



Enhancing Tourist Engagement and Heritage Development: Challenges and Prospects in Karnasubarna, Murshidabad

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Abstract:

Three important archaeological sites are located in the region of Karnasubarna in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal: Rajbaridanga or Buddhist Mahavihara, Rakshashidanga and Nilkuthi mound. However, the region still lags behind in attracting a significant number of tourists, despite its vast historical importance from the ancient era to the British colonial period and its strategic location. The study examines the demographic characteristics of the visitors and the reasons for their visits, explores the attitudes of the respondents regarding the current land use of these places and incorporates the views of the local community on growing the area as a lively tourism destination. After doing the primary survey to explore different kind of problems in the area such as, number of visitors to visit the other famous spots, lack of awareness of people, preservation and maintenance related problem; marketing issues, accessibility and transport etc. we need to overcome the challenges of tourist is our initial motive. This paper proposed several recommendations based on the identified problems, such as exploring the surrounding excavation of the site, enhancing natural beauty through planting and establishing connections to other popular and lesser-known tourist destinations. Involve more local residents for tourism development projects; as a result, local history will be popularised and publicized to tourist as well as progress their economic condition. All these proposals are suitably applied to this region; people are feeling more attracted to look over these sites, and became a more impotence and acceptable to develop cultural, historical, and heritage tourism in the region.

Keywords: Karnasubarna, Heritage, Tourist, Culture, Problem, Development.

Introduction:

Glorious historical place Karnasubarna is located at the Berhampore community development block of Murshidabad district, West Bengal. It is lying at approximately 24°0'49"N latitudinal and 88°11'27"E longitudinal. This heritage place is situated on the western bank of the Bhagirathi River, the place approximately 10 km towards the Berhampore, the headquarters of district Murshidabad. This paper is on three main excavated places at Karnasubarna, that hold lots of potential for attracting tourists, i.e., the Rajabaridanga, Raskhashidanda and Nilkuthi mounds. These sites are nearest to each other. The Rajabaridanga is closer to Rakshashidanga, about 850 metres, where the Nilkuthi mound is almost 1 km away.

The area of Karnasubarna retains great historical and heritage importance in the ancient history of Bengal cum India. This entire region was the capital of Gouda king Shashank, one of the most renowned kings of Ancient Bengal. During his period the region flourished with prosperity, people were educated and

maintained simple life, and it was an enriching centre of trade. The region witnessed considerable growth, becoming an important hub for major commercial, political and cultural activities.

Now a days, these archaeological sites are home to riches of historical evidence through excavation. Despite the historical importance of the region, it has attracted few tourists. But in a similar context, a number of people are much more attracted to another popularized historical site, i.e., Lalbagh. Hence, this paper also explores methods to engage more tourists in the area and promote greater understanding and significant awareness of the ancient history, heritage and culture of Bengal as well as India. Such initiatives could help people feel more attractive to these sites.

