



Research Paper

## Melai Chandi Mata Temple: A Heritage Site of Amta-1, Howrah, West Bengal, India

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**ABSTRACT:** The Hindu temple is where the god or deities reside. It is a building and area intended to unite humans and gods, and it is decorated with symbols that convey Hinduism's concepts and values. There is no distinction between the sacred and the secular in Hinduism. In the same vein, Hindu temples are both secular and spiritual places. They now have a social significance in addition to a spiritual one. Making every effort in this direction is the sacred responsibility of all Hindu society's leaders. The paper analyses the Melai Chandi Temple in West Bengal, India, a Hindu temple dedicated to Goddess Sati and one of 51 Shakti Peethas for Hindu Shakti worshippers. This paper is also an attempt to discuss the present activities of the temple. The Primary data is analysed using a quantitative method.

**KEYWORDS:** Hindu Temple, Hinduism, Spiritual places

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### I. INTRODUCTION:

The primary hubs of Hindu spirituality are temples. The most significant ways to offer spirituality are through rituals, beliefs, and values. Each Indian region has its temples that reflect its sociocultural landscape (Biswas, A. 2024). India's cultural heritage is regarded as one of the most evident indicators of the survival and continuity of customs, performances, artifacts, and monuments; naturally, this is primarily from earlier times with religious denominations, but it is also influenced by the state's definition and implementation of cultural policy and diplomacy. A good deal of criticism regarding the feasibility of the world heritage idea, primarily concerning monumentation, seems to be present among the World Heritage Committee (Singh, P.B.R., Rana, S.P., Kumar, S. 2021). The oldest known temple in Bengal, Balgram, is attributed to the Vaishnava sect, while the two destroyed temples of Mahasthan Gokul are likely Buddhist. These temples have a square floor plan with a Cella enclosed by a prostrate dormant. From the 9th to the 11th century, several temple buildings were built in the south of West Bengal, influenced by Odisha architecture. After Islam arrived in northern India, older temples were destroyed, but the Mogul ruler Jahangir reinforced the construction of unique Hindu temples, including those in Bishnupur, Antpur, and Kalna (Rakshit, S. 2023). Howrah district has a rich history of temples, with many fragments of ancient temples found. The founders of these temples were mainly landholders, employees of zamindars, merchants, priests, and patriarchs. The district has a higher number of plastered temples than terracotta temples, with only 68 having terracotta decoration. The devalayas are mainly Bengali style 'Chala', 'Ratna', and 'Dalan' classes, with some Shikhar temples built in the simplified style developed in Odisha. Chala Mandirs, Jorbangla, Charchala temples, and Atchala temples are also found in the district. Famous temples of this style include Amaragari, Amta, Kalyanchak, Khariop, Khalna, GarhBhavanipur, Gazipur, Jagatballabpur, Jaipur, Jhikhira, Dhasa, Nizbalia, Patihal, Chandrabhag, Pendo, Baruipur, Bamunpara, Bali, Bhandargacha, Mahishamuri, Makardah, Manikara, Mellak, Rauthara, and Radhapur (Santra, T. 2000).

Objectives:

- To study the demographic structure of the local people, visitors, and temple workers of the temple area.
- To examine the temple activities.

Study area:

Amta is located between latitudes 22°37'00 N and longitudes 88°01'47 E. It is in the Howrah district village. In Hooghly district, Amta I CD Block is bordered to the north by Udaynarayanpur and Jangipara CD Blocks, to the

east by Jagatballavpur CD Block, to the south by Uluberia II and Bagnan I CD Blocks, and to the west by Amta II CD Block. It is located 35 km from Howrah, the district headquarters. The geographical location of this temple is 1270 No. 0.0100 acres in total, as stated by Bangla Bhumi.

