10.6: Mode of transportation preferred to use for daily transportation within your place of visit



Interpretation 10.6:

The chart shows that the majority of respondents (80) prefer using car/cab for daily transportation within their place of visit. Smaller groups prefer autorickshaws (10), public bus (6), manual rickshaws (6), bicycle/walking (4), and others (4) as their preferred modes of transport.

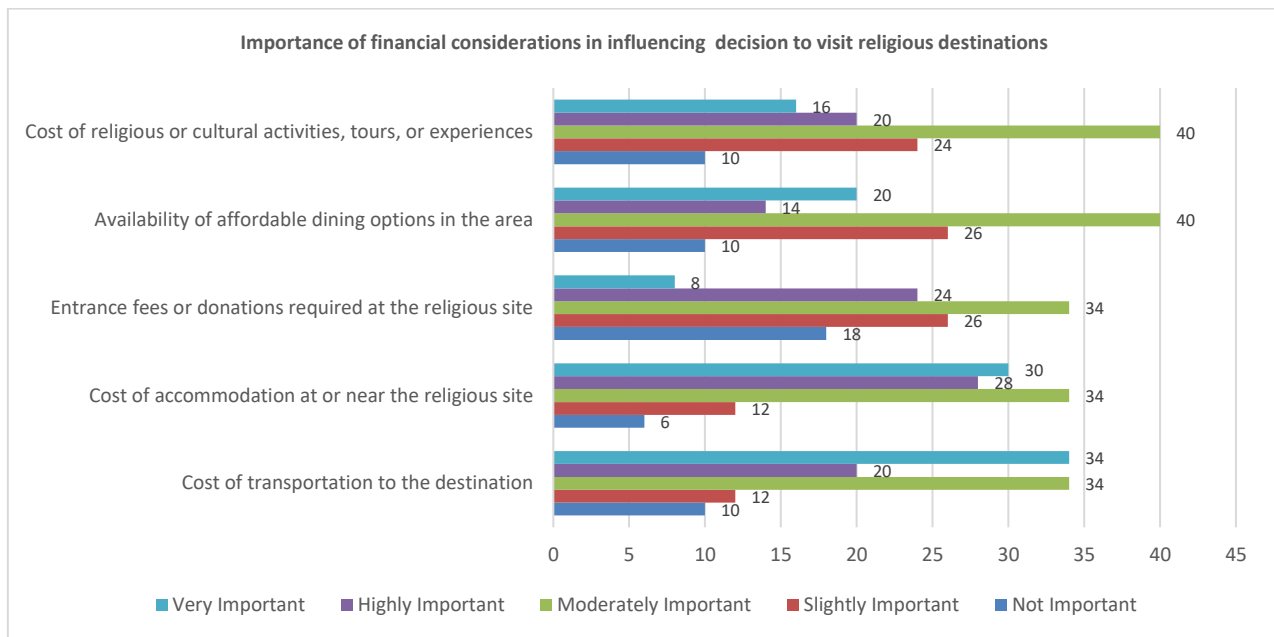
Table 10.7: Challenges or barriers faced when planning a trip to a religious destination



Interpretation 10.7:

- **Time Constraints (26.52%):** The top challenge, affecting over a quarter, due to work or personal responsibilities.
- **Lack of Information/Resources (21.21%):** Highlights the need for better access to travel and accommodation details.
- **Financial Constraints (12.12%):** Costs hinder some individuals from visiting religious destinations.
- **Safety/Security Concerns (11.36%):** Travellers are apprehensive about conditions at or enroute to destinations.
- **Lack of Communication (8.33%):** Poor information-sharing among stakeholders.
- **Language Barriers (6.82%):** Impacts interactions and service access.
- **Cultural and Food Differences (6.06% each):** Challenges with local customs or cuisines.
- **Other Factors (1.52%):** Rare, unspecified challenges.

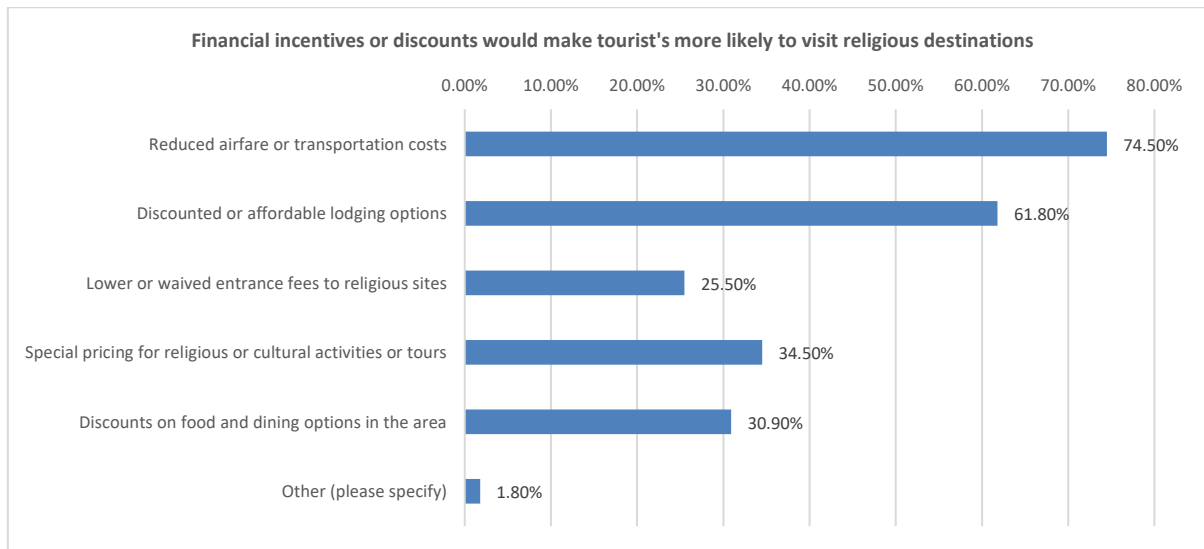
Table 10.8: Importance of financial considerations in influencing decision to visit religious destinations. Please rate (tick) the following factors on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "Not Important" and 5 being "Very Important."



