

SECRET GEOGRAPHY IN INDIA

A CASE STUDY OF

GOPINATH TEMPLE ON THE BHAGIRATHI RIVER SIDE AT AGRADWEEP IN WEST BENGAL

Biplab Das(Main Author)

Research Scholar(PhD)

Indian Institute of Engineering, Science and Technology, Kolkata

Aditya Bandyopadhyay

Professor

Indian Institute of Engineering, Science and Technology, Kolkata

Abstract:

Religious places are one of the important tourist resources. Religious places are related to all religions have a tourist significant, only the degree of important varies from place to place. One of them is Gopinath Temple which is Hindu (baisnab) religion related. It is quite old and attract a large number of tourist through it has location of disadvantages, find hopefully this tourist resources will have a great tourist significant in the days to come. In this background this religious spot is chosen for the study. This historical place is located on Agradweep village of Katwa sub-division of Bardhaman district in West Bengal,India.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To gain the information on Gopinath Thakur, significant person of ancient Baisnab history and local people's respect and faithful on him.
2. To earn the knowledge in erosion of Bhagirati river and destruction of Gopinath Mandir.
3. To estimate the information of economic loss on local peoples due to Bhagirati river erosion and people's believe on Gopinath Thakur.
4. To develop the tourist spot as Agradweep area to highlight the natural beauty and historical religious significant of the location.

Methodology:

In the study of Gopinath Temple two sources of information has been obtained, i.e., primary and secondary data. The primary data is obtained from held survey by collecting the answers of extensive questions which includes all aspects of socioeconomic condition like age, sex, occupation, education level, income of correspondent. The primary data also collected from the temple authority, priest and person of the villages. Though my study is based mainly on primary data but I also collected secondary data from mahakuma library, Katwa information centre, NATMO, Gazetteer, different books etc. just to get a general idea about the background of the study area and its tourism potentiality.

The dissertation is manly descriptive one, but the discussion and analysis is base: d on field survey as well as secondary data. In this context, I have adopted both statistical analysis and cartographic representation based on survey data. I have computed and used different statistically techniques. Primary date was collected from the filed in the form of temple survey, tourist survey etc.

The research work prepared in three stages which are as follows -

Pre-field work:

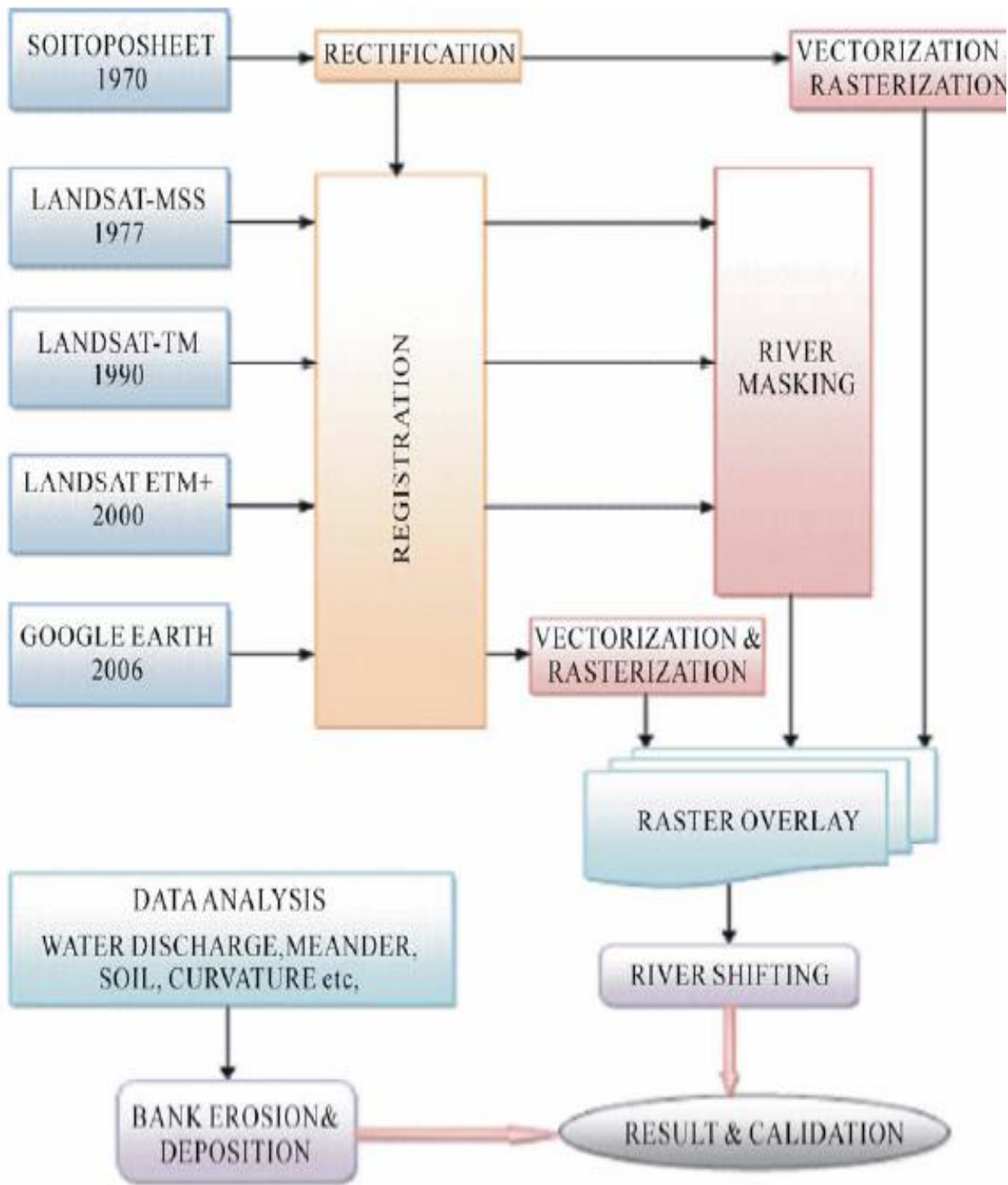
This stage includes - i) collection of districts map ii) collection of secondary information from district handbook, cesus report, others books and journals etc. iii) preparation of questionnaire statistical schedule for collection of primary data which are closely related with the research work.

Field work:

By questionnaire schedule primary data will be collected from the study area. Observation schedule also help to collect the information.

Post field work:

Collected data will be classified in a master table and various cartographic and statistical techniques will be made in support of the theoretical discussion.



Flow chart of methodology

Fig – 1: Flow Chart of Methodology

RESULTS:

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF AGRADWEEP AND IT'S IMPORTANCE:

Agradweep is an ancient land in katwa Sub-division. Ptolemy mentioned it as Apnagar or Aagaha, Will Ford Called it as Aghodeep and according to Renel, it was Aaghadweep. The present day's Agradweep's main attraction is Ghosh Thakur's Shreepaat's Gopinath. To reach there, one has to get down in Agradweep railway station, which is in Bandel – Katwa railway line and then travel about 2.5 km by toot or rickshaw to reach the Agradeep village, which situated on the banks of the river Bhagirathi. Due to frequent changes in the way of river Bhagirathi, Agradeep in past remained sometimes on east banks and some times on West Banks, Presently, it is on the eastern banks of the river. Every year Krishna Ekadashi and Trayodashi dates of Chaitrya month, to observe passing away of Ghosh thakur and Bhruni bath resectively.