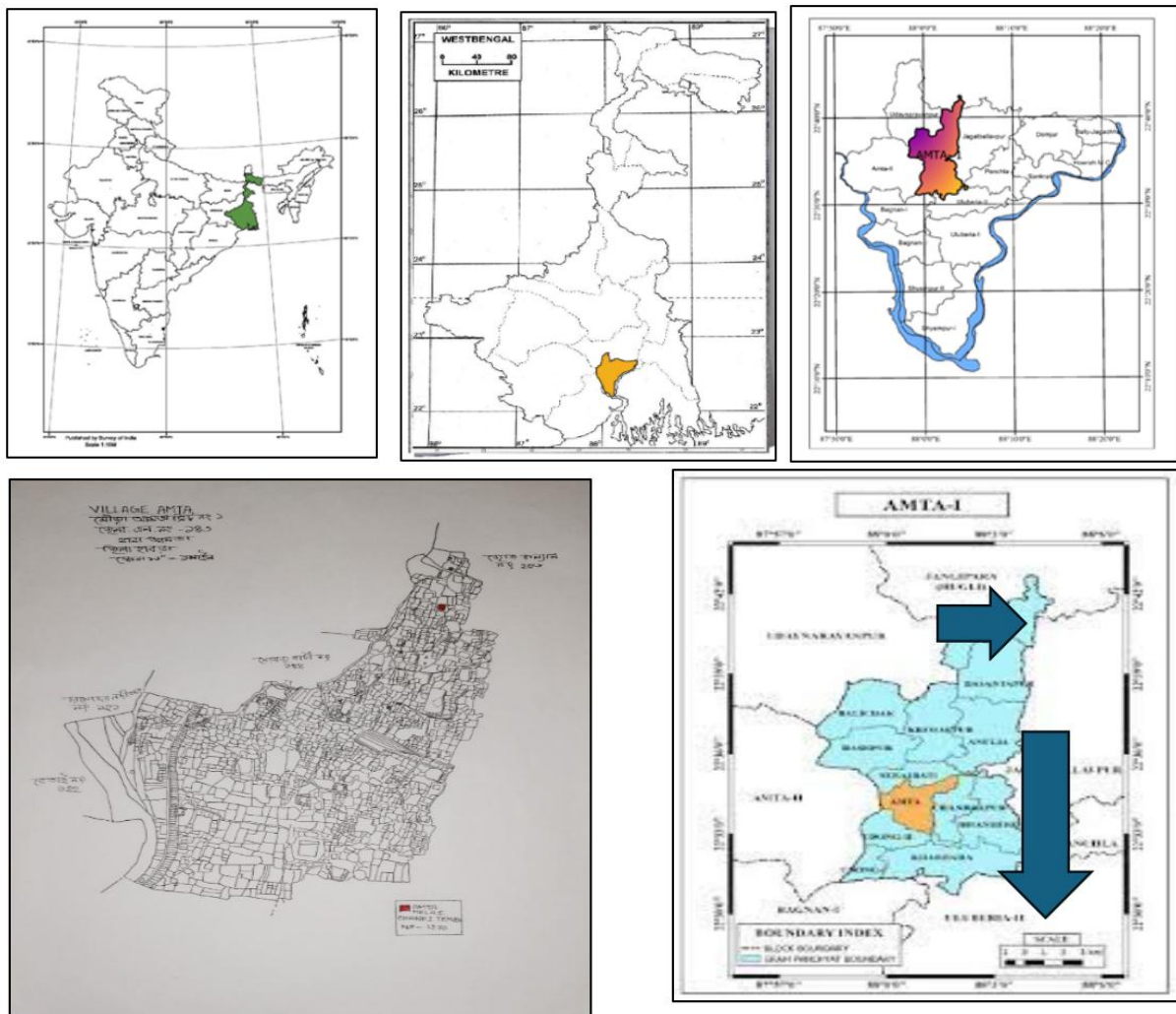


Fig 1: Location Map of Study Area

## II. DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY

Data information has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. At first, secondary data are collected from various research papers, books, etc. Mouza map is collected from the BLRO office. This piece of research work is mainly based on primary data. The primary data has been collected from the selected study area (Amta-I block). Questionnaires were prepared for temple workers, local people and for visitors as well. Ms-Excel, Ms-Word, Q-GIS (3.10) are used to prepare diagrams and maps.

### *HISTORY OF THE TEMPLE:*

The town of Amta is expanding in the Howrah area. The idol of Lakshmi Devi, which is thought to be about 450 years old, is housed in this Amta. The Howrah district's oldest temple is the seat of this deity. The poet Kankan Mukundaram's Chandimangal poem also refers to this shrine.

'Amta Melai Chandi' is one of the twenty-one Sati Peeths, as per the Puranic texts. After Sati retained the corpse, Jayanti near the western edge of Damodar was hit by the body's Malai Chaki. The goddess then bestowed to Pandit Jatadhari Chakraborty a dreamland. The goddess told Pandit in a dream that a piece of her body was in the village of Jayanti, perched on a banyan tree. Pandit PrakandaKharasyeta crossed the Damodar River as a result, and he discovered a stone block laying there. Jayanti is the name of the region where the stone block was found. He began the pooja there after he had recovered this stone. There are rumors that he used to ride a crocodile across the river. However, it was not possible to cross the river to carry out the puja during the rainy season when the Damodar was completely submerged in water. Pandit's age gradually made its way across this powerful river. For him, finishing the pooja is simple. So, he confided in Devi about his issue. and awaited

the goddess's instruction. Once more, Devi's ideal land is granted, and she gives Pandit the order to put her in Pandit's home. Amta was where Pandit lived. Thus, Pandit set out to transport Devi to Amta. The goddess was housed in Amata Moirapara under a neem tree upon her arrival in Amata. The Pandit began the Devi Puja by choosing a particular tree and building a canopy.



Pic 1: Idol of Melai Chandi

Kana claims that at first there was no goddess shrine. Puja was placed under a tent. The well-known salt trader Raja Krishnachandra Datta of Hatkhola, Calcutta, traveled the Damodar route. The trade ship of Raja Krishnachandra Datta, carrying roughly three items, was then sunk at Damodar. The king consequently recalled the goddess. The goddess then gave the king the command that all of his issues would be resolved if her temple was built at Amta. Thus, in 1649 AD, he founded this Atchala shrine.

The procedure of creating the goddess' idol started later. The goddess gives Jotadhari Pandit the command to keep everyone out of the temple until her idol's building is finished.

However, a few peasants and slaves entered the shrine out of curiosity. That day marked the end of the idol-making process. Consequently, the goddess lacks hands and feet but has eyes, nails, and a face. In other words, the goddess' idol is not fully formed. Under that circumstance, the goddess' daily adoration begins auspiciously.