Interpretation 10.8:

- **Cost of Activities/Tours:** Moderately Important (40%), Slightly Important (24%), Highly Important (20%).
- **Affordable Dining Options:** Moderately Important (40%), Slightly Important (26%), Very Important (20%), Highly Important (14%).
- **Entrance Fees/Donations:** Moderately Important (34%), Slightly Important (26%), Highly Important (24%).
- **Accommodation Costs:** Moderately Important (34%), Very Important (30%), Highly Important (28%).
- **Transportation Costs:** Moderately Important (34%), Highly Important (34%), Very Important (20%).

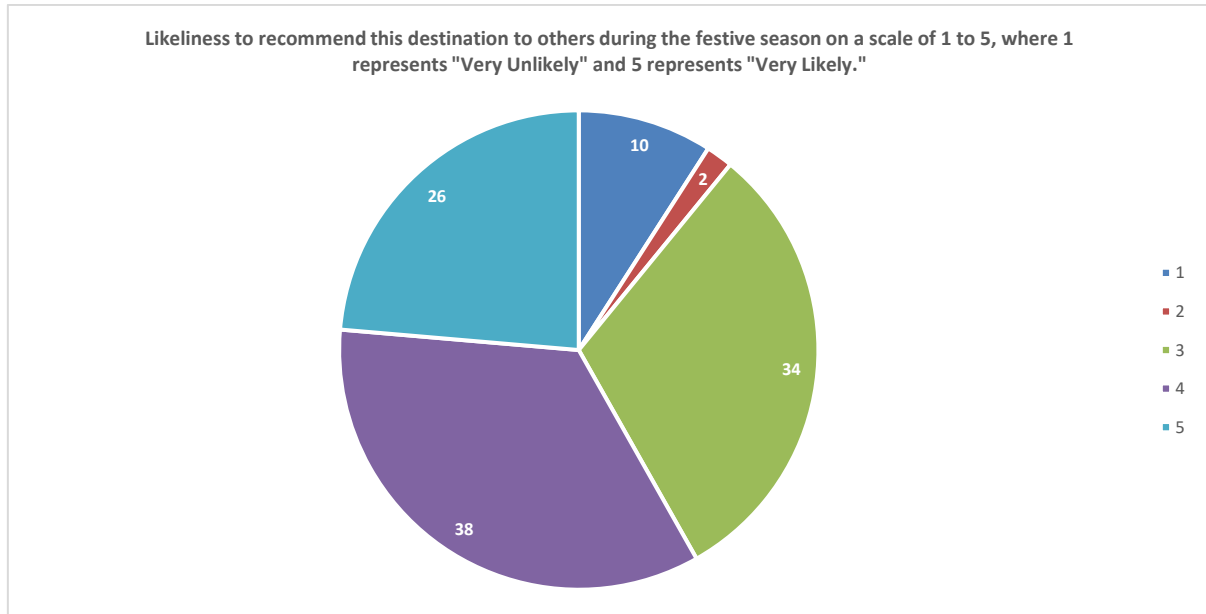
Table 10.9: Financial incentives or discounts would make tourists more likely to visit religious destinations



Interpretation 10.9:

The bar chart shows that "Reduced airfare or transportation costs" is the most important financial incentive for visiting religious destinations, chosen by 74.5% of respondents. This is followed by "Discounted or affordable lodging options" with 61.8%, "Special pricing for religious or cultural activities or tours" with 34.5%, and "Discounts on food and dining options in the area" with 30.9%. "Lower or waived entrance fees to religious sites" was selected by 25.5% of respondents and other was selected by 1.80% of respondents.

Table 10.10: Likeliness to recommend this destination to others during the festive season



Interpretation10.10:

- Very Likely (5): 26% of respondents indicated they are very likely to recommend the destination. This is the largest portion of respondents.
- Likely (4): 38% of respondents are likely to recommend the destination.
- Neither Likely nor Unlikely (3): 34% of respondents are neutral in their recommendation.
- Unlikely (2): 2% of respondents are unlikely to recommend the destination.
- Very Unlikely (1): 10% of respondents are very unlikely to recommend the destination.