From around five hundred years, the people of Gangetic West Bengal,s large area have immense sense of devotion for Ghosh Thakur's (Govindo Ghosh) Vaishnav idol Lord Gopinath, which is unparallel in India. From the time when Govindo Ghosh a resident of Kulai, a close disciple of Chaitanya establish the idol of Lord Gopinath in Agradweep, it become a place of pilgrimage for the Vaishnavs, but the occurrence of Baruni bath and festival is Known from an ancient time. According to the Scholars, Sometimes around 5000 B.C. and Baruni bath on Krishna trayodashi date of the month of Chaitra, new Year used to start. During Krishna Kadashi, Chandra (moon) remains in Satabhisha Constellation. According to the astrologers, God Varun is the lord of Satabhisha Constellation. For that reason, the other name of Satabhisha is baruni. We can say it for sure that the Barony festival of Agradweep is quite ancient in occurrence. According to the legends, the religious merit or piety one can get by bathing once in the Baruni festival is equals to bathing in the ganges during 100 solar eclipses.

Traditions tell us that King Vikramaditya of Ujjain (in different opinion, King Vikram Kesari of Mangalkot) used to come to Agradweep for Baruni bath. Date of establishment of lord Gopinath idol in Agradweep by Ghosh Thakur Coincided with the date of passing away of Ghosh Thakur and Baruni, which increased the imporeance of Agradweep as Shreepaat. Sometimes in between 1574-76 A.D. King Maansingh Came to Bengal to defeat the Pathan Muttan and on his return, he paid a visit to Agradweep for offering prayer to Lord Gopinath. There is mention of Lord Gopinath Agradweep in the epic "Tirthamangal", composed by Vijayram Gupta during 1174 (Bengali era). This implies that the renounce and fame Lord Gopinath of Agradweep is ancient in origin. Gadadhar Das, brother of Kashiram Das who wrote the Bengali Mahabharat, also mentioned Lord Gopinath in his Writings.

Agradweep Gopinath Rai Padatala,

Nivas amar Sai Charan Kamala

(Agradweep remains under the feet of Lord Gopinath and I live under the same lotus-like feet)

Emergence and establishment of Lord Gopinath:

In the Ganges West Bengal, there are many here says and traditions the establishment of Vaishnav god Lord Gopinath. The establisher of idol of Lord Gopinath was Govindo Ghosh, who is known as Ghosh Thakur in this region. They lived in the Kashipur Vaishnavtala nearby Agradweep. According to legends, he was born in Vaishnavtala. Govindo Ghosh and Govindananda of Chaitaina Bhagvat is one and same person.

It is written in Chaitaina Charanamrita that Nityananda along with Vasudev and Madhav Ghosh came to Gour from Neelachal Govindo Ghosh remained with Chaitanya to preach. Mahaprabhu for sometimes in Neelachal. During 1515 A.D. when Shreechaitanya for the Second time came to Gour Banga, Govindo Ghosh became his cotraveller. It is not known that exactly where Govindo Ghosh met Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. But according to some, they met in Kashipur Vaishnavtala. According to legends during their travel, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu abandoned Govindo Ghosh after observing his accumulator urge.

The fault of Govindo Ghosh was that he provided myrobalan fruit to Mahaprabhu for month refreshment which he gathers previously. For this sin, Shree Chaitanya left his dear disciple. But at last, due of severe yearning of Govindo Ghosh, Shree Chaitanya asked him to establish Shreepaat in the ancient pilgrim of Agradweep. From then, Govindo Ghosh started living on banks of Ganges in a hut and continued his religious prayers. Sfter this incidence, one day while bathing in the Ganges Govindo Ghosh found a long of wood which he brought to his hut. After some time, Mahaprabhu came to Ghosh Thakur's hut and with his divine commandment that wooden log changed to stone. With Mahaprabhu's directions and hard work of an unknown sculptor, the idol of lord Gopinath was carved out. Mahaprabhu himself established that idol and named it as lord Gopinath. Ghosh Thakur became the first priest of Lord Gopinath. It is not known for sure that exactly when Lord Gopinath was established in Agradweep but it can be assumed that when shree Chaitanya for the second or last time came to Gour, sometime during 1514 – 15, the idol was established. Around 2 feet high standin idol was carved out of touchstone, which is not only the pride of the Vaishnav but also of the people of the katwa sibdivision and unique pice of Bengal's art craft.