The goddess's temple can be accessed through a massive lion door. This temple is open all year round for daily adoration of the deity. Approximately 267 families are currently being served. There is daily worship of the deity. The deity is provided food every day. Goddess eats five different kinds of food: fish, pies, rice, lentils, and curries. The mother also has regular baths and wears clean clothes. We do our mother's daily aarti in the evening. It shows five pots arranged next to the goddess idol. Beside the goddess's idol are the five Ghats: Jorashur, Mahakala, Sheetala, Kali, and Shasti. Adjacent to the Devi temple is the Shiva Tagore temple dedicated to Radhakrishna Ramakrishna Sarada Maa. This location also hosts daily worship.

This temple was founded on the day of Buddha Purnima. Every year on the day of Buddha Purnima, Melai Chandi celebrates Establishment Day. On Baisakhi Purnima, a unique pooja honoring the goddess is carried out. On this puja's occasion, Amta hosts a sizable fair. Idols are not constructed separately for Durga Puja since Chandi is another form of Durga. Every year, pots are set up and meticulous rules and procedures are followed as part of a massive Durga Puja celebration. On Navami and Dasami, there is an animal sacrifice and a

red game. This temple is the venue for the thirteen Paban Bengali pujas held over the course of a year. The ghat is then discharged at the adjacent Dhopa Ghat by a procession made up of the locals and servants. However, there is a guideline for Ghat Bisarjan that states that the proper time for Ghat Bisarjan has arrived when the priest declares, "that conch shell has flown." However, the priest must state that "that shell has flown away" even if the conch shell is not visible at this moment.



Pic 2: Temple of Melai Chandi

There is no caste or religion that prevents anyone from coming to this goddess. "Worship of Olabibi" is one instance of it. Historical narratives, such as the Corona of 2021, claim that a different epidemic known as "Olawatha" struck the society several centuries prior. For the purpose of curing this venereal ailment, Olabibi was worshipped by individuals, mostly Muslims, which Melai House continues to host. People from many communities gather at Melai House for this puja.

Senior resident S Moniruddin has spent a great deal of time researching Amta's past. He added that the haat was constructed around Devi Chandi's stone block, which was created in AmtarMoirapara. In addition to selling betel nuts, paddy, potatoes, jute, and other items for cottage industries, the Moyrapara market was well-known for its assortment of palanquins, khamms, and peacock-winged boats. Large boats were loaded to transport all those items to Amata harbor. The crops that used to arrive from Burdwan Hooghly, Champadanga along the river were potatoes, onions, and paddy. Bullock carts were used to transport goods from the dock to the market. The market used to draw at least two thousand visitors at that time. There have been thriving markets there for nearly a century. The market's significance declined in tandem with Damodar's decline.

MelaichandimataDevottar Estate Committee' oversees overseeing both the current bazaar and the previous haat. There are currently 350 vendors, comprising large and small stores, a vegetable market, and a wholesale market.

Main occasion of this temple: "sticks games" are held on the occasion of Buddha purnima, "Dharmerjhap", "kolpotoruutshob" are held on 1<sup>st</sup> January the occasion of Ramkrishna's birth day.

This goddess is incredibly magnificent. This mother is consulted by people from all over the world for problem-solving. Nobody leaves this awakened goddess empty-handed. Howrah Amta is one of the satipiths where this deity resides among others. May the goddess of mercy bless everyone. I am putting a stop to the satkahan of this goddess' grandeur in this way.