OBJECTIVE 2

Table 10.2.1:

Paired Samples Test						
PRE - POST	Paired Differences			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			
	-0.700	4.120	0.752	-0.931	29	0.360

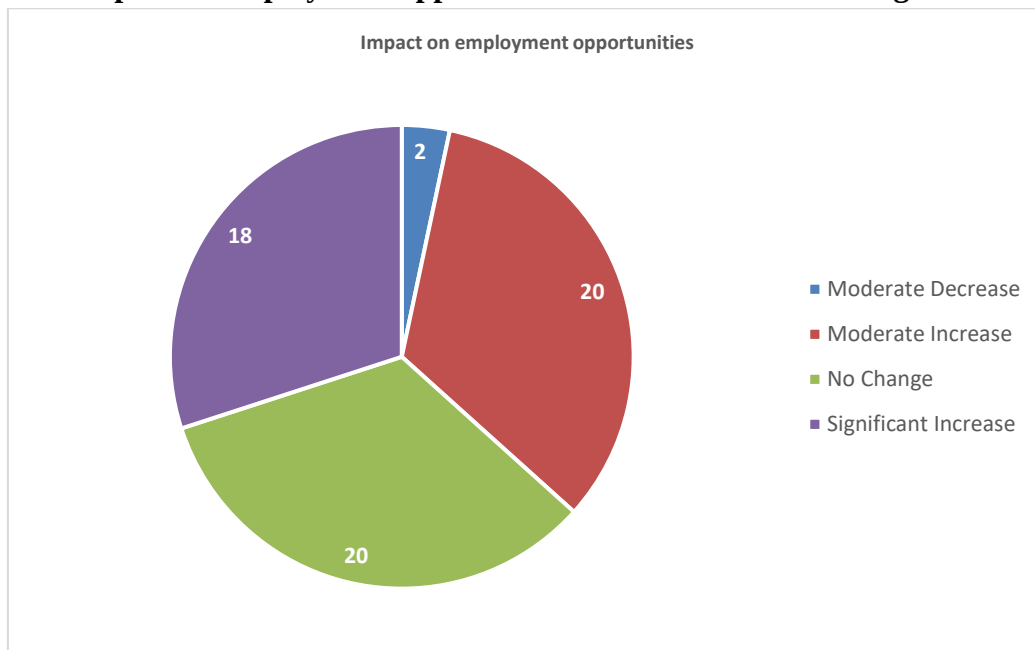
Interpretation 10.2.1:

Since the p- value (Sig. (2-tailed)) is greater than 0.05 then there is no significant difference between

Pre and Post environmental effect. So, will accept the null hypothesis and reject the alternative hypothesis.

OBJECTIVE 3

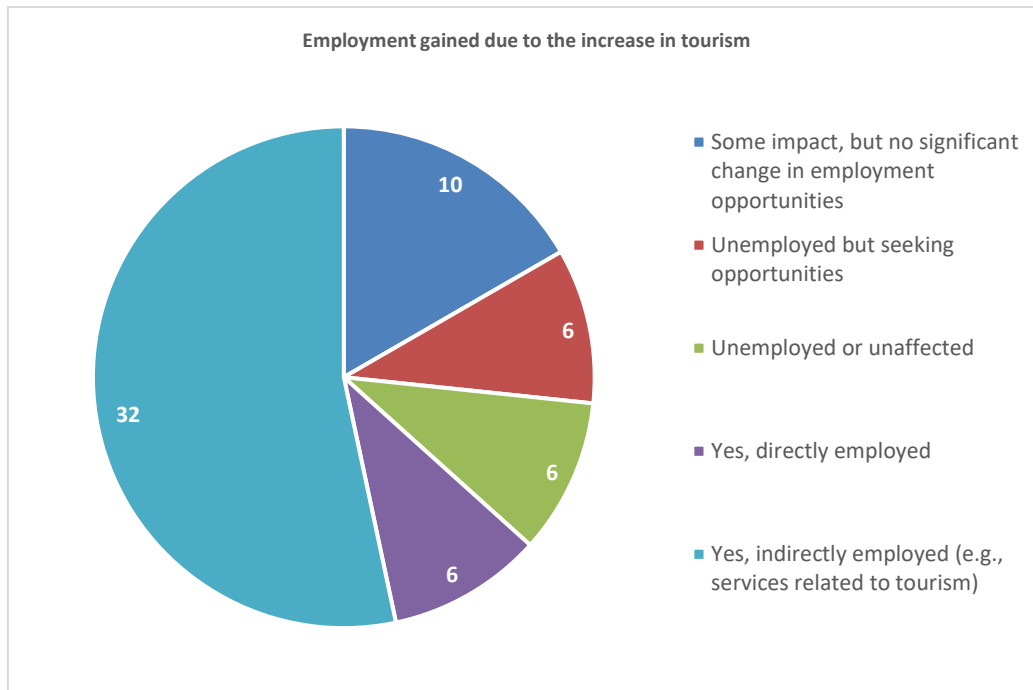
Table 10.3.1: Impact on employment opportunities in the local area during Ambubachi Mela:



Interpretation 10.3.1:

The chart shows that during Ambubachi Mela, 20 respondents each observed either a moderate increase or no change in employment opportunities, 18 respondents reported a significant increase, and only 2 respondents experienced a moderate decrease.