After the establishment of idol of Lord Gopinath, Ghosh Thakur remains alive for many years. He was married to a lady of Singh family of Vaishnata. One boy was also born to his wife. But his wife died while giving birth to the Child. His son also died in the age of five. For these reasons, Ghosh Thakurs was very sad unable to worship with consistency.

So, lord Gopinath appeared in front of Govindo Ghosh and him that all the ritual which his son was entited to perform after his deth would be performed by Lord Gopinath. After this incidence, Govindo Ghosh starting Lord Gopinath as son and on Chaitra Ekadashi just before Baruni festival, Govindo Ghosh passed away Legends says that even Lord Gopinath shred tears in sorrow and also performed all the ritual of funeral ceremony. From that year onwards, the same day, every year, the idol of Lord Gopinath was made to do the oblation rituals of the unreal ceremony.

ROUTE MAP AND EFFECTS OF RIVER BHAGIRATHI

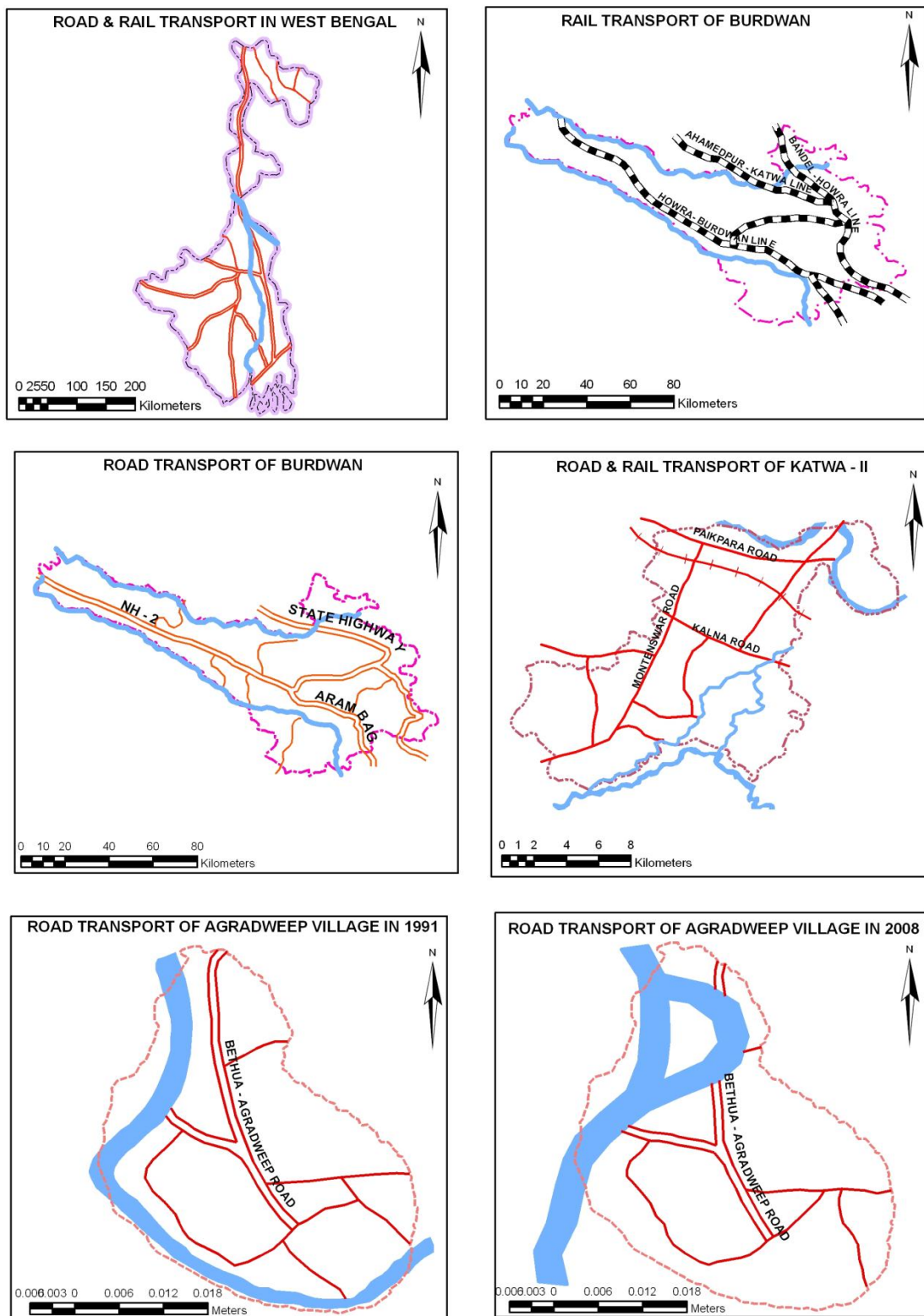


Fig -2: Route Map and Effects of Bhagirathi River

HISTORY OF THE PRIESTS OF THE GOPINATH TEMPLE:

After establishing the idol of lord Gopinath, Govindo became the first priest. After the demise of the wife and son of Govindo Ghosh, he was in deep sorrow and was unable to continue with the worship. But lord Gopinath himself answered him and Govindo Ghosh revived all the worship rituals. After the death of Govindo Ghosh, some family members of the Ghosh family took away the idol of Lord Gopinath to Bangladesh Purba Bangla's Kushtia. But the idol was recovered and returned to Agradweep's Temple. During the Reign of Murshid Kuli Khan, the responsibility to look after the temple was given to king of Nadia Raghunath (Father of Krishna Chandra). As for it is known, someone called Nityananda Bhattacharya was appointed as the priest during the reign of Raghuram. After that, the Mukhopadhy family of Bahara Village was given the responsibility to conduct the worship of Lord Gopinath. Till today, the successors of Mukhopadhyay family serve as the priest of the temple. With a treaty with the King of Krishnagar, the Mukhopadhyay family gained the right over all the rituals of the temple. The fourth generation member of the Mukhopadhyay family named Dilip Mukhopadhyay is the present priest of Lord Gopinath temple of Agradweep.