III. RESULT & DISCUSSIONS

TEMPLE WORKER PROFILE

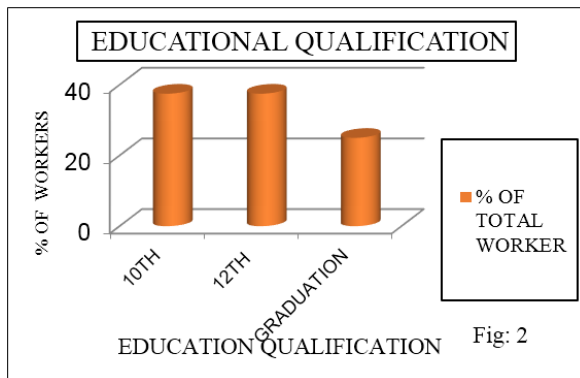


Fig: 2

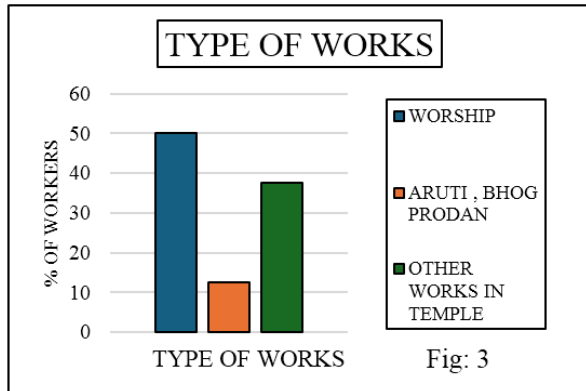


Fig: 3

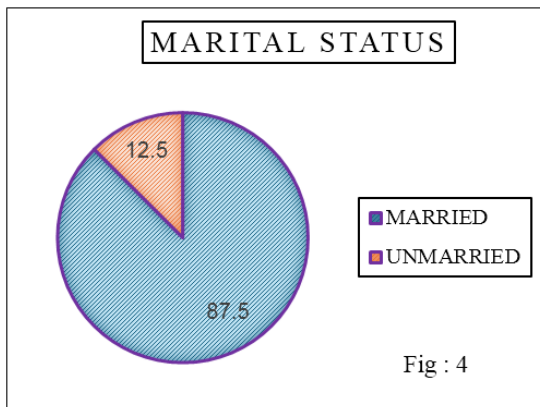


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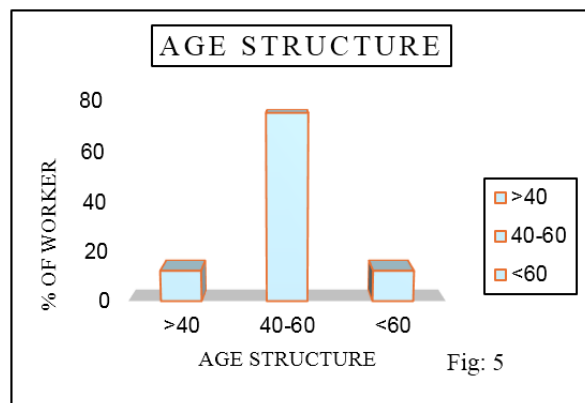


Fig: 5

37.5 % of workers are 10<sup>th</sup> pass, 37.5% of workers are 12<sup>th</sup> pass, and the remaining workers have completed their graduation. They can read and write. (Fig: 2)

50% of the workers are attached to worship of the temple, 12.5% of workers are attached to Arati, Bhog distribution, and 37.5% of workers are attached to other work of this temple, like cooking Bhogs, collecting flowers, sandhya arati, and marriage rituals. (Fig: 3)

87.5% of workers are married, and 12.5% of workers are unmarried. Married and unmarried, all work together in this temple. (Fig: 4).

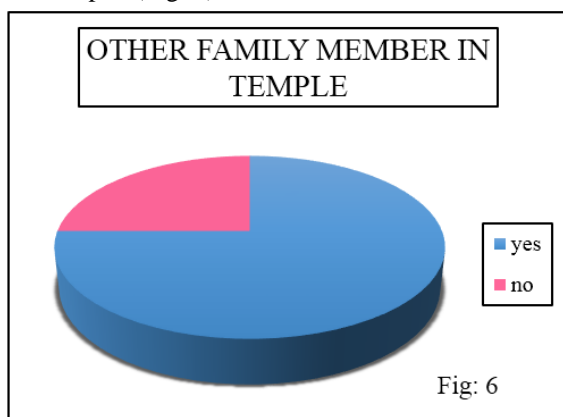


Fig: 6

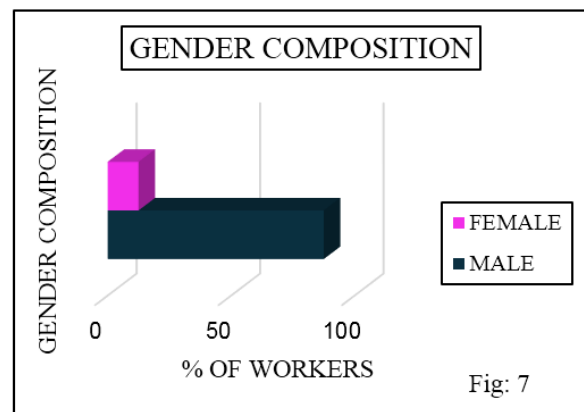


Fig: 7

Here 12.5% of workers are below the age of 40, 75% of workers are between 40-60 age group, 12.5% of workers are above 60 years old. The young generation and the old age are engaged in this temple work. (Fig: 5). 75% of workers family members are working in temple-related works and 25% are not working in temple-related works. They are either students or working in service sectors like the Government or the Private sectors. (Fig: 6)

87.5% of male workers are attached to this temple work, 12.5% of female workers are connected to this temple. Female workers work in the kitchen in the temple and collect flowers. (Fig: 7)

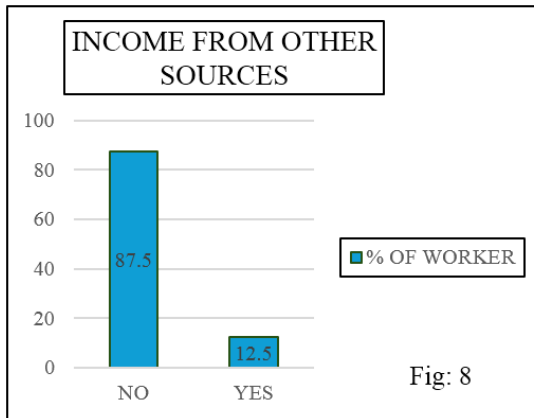


Fig: 8

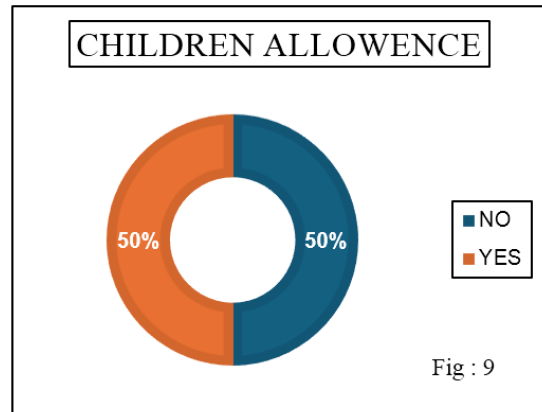


Fig : 9

87% of workers earn from other sources. They are working in the office, business, and any other work. 13% of workers do not earn from another source. They mainly work in the temple. (fig: 8)