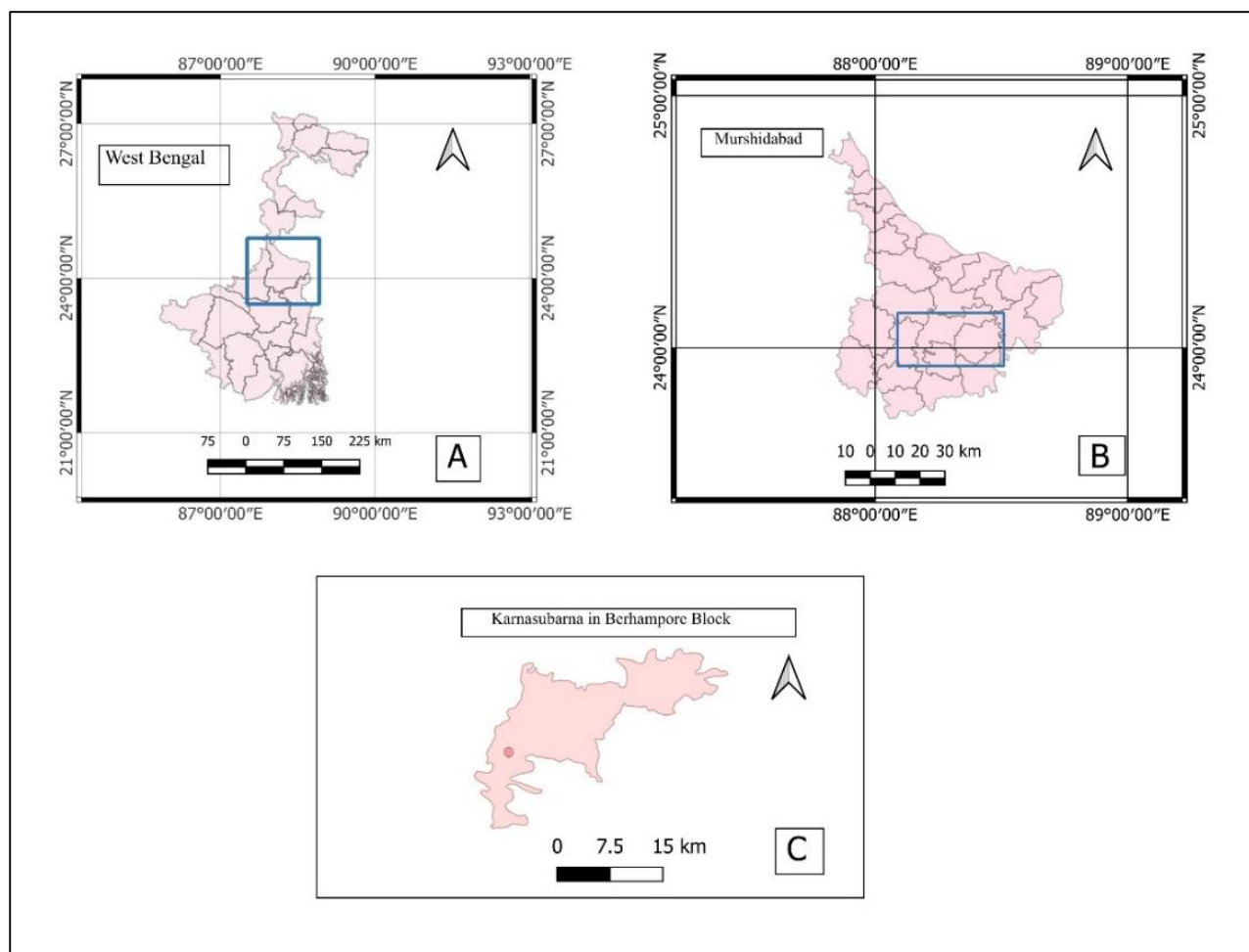


Figure 1. Location Map of the Study Area

Objectives:

- i. Highlight of the place are their historical, cultural and heritage significance.
- ii. To identify the major challenges to visitors experiencing of visit in this place.
- iii. To the enhancement awareness for local people of their participation, proper use of land and increases beautification of sites.
- iv. Some recommended strategies to overcome these problems.

Tourist Attractions at Karnasubarna in Berhampore CD Block, Murshidabad:

The name of Karnasubarna is derived from two words: 'Karna' means 'era,' and 'subarna' means 'golden or beautiful like gold'; that is, its complete literal meaning is golden era. The entire area served as the significant capital city of the Gauda kingdom during the 7th century, ruled by the renowned king Shashanka. According to folklore said about that, after the death of Shashanka, the capital was conquered by Kamarupa; his king's name is Raja Bhaskaravarmam, who ruled the area for a very short period in the region. This evidence comes from the Nidhanpur copper plate. At present, the Karnasubarna region is located at Kansona, under the district of Murshidabad in the state of West Bengal. The Chinese Buddhist

scholar Hiuen Tsang describes an important fact in the area. The region was known for its pleasant weather, fruitful agricultural land, great religious and cultural activities, and importance as a trade center. The people are leads, their life very much simple, devoted and literate in the region.