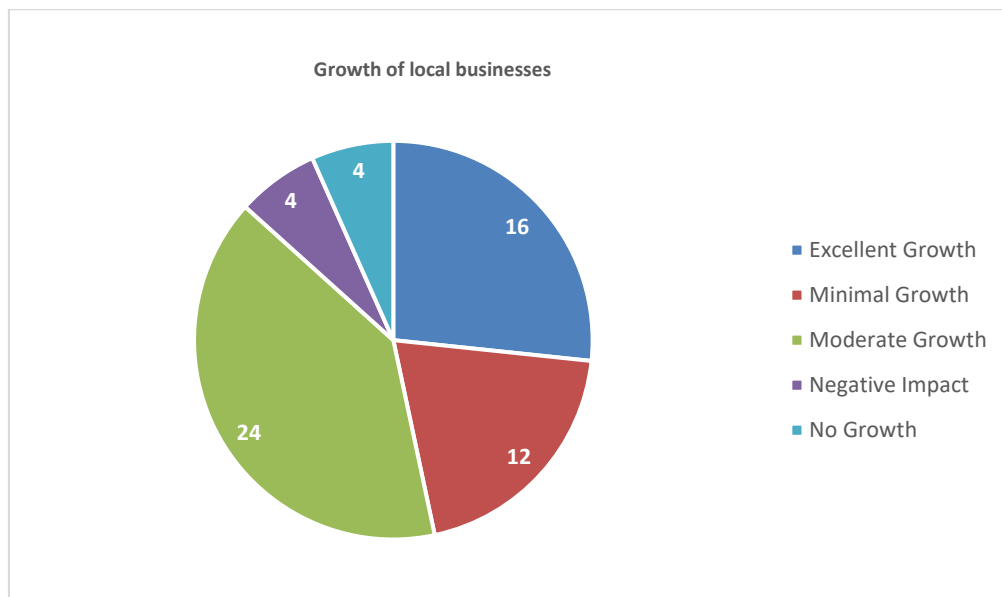
Table 10.3.2: Employment gained due to the increase in tourism during the Ambubachi Mela



Interpretation 10.3.2:

The pie chart shows that 32 of respondents were indirectly employed, 10 experienced some impact but no significant change in employment opportunities, 6 gained direct employment due to the increase in tourism during Ambubachi Mela, and 6 think there are unemployed but seeking opportunities and other 6 think people are unemployed or unaffected.

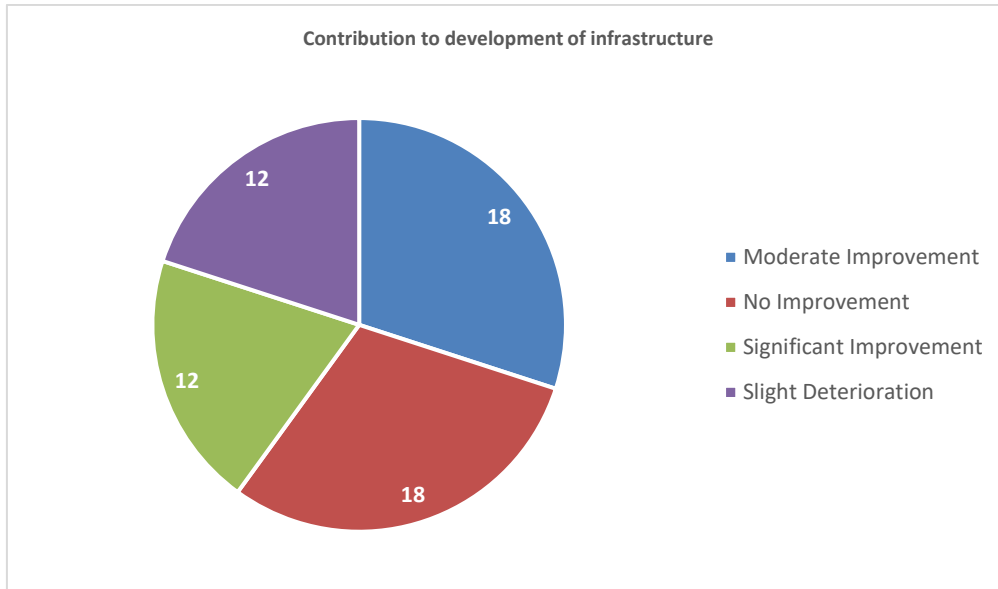
Table 10.3.3: Rate of growth of local businesses (e.g., shops, vendors) due to the influx of tourists during the Ambubachi Mela



Interpretation 10.3.3:

The chart indicates that during the Ambubachi Mela, 24 respondents reported moderate growth in local businesses, 16 respondents observed excellent growth, 12 respondents experienced minimal growth, while 4 respondents each noted a negative impact or no growth.

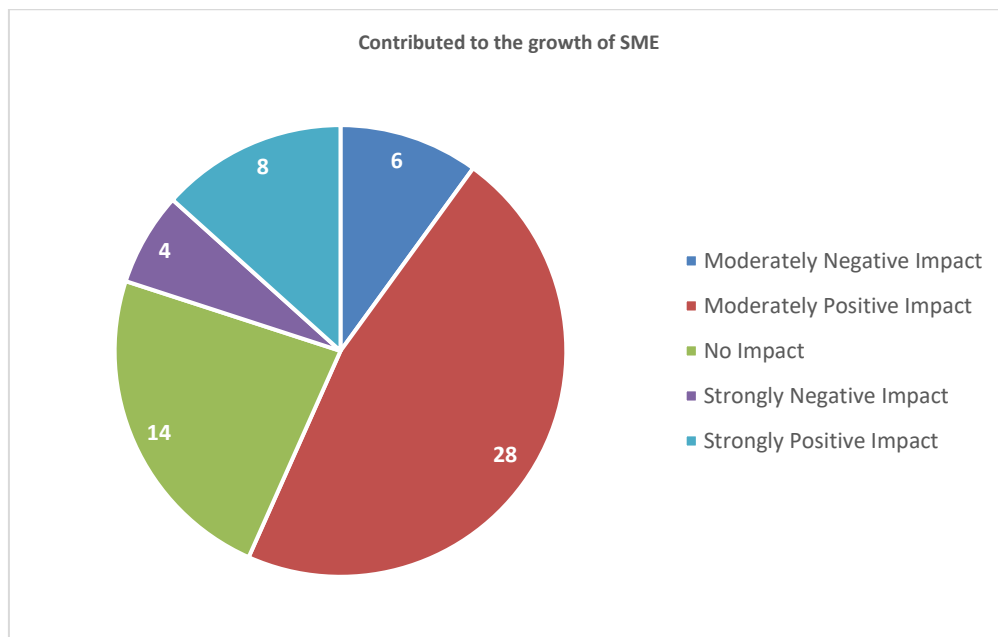
Table 10.3.4: Contribution of Ambubachi Mela to the development of infrastructure (e.g., roads, public facilities) in the local community