50% of workers are interested in allowing their children to work for the temple, and 50% of workers don't allow their children to work for the temple. Young generations are educated and working in other sectors. They show less interest in temple works. (fig: 9)

37% of workers have land property like *dangajomi*, paddy field, 13% of workers own ponds, and 50% of workers have no excess property.

#### VISITOR SURVEY PROFILE

48% of visitors are married and 38% of visitors are unmarried, 10% are widows and 4% are divorced. This is a 'Saktipith' of 'Ma Durga'. So married persons mostly visit here. (Fig: 10).

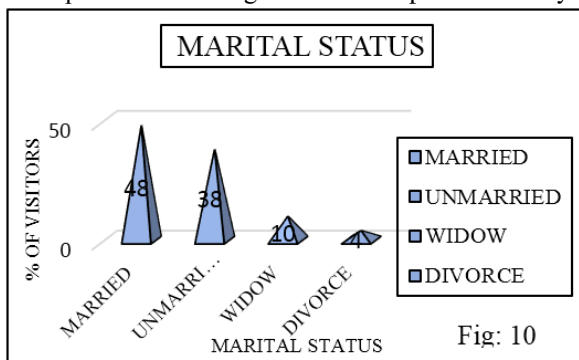


Fig: 10

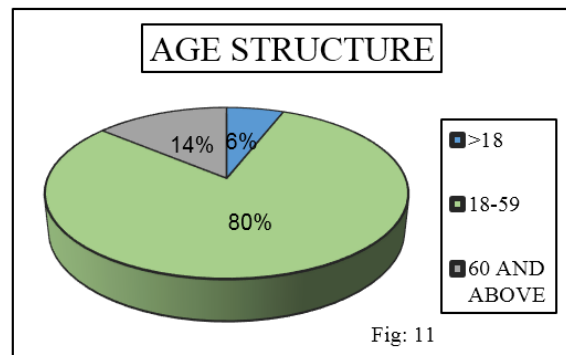


Fig: 11

About 80% of visitors are in the 18-59 years age group, 14% are above 60 years, and 7% of visitors are below 18 years of age. Adults visit here mostly. (Fig: 11).

40% of visitors are graduates, 14% of visitors have completed their master's degree, 22% of visitors did not pass class 10<sup>th</sup>, 20% of visitors have completed Higher Secondary, and the remaining 4% of visitors have a PhD degree. Visitors are mostly educated, but they believe in God. Hence, they come here for their purposes. (Fig: 12)

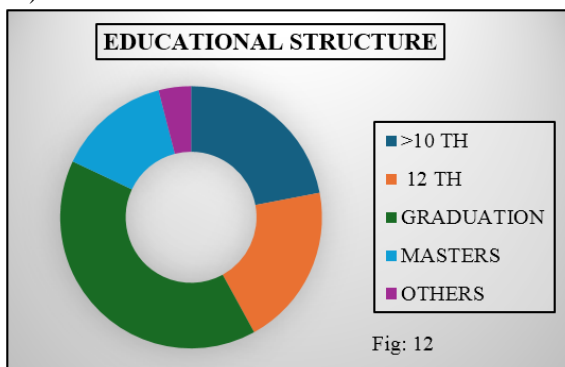


Fig: 12

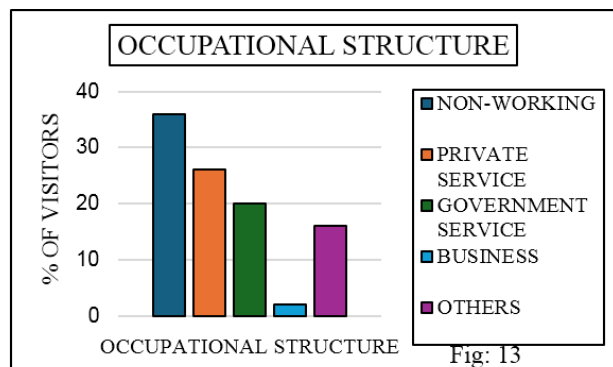
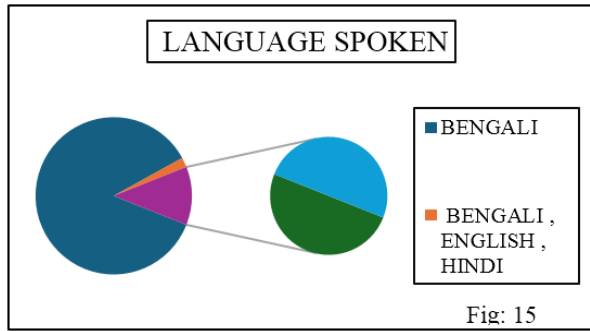
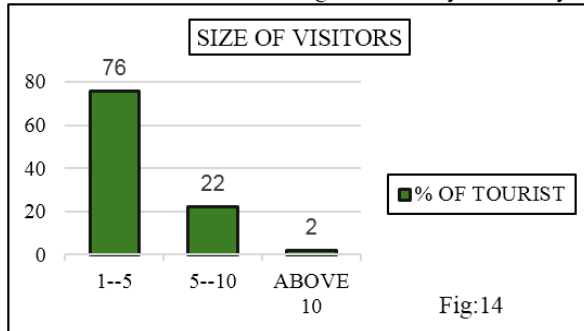