I. Rajabaridanga:

The archeological site Rajabaridanga is one of the most important places at Karnasubarna. The Karnasubarna railway station is located approximately 2.4 km away, on the bank of the Bhagirathi River. The Chinese Buddhist scholar, monk and traveler Hiuen Tsang, who visited the Bengal during the 7th century CE, in his travel account, mentions a Buddhist monastery called Lo-to-mo-chi, located near Karnasurbna its place identified with Raktamrittika Mahavihar. The Mahavihar was a significant learning center for Vajrayana Buddhism.

The Rajabaridanga site was first excavated in 1962 by a team from the Department of Archeology, University of Calcutta, under the direction of S.R. Das. Among the archaeological excavations revealed diverse significant historical remains, including monastic sealing, terracotta figurines, ornamental stucco moldings, and human head sculptures. Also discovered the remains of a fragile brick structure associated with Mahavihar through the excavations.

II. Rakshashidanga:

The Rakshashidanga name is derived from two words, 'Rakshasi' and 'Danga,' meaning 'place of demons.' People are popularly believed that Shashanka took a saint name, Turkhun Shaheb, from Turkmenistan to free the people from the demons. But still there is no authentic historical evidence present here to substantiate their belief. At present, the place is apprehended as a religious site by local people called as 'Turkhun Shaheb Mazhar', surrounded by tree.

The site Rakshashidanga, which is closely located with Rajabaridanga, has been excavated by K.N. Dixit under the Archaeological Survey of India during 1929-30. The archaeological site is at an elevation near about 50 feet relative to the Bhagirathi River and 25 feet above the agricultural land. After the excavation a small portion of the archaeological remains is still found at the site.

III. Nilkuthi Mound:

During the British period of India, the named Nilkuthi Mound was derived from the existence of the Indigo factory in the region. This mound was excavated from 6th December 2005 to April 2006 by the Archaeological Survey of India. Based on the archaeological findings, the site has been assigned a general chronological span ranging from the 2nd century to the 15th century. The mound is located at Rangamati Chandpara in Berhampore, Murshidabad district, West Bengal. This entire region is historically rich and notably important because of its association with the ancient capital centre of Karnasubarna. In the present day, the site is found to have only a ruined brick chimney, limited structural remains and an open space. Also, this mound provides historical evidence for understanding the development and cultural transformation of the area over the different historic eras.

Major Problems Faced by This Region to Attracted Tourists:

i. Lack of proper preservation and Maintenance:

The main archaeological attractions of Karnasubana region, such as Rajabaridanga, are not adequately preserved and maintained as heritage tourism sites. Similarly, other important archaeological sites such as Rakshashidanga and Nilkhuti have received limited attention for development heritage sites. The adequate preservation and maintenance of these heritage sites reduced their attractiveness to tourists and limited potential for tourism development.

ii. Lack of people awareness:

Many visitors have no idea about archaeological excavation without proper explanation. They are also known that karnasubarna, particularly because it is associated with King Shashanka and their

ancient capital of Gour. They didn't know properly its archaeological and historical importance because lack of visitor orientation and other information is not sufficient here.

iii. Competition of other tourist places:

Murshidabad has already established the identity of tourism based on Nawabi culture. Most visitors prefer to visit the attractive places in Lalbagh and its surrounding area, showing little interest in the isolated site of Karnasubarna.

iv. Transport and Accessibility problems:

Karnasubarna has inadequate transportation and accessibility facilities, which create significant challenges for tourism development. The study area is not well connected by properly developed roads. In comparison, Lalbagh, which is well connected to Sadar in Murshidabad, has better transportation and accessibility facilities. Government bus services are inadequate in this site. Although some private buses, cars and other vehicles operate along the roads, their services are not sufficient to meet the needs of tourists.

v. Lack of security:

The government and local people have not been taken to manage and protect the site properly. The absence of strict security measures and regular guards has resulted in the misuse of the archaeological site by local people. The land is often used for grazing livestock, drying clothes on the railings, and the sensitive wells are used for drying cow-dung cakes. In addition, people sometimes walk over the fragile brick structures, particularly at the Rajabaridanga archaeological site. Such activities may cause serious damage to the archaeological remains and reduce the site's potential for heritage conservation and tourism development.

vi. Marketing and promotion issue:

The historical site has not been applying proper marketing strategies as a tourism destination. The availability of reliable and comprehensive information about the site on online platforms is also limited. As a result, to identify and comprehend the sites accurately for the tourists are difficult. The attraction of visitors is less because there is not proper, comprehensive digital information, publicity and promotional activities.

vii. Deterioration of environment:

The local people have contributed to the deteriorated environment of the site's surroundings and reduced its visual appeal. The site is often used as a dumping ground for domestic waste, including plastic, glass, paper, and animal waste. Improper waste disposal not only contributes to environmental pollution but also adversely affects the site's aesthetic value and overall diminished appearance. Such environmental pollution and degradation may discourage attractive potential visitors, obstruct heritage conservation efforts and interrupt sustainable tourism development in this region.

Methodology:

The present study is based on primary sources of data. The collected data were analyzed to understand the tourist perception, existing conditions for people's participation for development tourism, and challenges of the study area.

➤ **Primary Data:**

Primary data were collected from the study area through a questionnaire survey. A total of 100 samples were collected. Among them, 70 respondents were selected randomly and asked to respond to the questionnaire. The remaining 30 samples were collected from online sources (i.e. Google form) including information and experiences shared by students, scholars, and travel bloggers who had previously visited Karnasubarna.

Result and Discussion:

i. Purpose of visitors to visit in the sites:

A survey was conducted among 100 people and tourists, who were randomly selected from different age groups and genders. The survey aimed to understand the different types of visitors and their purposes for visiting Karnasubarna. The results showed that 60% of the visitors were school and college students, 13% were social media bloggers, 7% were research scholars, and 20% of the general public.

The survey indicates that most visitors come to Karnasubarna for educational purposes. In particular, students visit the site with their teachers to learn about the rich ancient history and cultural heritage of Bengal. Social media bloggers are also attracted to the site and help create awareness among local and national tourists about its historical and cultural significance. Research scholars visit Karnasubarna primarily for academic and research purposes, particularly to investigate and highlight the heritage value of the site. A smaller number of general visitors come to observe and experience the historical remains and archaeological evidence of the site.