Socio-economic Conditions

- Social Status : Despite socially gaining respect from all spheres of the society in Agradweep and from the Vaishnavs, the economic condition of Mukhopadhyay family is not well. The fourth generation member of Mukhopadhyay family, Dilip Mukhopadhyay has a family size of six. i.e., old mother, wife, three daughters and he himself.
- Education : Dilip Mukhopadhyay os Madhyamik Passed (X Standard) and his wife Rekha Devi is Higher Secondary passed (XII Standard). Mr. Dilip's elder daughter is in VI s Standard and the other daughter is in III Standard.
- Monthly Income : Previously, a share of the offering used sent to the royal treasure of Krishnagar and economic donation was received by the temple. But, these days no significant donations are made by the royal treasure. All the rituals are performed with the money received as offerings. A share of offering is provided to Dilip Mukhopadhyay as his salary, on which his six-member family is dependent. The gross monthly income of Dilip Mukhopadhyay is around Rs. 2000-2500.
- Problems : The old mother 32years old wife of Mr. Dilip is very ill. The local doctor suggested taking his wife Kolkata for better treatment. But due to his economic condition, he is unable to do so. So, like very poor people, Mr. Dilip is in a great need of money. According to him, before 1998 a huge number. I of pilgrim used to came to Agradweep to offer prayers and to worship lord Gopinath. But in 1998 the connecting road in between Bethua and Agradweep was washed away the erosion of Bhagirathi River. Due to poor connectivity, the number of distant pilgrims decreased hugely. Directly or indirectly it brought economic crisis not only to Mr. Dilip but also to the adjacent shopkeepers.
- Comments : In this situation, Governmental and Governmental initiatives are largely needed to maintain the present status of the temple and to improve the economic

condition of the priest and local people. Initiatives should be taken to improve connectivity to Agradweep and proper management of the temple affairs, so that, it remains an attractive pilgrimage for the devotees.