Interpretation 10.3.4:

The chart shows that Ambubachi Mela's contribution to infrastructure development is evenly split, with 18 respondents each reporting moderate improvement or no improvement, and 12 respondents each observing significant improvement or slight deterioration.

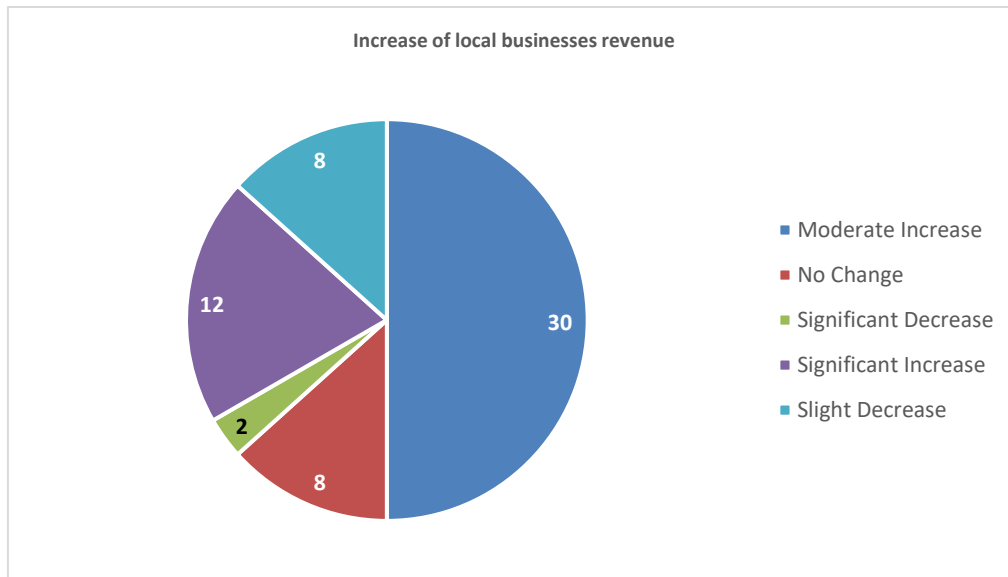
Table 10.3.5: Extent to which Ambubachi Mela contributed to the growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the area



Interpretation 10.3.5:

The pie chart shows that 28 of respondents believe Ambubachi Mela had a moderately positive impact on the growth of SMEs, while 14 perceived no impact. 8 reported a strong positive impact, 6 a moderately negative impact, 4 a strongly negative impact.

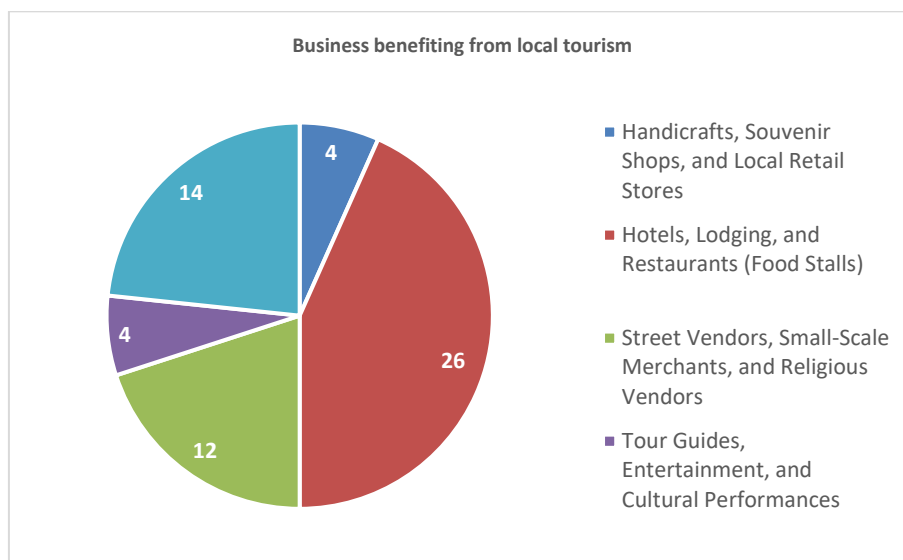
Table 10.3.6: Increase of local businesses revenue during the Ambubachi Mela



Interpretation 10.3.6:

The chart shows that during the Ambubachi Mela, 30 respondents reported a moderate increase in local business revenue, 12 respondents observed a significant increase, 8 respondents noted no change or a slight decrease each, and only 2 respondents reported a significant decrease.