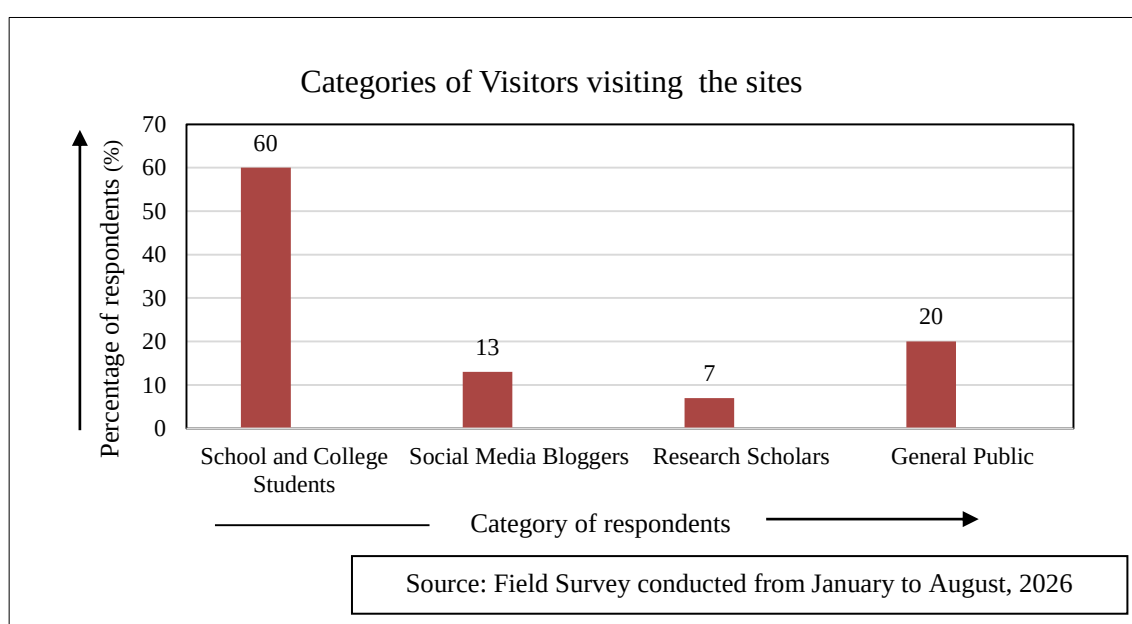


Figure 2. Categories of Visitors Visiting the Heritage Site

ii. Local People's Participation in Tourism Development:

Local people are aware of the historical and cultural significance of the site and recognize its importance for tourism development. Approximately 30% of the local residents strongly agree with the proposal to develop tourism in the area, while another group of residents, accounting for about 50%, agree with the proposal. However, few residents remain uncertain about tourism development and have expressed a neutral opinion about 13%. A small number of people, about 7%, have shown too much disagreement with the proposal.

The development of tourism in Karnasubarna can provide various economic opportunities for the local community. Increased tourist activity can generate employment and income. As a result, local people may experience improved economic conditions and a better standard of living compared with their previous situation.

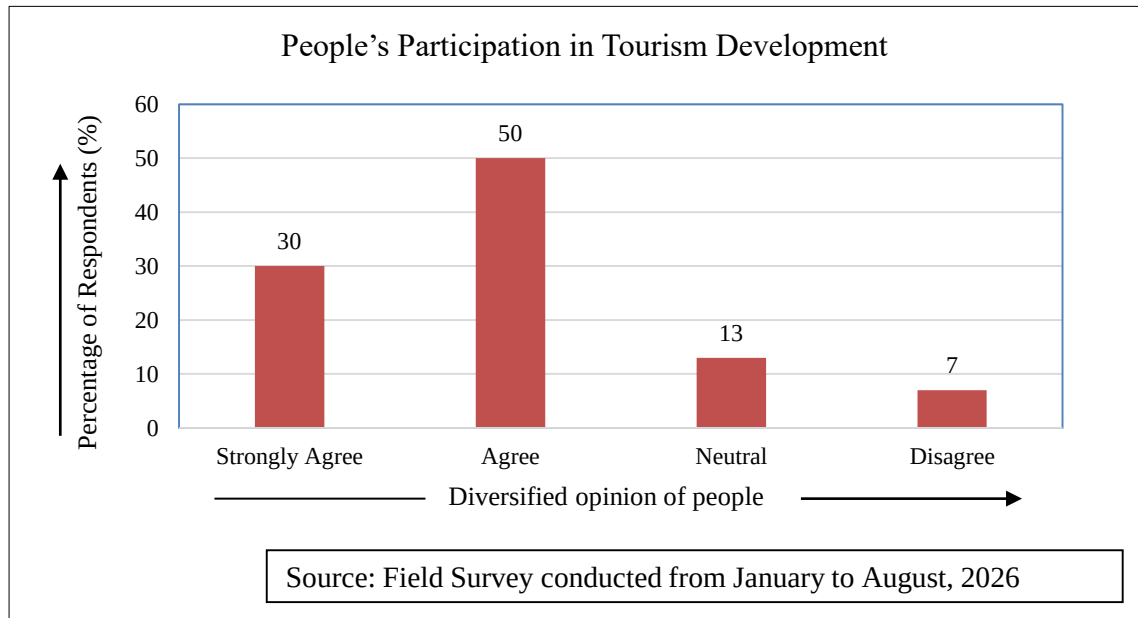


Figure 3. Local Community Perception and Participation in Tourism Development

iii. Environment pollution:

Based on the survey, both domestic and non-domestic waste are found at the site. Approximately 80% of the waste consists of domestic waste, while the remaining 20% is non-domestic waste. Domestic waste includes fruit and vegetable peels, eggshells, newspapers, plastic bottles, glass jars, aluminum soda cans, and broken glass bottles. Non-domestic waste includes iron scraps, defective or discarded goods, and broken bricks.