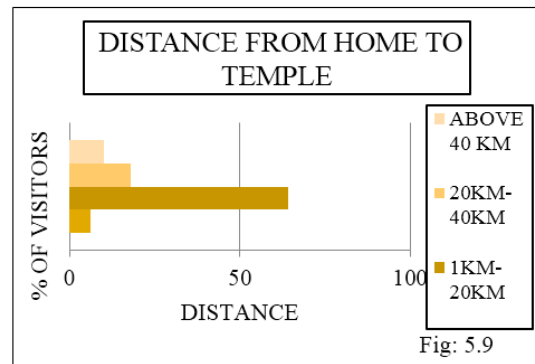
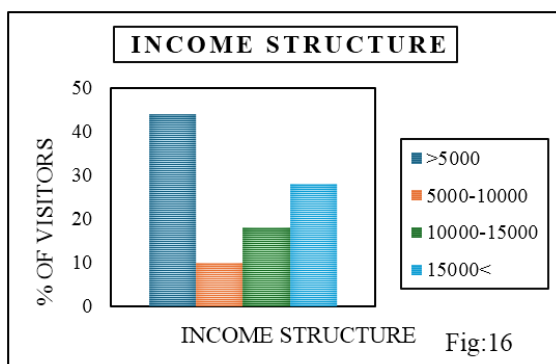
Fig: 13

36% of visitors are non-working because they are mostly housewives and students. 26% of visitors work in the private sector, such as private school teachers, private tutors, banking, etc., and other sectors are associated with farming, labourers, carpenters, etc. (Fig: 13)

As most of the visitors are local, 76% of visitors come alone or in a group of 5 people at most, 22% of visitors visit here in a group of 5-10 people, and 2% of visitors visit in large groups, that is, more than 10 people at each visit. (Fig: 14)



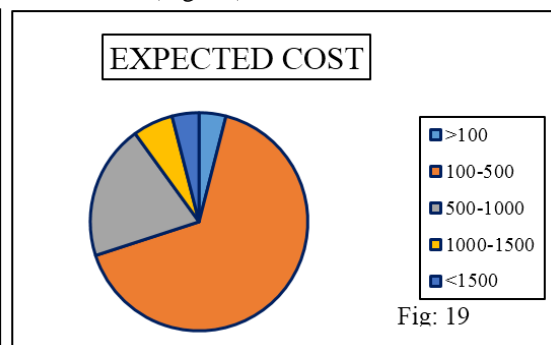
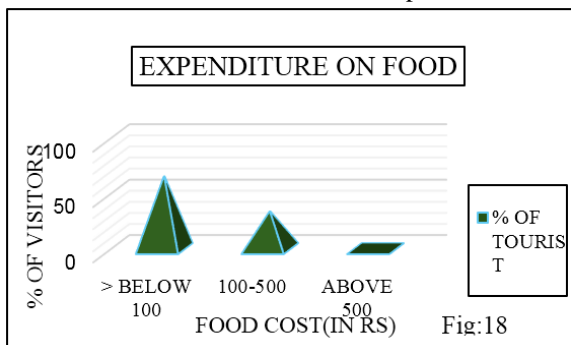
86% of visitors can speak in the Bengali language, 6% of visitors can speak both Bengali and English, 2% of visitors can speak in English and Hindi, and 6% of visitors can speak Bengali and Hindi. In this area, most of the people speak Bengali, as it is the most common language here. (Fig: 15)



52% of visitors are from the general caste, 36% of visitors are OBC, and 12% of visitors are SC. Most of the visitors are from general and OBC castes with no trace of scheduled tribes. (Fig: 16)

Most of the visitors come here from the local area. 6% of visitors come within 1 km of distance. 64% of visitors come within 1 km to 20 km distance. 18% of visitors come from 20 km to 40 km away. 10% of visitors come from above 40 km away. Visitors often come here from the outskirts of Amta and Kolkata, Howrah, Durgapur, Bankura district, Bagnan, Uluberiya, and many other places. (Fig: 17)