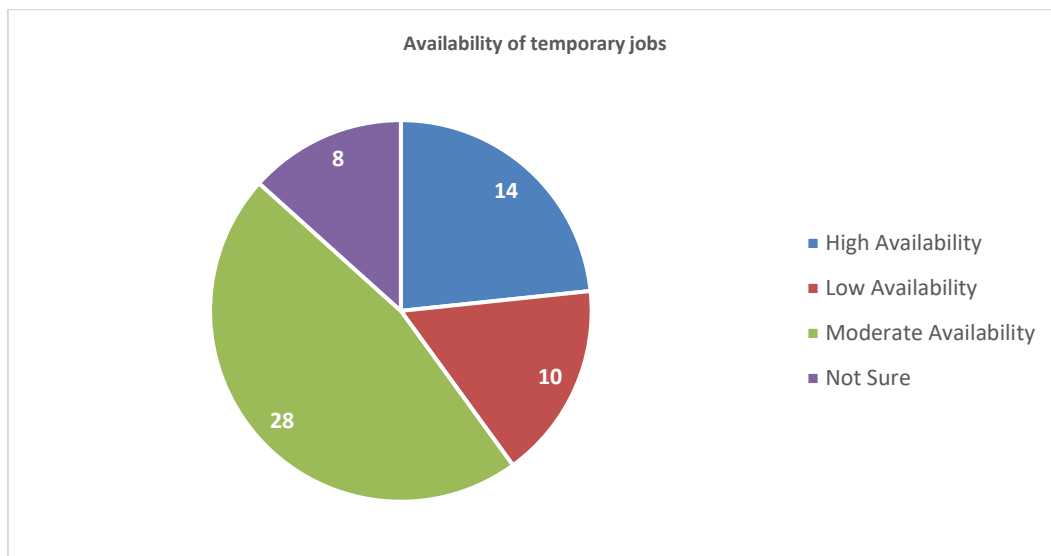
Table 10.3.7: Type of local businesses that has benefitted the most from the religious tourism during the Mela



Interpretation 10.3.7:

The pie chart reveals that ""Hotels, Lodging, and Restaurants (Food Stalls, have benefitted the most from religious tourism during the Mela, accounting for 26 of the overall impact. This is followed by " Transportation Services with 14, and " Street Vendors, Small-Scale Merchants, and Religious Vendors with 12. "Tour Guides, Entertainment, and Cultural Performances" as well as Handicrafts, Souvenir Shops, and Local Retail Stores " both contribute 4 each.

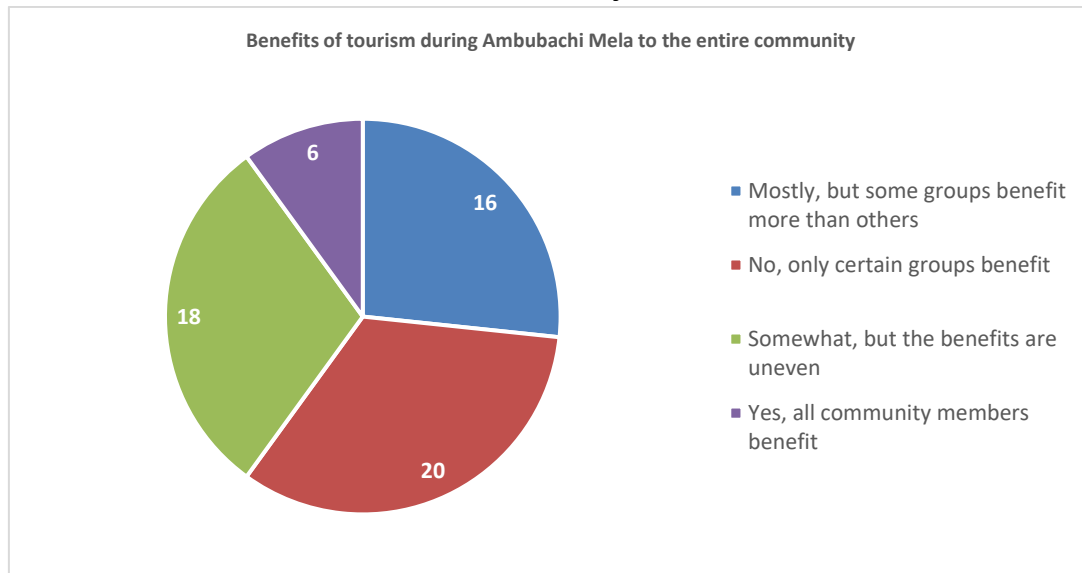
Table 10.3.8: Availability of temporary jobs (e.g., event-specific roles) during the Mela



Interpretation 10.3.8:

The chart indicates that during the Mela, 28 respondents observed moderate availability of temporary jobs, 14 respondents noted high availability, 10 respondents reported low availability, and 8 respondents were unsure about the availability.