TEMPLR WORKER:

As the idol of lord Gopinath used to transfer to Krishnanagar after the festival of Chaitra Ekadashi so during these 6 months, all the rituals of Gopinath remains ceased. But during the other 6 months, when lord Gopinath remains in Agradweep, 2 workers, among them one is temporary, are there for temple works. For the rest of the time, only one worker is there in the temple.

Demographic Conditions

- Age : The permanent worker of the temple is an old woman about 55 years. She used to clean and maintain the temple and its adjacent areas. The other worker is a 45 years old man who used to some selected works of temple on special occasions.

Socio – Economic Condition

- Education : The female worker is illiterate but the male worker is VIII standard passed. Despite this both of them have continued the studies of their children against all odds Per Marital status: Both the works of the temple married. The male worker has family of five members and the female worker has a family of three including her husband.
- Capital Income : The permanent female worker gets Rs. 100 per month for her work along with two meals per day in the temple. Actually, her salary is almost nothing but she continues her work in the female because of her faith and devotion to lord Gopinath.
- The temporary male worker in the temple on selected days and gets a daily wage of Rs. 50/ day on the working days. The family of the male worker is depended on agriculture and the worker used to work as agricultural labour for the sustenance of his family.

PILGRIMS AND TOURISTS OF THE GOPINATH TEMPLE:

The god of devotion, lord Gopinath of Ageadweep is not only important to the local people but also revered by whole of the Vaishnav Society of Bengal as a live deity. So, to see the loving god and to submit their wills to the lord Gopinath, pilgrims all Bengal are coming to Agradweep from the time of festival.

Demographic Condition

To know about the demography condition of the pilgrims coming to Agradweep, we have to first study and analyze various indicators such as age, sex etc.

- **Age:** Out of the pilgrims and tourists coming to Agra weep's Gopinath temple about 43% of them are in between the age group of 45-60 years. About 14% of the pilgrims are about above the age of 60 years. The percentages of pilgrims in between the age group 30-45 years and below 30 years are 29% and 14% respectively. From the above data we can conclude that people of the age group 45-60 years mostly come for pilgrimage to lord Gopinath temple.
- **Sex:** Out of the pilgrims coming to Agradweep, about 48% are women and rest 42% are men. So, it can be said that women are leading in comparison to men in the pilgrimage to lord Gopinath temple.

Social Condition

- **Religion and Caste:** People of both upper and lower castes come to worship lord Gopinath. The caste, Sub-Caste or religion of pilgrims is insignificant. All are welcome here. Among the pilgrims, about 43% belong to Scheduled Castes and rest 57% belong to general castes.

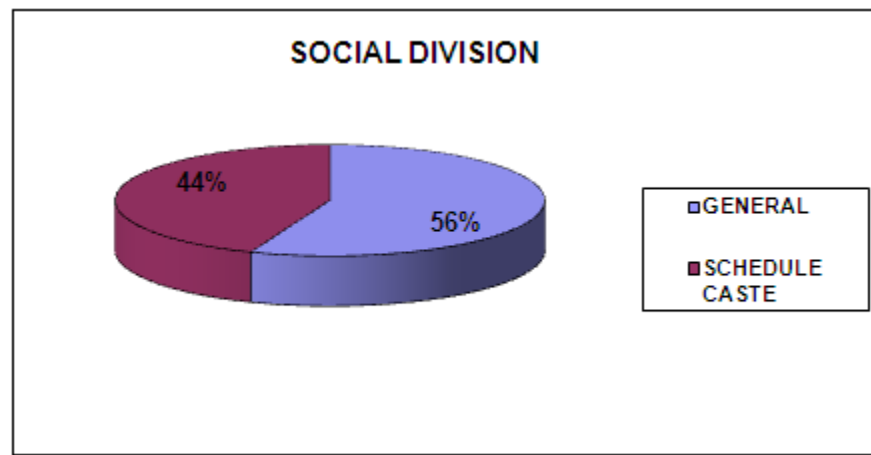


Fig-3: Social Division of Pilgrims of Gopinath temple

- **Places from Pilgrims Come:** It is not that all the pilgrims are from Agradweep or adjacent areas. Pilgrims come from places far and near. About 15% of the pilgrims come from a distance greater than 20km. But most pilgrims, about 43% come from places about 10-15km distant from Agradweep. Apart from this, about 28% of pilgrims come from 5km distance and rest 14% come from 15-20km distance.