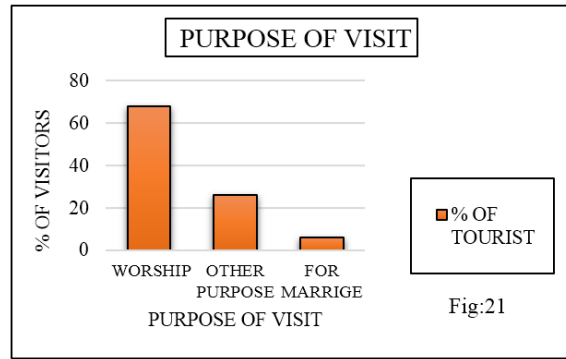
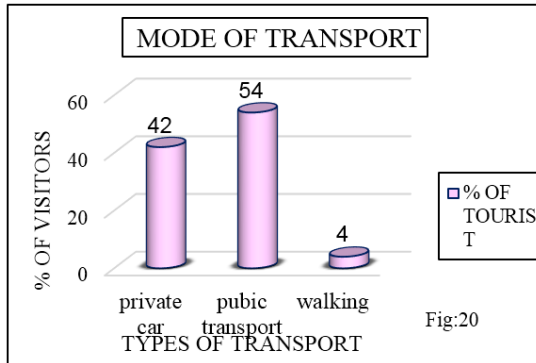
4% of visitors food expenditure ranges below 100rs, 66% of visitors food expenditure ranges between 100-500rs, 20% visitors food expenditure ranges between 500-1000rs, 6% of visitors food expenditure ranges from 1000-1500rs, 4% of visitors food expenditure costs above 1500rs. (Fig: 18).



Here, 2% of tour expenses range below 100 Rs, and 76% of visitors tour expenses range between 100 and 500 Rs, 14% of visitors tour expenses range between 500 and 1000 Rs, 4% of visitors tour expenses range from 1000 to 1500 Rs, and 4% of visitors tour expenses are above 1500 Rs. (Fig: 19)

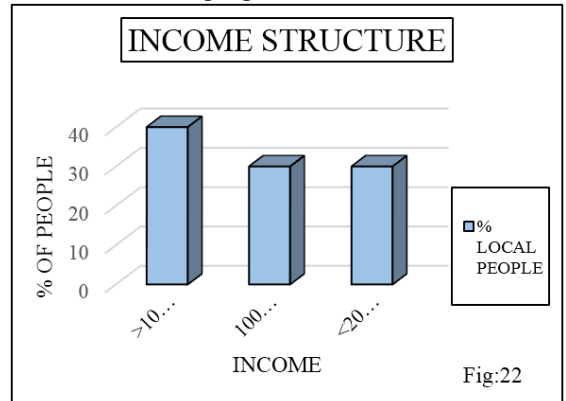
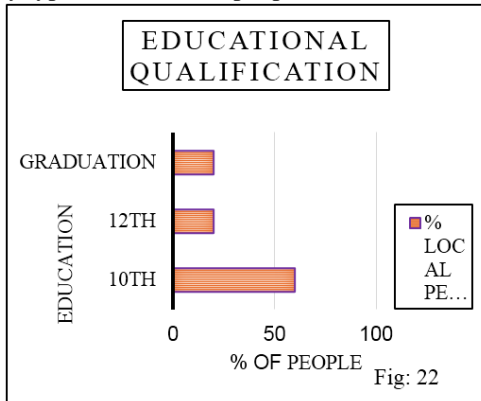
This location of the temple falls under a rural area, as it is on the outskirts of the Howrah district. Here, 4% of visitors come by walking, 42% of visitors come in private cars as they come from a bit of a far distance, and 54% of visitors come by public transport. Hence, this area has a well-developed transport and network communication. In this area, trains, buses, toto, cars, and public transport are available. Visitors avail themselves of bikes and private transport even. (Fig: 20)

68% of visitors mainly come for worship, 6% of visitors come for marriage purposes, and 26% of visitors come to visit this place, and local people come here to spend their leisure time. (Fig:21)



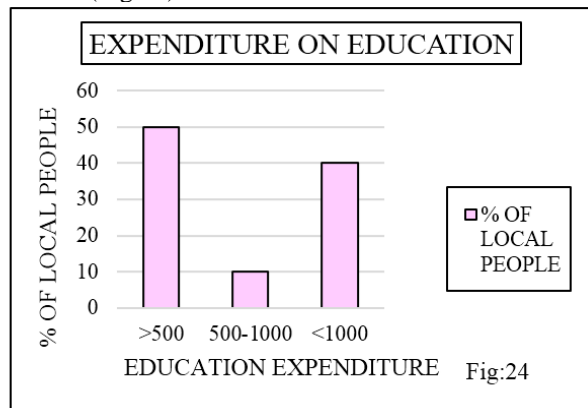
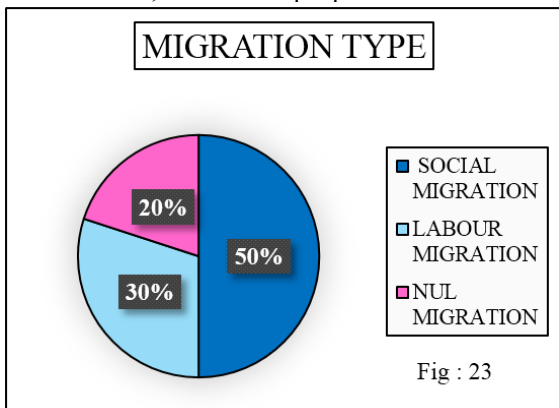
**LOCAL PEOPLE PROFILE**

According to respondents, 50% of local people are male, and 50% are female.40% of local people are below the age of 30, 40% are within the 30-40 age group, and 20% are above the age of 50.70% of people are married, and 30% of people are unmarried.50% of people are from the unreserved, 10% of people are OBC, and 40% of people are Scheduled Caste. 50% of local people belong to joint families, and 50% of local people have nuclear family types.80% of local people have Pucca houseswhereas 20%of local people have mud houses.