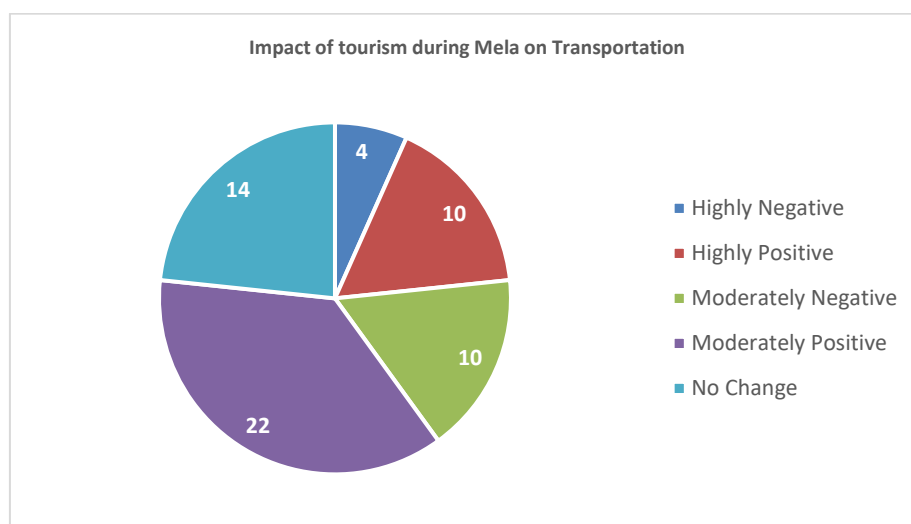
Table 10.3.9: Benefits of tourism during the Ambubachi Mela extension to the entire community



Interpretation 10.3.9:

The chart indicates varied perceptions about the distribution of tourism benefits during the Ambubachi Mela: 20 respondents feel that benefits are limited to only certain groups, 18 believe the benefits are uneven but exist, 16 think that mostly all groups benefit with some receiving more than others, and only 6 believe that all community members benefit equally.

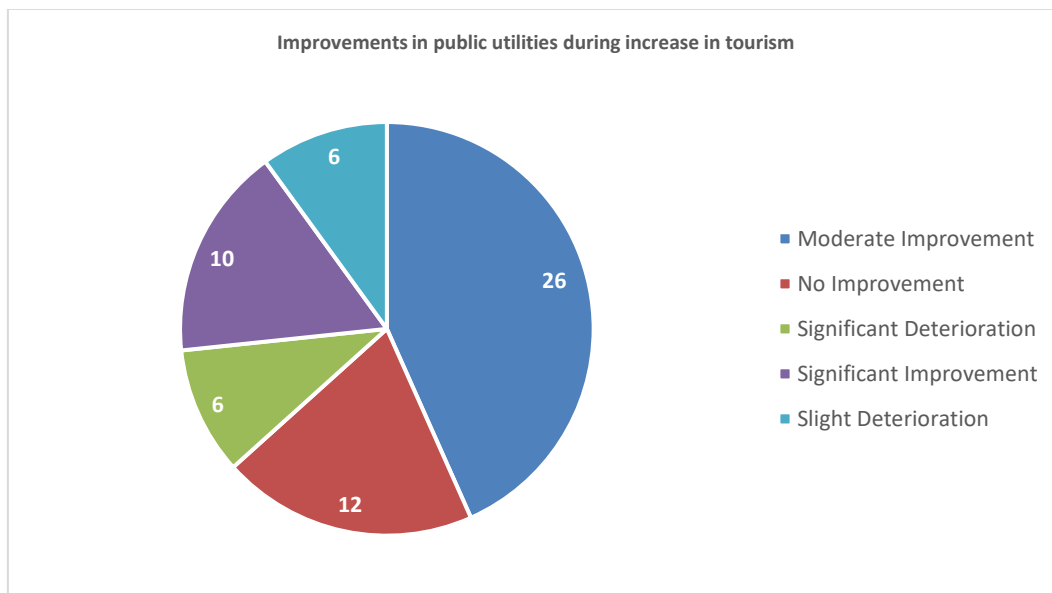
Table 10.3.10: Rate of impact of tourism during the Mela on transportation infrastructure



Interpretation 10.3.10:

The pie chart shows that 22 of respondents believe Ambubachi Mela has had a moderately positive impact on transportation infrastructure, 14 believe it has had no change on transportation infrastructure, 10 believe it has had a highly positive impact, 10 believe it has had a moderately negative impact and 4 believe it has had a highly negative impact.

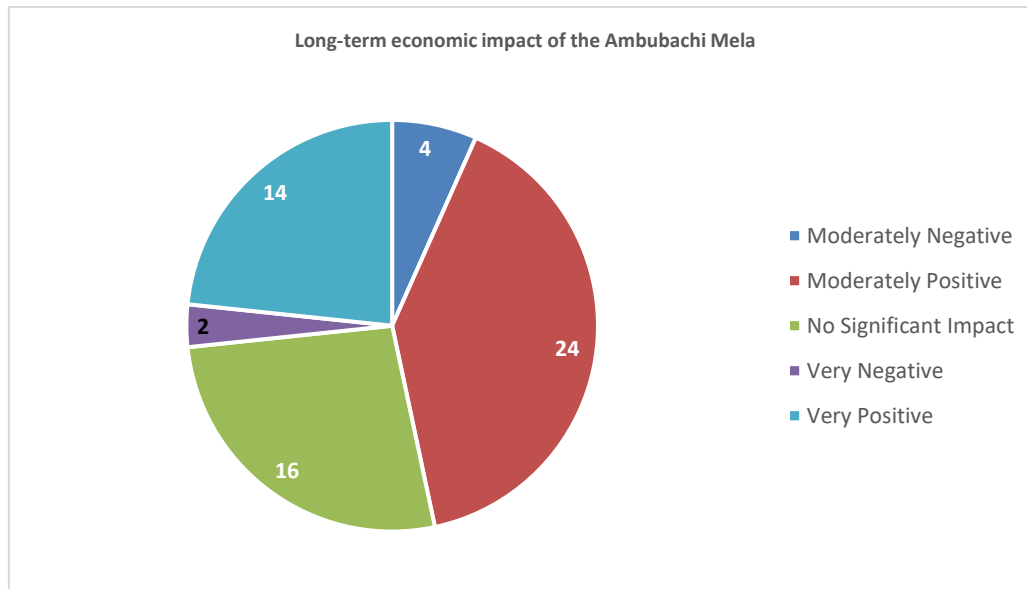
Table 10.3.11: Improvements in public utilities during increase in tourism in the mela:



Interpretation 10.3.11:

The chart shows that the majority perceive moderate improvement (26) in public utilities during the tourism increase associated with the Ambubachi Mela. However, 12 see no improvement, 10 observe significant improvement, while 6 each report slight deterioration or significant deterioration.

Table 10.3.12: Long-term economic impact of the Ambubachi Mela on the local community



Interpretation 10.3.12:

The pie chart shows that 24 of respondents believe Ambubachi Mela has moderately positive long-term economic impact on the local community, 16 believe it has no significant impact, 14 believe it has a very positive impact, 4 believe it has a moderately negative impact, and 2 believe it has a very negative impact.

11. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study highlights key findings related to the drivers of religious tourism and its socio-economic and environmental impacts, with a focus on the Ambubachi Mela at the Kamakhya Temple.

Objective 1: Factors Influencing Religious Tourism

Spiritual connection (74%), peace (64%), and religious devotion (56%) emerged as the primary motivations for visiting religious destinations, while architectural beauty (52%) and cultural exploration (38%) were secondary drivers. Visitor experiences during festive seasons revealed dissatisfaction with crowd management, moderate satisfaction with cleanliness, and mixed feedback on restroom facilities and transportation. Safety and security, as well as information availability, were rated highly. Recommendations from friends and family (85.5%) were the primary source of information, followed by social media (67.3%). Visitors preferred short stays (56%-day trips; 44% weekends), with cars/cabs (80%) as the most common mode of transport. Key barriers included time constraints (26.52%), lack of resources (21.21%), and financial constraints (12.12%). Cost-effective

incentives like reduced transportation (74.5%) and discounted lodging (61.8%) significantly influenced decisions, with most visitors likely to recommend such destinations.

Objective 2: Environmental Impact During Ambubachi Mela

The analysis of environmental impacts before and after the Mela showed no significant difference ($p > 0.05$), indicating minimal impact. This suggests that environmental management practices were effective, though continuous monitoring and safeguards are necessary.

Objective 3: Socio-Economic Impacts of Ambubachi Mela

The Mela moderately boosted employment, predominantly through indirect opportunities (32 respondents). Local businesses, including hotels and restaurants, reported moderate to excellent growth. SMEs saw moderately positive impacts, and infrastructure improvements were moderate (18 respondents). However, tourism benefits were unevenly distributed. Public utilities showed moderate improvements (26 respondents), while transportation infrastructure had mixed effects. Long-term economic impacts were perceived as moderately (24 respondents) to very positive (14 respondents).

These findings emphasize the need for targeted infrastructure improvements, inclusivity, and sustainable practices to maximize the benefits of religious tourism for local communities.

12. CONCLUSION

The study highlights key drivers of religious tourism at Ambubachi Mela, Kamakhya Temple, emphasizing spiritual connection, peace, and devotion as primary motivations, with secondary factors like cultural and architectural appeal. While visitor experiences were generally positive, improvements are needed in crowd management, restroom facilities, and transportation. Environmental analysis revealed minimal impact, showcasing the potential for sustainable event management with proper safeguards. Socio-economic benefits included moderate increases in employment and significant growth in local business revenues, especially for tourism-related sectors. However, uneven benefit distribution and limited infrastructure improvements call for inclusive strategies to maximize religious tourism's sustainable economic and community impact.

13. Suggestions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations can be made to address the identified challenges and enhance the positive impacts of religious tourism, particularly in the context of Ambubachi Mela at Kamakhya Temple:

Improving Visitor Experience: Implementing digital crowd management tools, expanding parking facilities, and introducing shuttle services. Upgrading restroom facilities with smart monitoring systems, increasing drinking water stations, and offering diverse, hygienic food options.

Enhancing Information Dissemination: Creating a dedicated website and mobile app providing schedules, routes, and accommodations. Leveraging social media for real-time updates and engaging local communities as cultural ambassadors.

Addressing Barriers: Promoting flexible visitation options, providing multilingual guides, and introducing affordable travel and stay packages.

Promoting Socio-Economic Development: Supporting local businesses through training and platforms to showcase products. Creating temporary job opportunities, especially for youth and women, and investing in infrastructure benefiting the community year-round.

Ensuring Equity: Developing policies for inclusive benefits distribution and fostering collaborations between governments, communities, and private sectors.

Strengthening Environmental Management: Implementing sustainable waste management practices, eco-friendly infrastructure, and visitor awareness campaigns on cultural preservation.

Enhancing Financial Incentives: Offering subsidized travel and lodging, along with festival-specific discounts from local businesses.

Long-Term Planning: Developing a master plan for tourism, conducting periodic assessments, and positioning Kamakhya Temple as a global hub for religious tourism with cultural packages and strategic marketing campaigns.

Collaborative Governance: Encouraging public-private partnerships and advocating for supportive government policies to enhance the region's tourism potential.

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