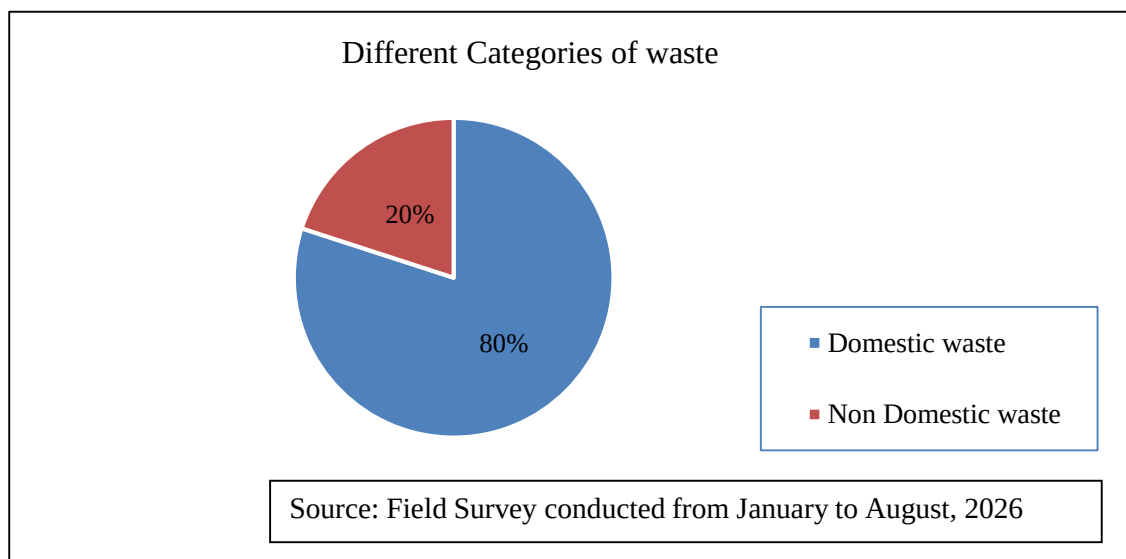


Figure 4. Proportion of Domestic and Non-Domestic Waste at the Site

iv. Perception of Tourists Regarding the Present Land Use at the Site:

According to the primary survey, tourists expressed their opinions regarding the present land-use pattern and management of the site. The survey revealed that 77% of the visitors were strongly dissatisfied with the existing land-use management, while 17% were moderately dissatisfied and the remaining 6% were satisfied. Most of the tourists are dissatisfied because local residents primarily use the land for agricultural activities and grazing purposes. In addition, the site is also used for dumping garbage and, during winter, for making fires.