Here, 20% of local people are graduates, 20% of people have passed class 12, and 60% of people are 10th pass. (Fig: 22)

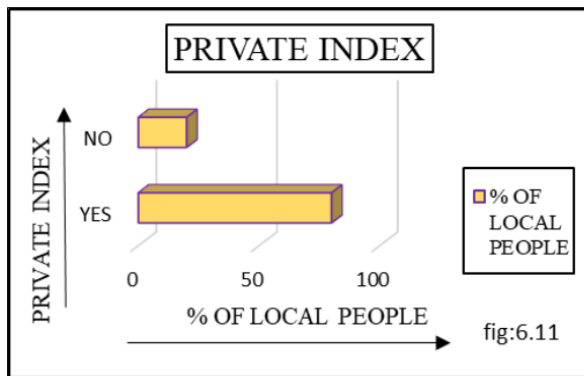
Here, 40% of local people’s income is below 10000 RS, 30% of local people's earnings range between 10000 and 20000 RS, and 30% of people’s income is above 20000 RS. (Fig:23).



50% of people have migrated for social purposes such as migrations for marriage, job purposes, etc. 30% of local people migrated for work, and 20% of people did not migrate. (Fig: 23)

50% of people’s education expenditure is below 500RS, and 10% of people’s education expenditure is 500-1000 RS. And 40% of local people's education expenditure is above 1000 RS.(Fig: 24)





(Fig: 25).

20% of people have no private assets. But 80% of people have private assets and properties such as ‘dangajomi,’ paddy fields, ponds, etc. (Fig: 25).

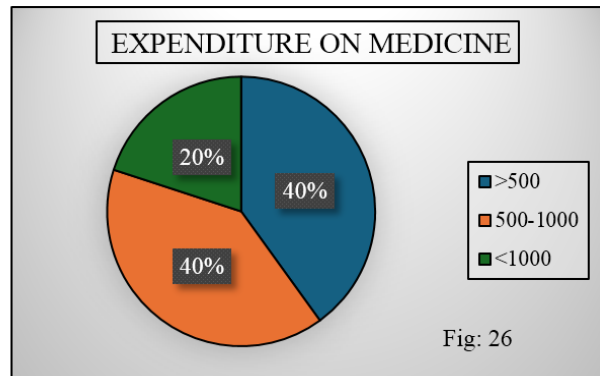


Fig: 26

40% of people’s medicine expenditure is below 500, and 40% of people’s medicine expenditure is 500-1000 RS. And 20% of local people’s medicine expenditure is below 1000 RS. (Fig: 26)

According to local people, this area is a rural area, so many people collect their drinking water from tube wells. That’s why 40% of local people have no water supply system. And 60% of local people have water availability and good quality of water. (Fig: 27)

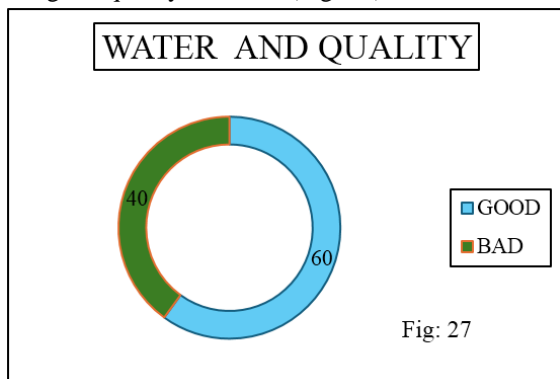


Fig: 27

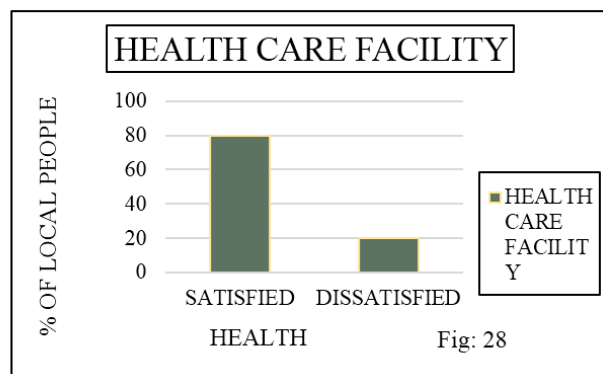


Fig: 28

80% of local people are satisfied with their health care facility, and 20% of local people are dissatisfied with their health care facility, as these people have less access to health centres. (Fig:28).

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The West Bengal people place great significance on the Melai Chandi Temple as a cultural and religious institution. This historic temple honouring the goddess Chandi is evidence of the area's magnificent architecture and rich cultural legacy. The temple contributes significantly to the advancement of societal cohesiveness, unity, and cross-cultural understanding through its numerous festivals, ceremonies, and community involvement.

The Melai Chandi Temple is a priceless communal asset and a repository of Bengal's cultural heritage due to its historical significance, architectural beauty, and cultural relevance. As a hallowed location, it still fosters adoration, spiritual development, and a feeling of community among its followers. The Melai Chandi Temple serves as a symbol of custom, history, and community spirit in today's rapidly changing world, serving as a reminder to us of the value of safeguarding our cultural heritage for coming generations.

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