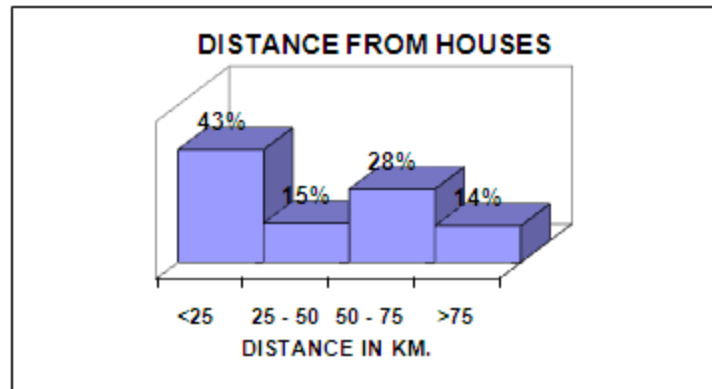


Fig-4: Distance from Pilgrim's house to Gopinath temple

- Education: About 42% of the pilgrims are illiterate but there are also a large number of educated pilgrims. Among them about 14% are Master degree holders, 14% are Graduate, 15% are Higher Secondary passed and rest 14% are Madhyamik Passed. So it can be said that lord Gopinath is equally beloved to both illiterate and education people.
- Marital Status: About 86% of the pilgrims are adult and married and only 145 are unmarried. So, it can be concluded major portion of the pilgrims are married.

Economical Condition

- Occupation: The pilgrims to the lord Gopinath temple are engaged in various occupations. About 43% of the pilgrims are house wives. Apart from this, about 14% are school teacher, 14% are involved in agriculture and other 14% are potters (mostly living in Agradweep. And rests 15% of the pilgrims are students. This implies that pilgrims to the lord Gopinath temple are coming from all speres of the society.
- Per Capita Income: About 43% of the pilgrim's does not have any significant income. About 28% pilgrims have a monthly income below Rs. 2000 and about 14% of pilgrims have monthly income between Rs. 2000-4000. About, 14% of pilgrims have monthly income above Rs. 4000. So, it can concluded that in spite of low monthly income, the pilgrims coming to lord Gopinath temple of Agradweep have immense devotion for the beloved god.

CONCLUSION:

Even the pride of the hundred year old is huge and about one lakh of people comes to Agradweep for bathing in the Ganges during Baroni, there remains a pyramid of ill management of the preparations for

food shelter issue of the pilgrims. Many pilgrims, after worshipping in the temple returns to the nearby town Katwa for staying. This a set back for Agradweep to be an attractive tourist-stop. The location of Agradweep is in deep rural part of W.B. on other hand, there is a huge crisis of the transport facility which prevented Agradweep to be in the lime light for tourist destintions. The main connectivity from Bethua to Agradweep road is almost destroyed by devastation by Bhagirathi, The only mean of transport direct to temple is the rickshaw. The present condition of Katwa-Agradweep Ghat bus route is miserable. After the onset of darkness in the evening, there remains a huge problem of transportation as nothing is available to a pilgrim or tourists. Due to unruly nature of the most of pilgrims, ignorance of the people of Agradweep and inactive role of the administration and Panchayat Samiti, the pollution free banks of Agradweep becomes a hub of pollution every year during the festival.

All last can said that the erosion of the banks of the river Bhagirathi was able to suppress the sense of devotion of the people of Agradweep and the pilgrims but increased it exponentially. People of Agradweep accepted the erosion by Bhagirathi as the will of lord Gopinath and maintain the age old traditions associated with the temple. This included the Dot Utsav after the Chaitra Ekadashi. During this period, the whole of Agradweep in the mood of Celebrations and enjoyments.

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