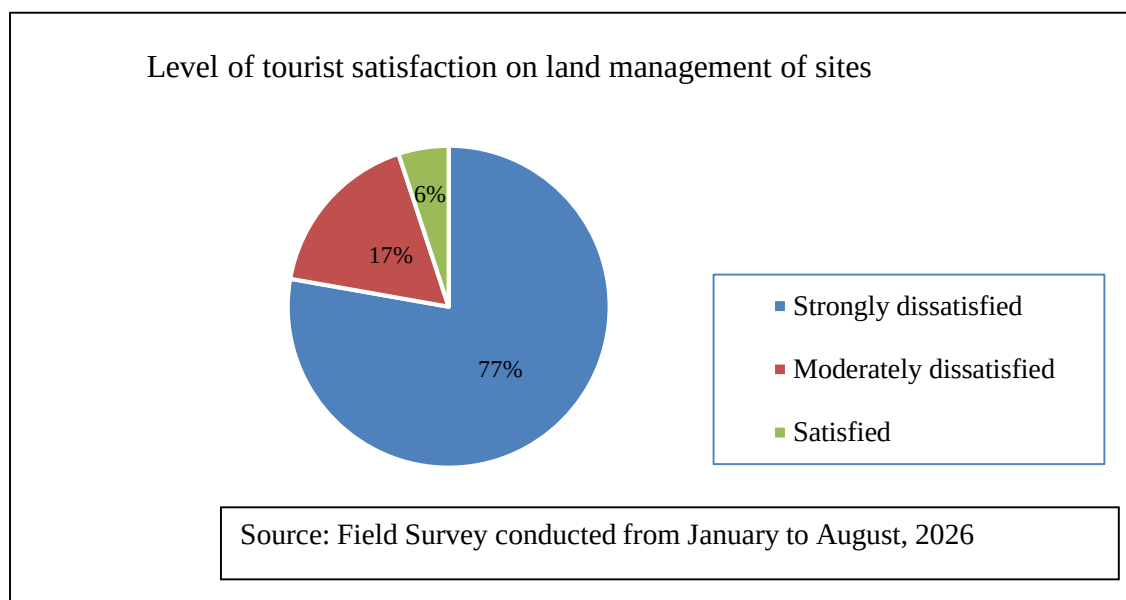


Figure 5. Level of Tourist Satisfaction Regarding Present Landuse Management

Overcome strategies for the problems:

i. Explore the surrounding excavation site:

Only the Rajabaridanga site has been partially excavated, and the excavation has not yet been completed. Several portions of the site remain unexplored and should be excavated systematically to obtain a comprehensive understanding of its archaeological significance. Similarly, sites such as Raskhasidanga and Nilkuthi have not yet been properly excavated; only some patches of brick structures have been exposed.

Hence, the surrounding region requires systematic historical excavation and exploration. In collaboration with both the Archaeological Department of Calcutta University and the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), it can undertake further excavation and documentation of these sites. The archaeological and historical importance in the region is uncovered with the help of proper excavation, preservation and scientific innovation, and increased its potential development for historical and cultural tourism.

ii. Plantation:

At present, the site of Rajabaridanga is completely surrounded by iron railings. During the field survey, we noticed that the iron railings are in worse condition, and some portions have already started to break down. Plantation surrounding the sites enhances their aesthetic appeal, creates a pleasant environment, and contributes to their attractiveness to tourists. Therefore, adequate maintenance of the railings and improving their overall appearance and promoting tourism are essential to the plantation around the historical sites.

iii. Established of museum:

Another important site in Rakshidanga, A museum can be established at this site, which presents information related to King Shashanka through pictures, information boards, maps, models, and

photographs. In addition, archaeological artifacts that have been found as a result of excavation, such as terracotta material, sculptures, seal and many other things must be exhibited in the museum. To help the understood through the museum of the visitors are historical and heritage significance of the region.

iv. Improve Better accessibility of transport:

Firstly, rural roads should be reconstructed, and government bus services should be increased with concessional ticket fares. Car and e-rickshaw services should also be made available through online platforms for booking rides, such as Rapido. Greater engagement with private cars, buses and other modes of transportation should also be encouraged.

v. Strongly promotion and marketing:

In the modern period, people are frequently using social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and Facebook to promote this site. By sharing the information, photographs, videos, documentation and facts in promoting these regions through the participation of travel bloggers and local people. Presents in different types of events, such as puppet shows, historical show, Baul concerts, can be systematically organized and highlighted to the cultural and historical significance in the region.

Promotional signboards and billboards are widely used across popular heritage sites such as Hazarduari Palace, Katra Mosque, Kathgola Bagan and Motijheel. These marketing and promotional strategies can generate awareness about the historical significance of the region and make more interest and curiosity among visitors about visiting sites. For example, using signage at Berhampore (the major commercial area) and along the roads leading to Karnasubarna, people can easily help to identify the place, and there is growing more excitement visit in the sites.

vi. Enhanced visitors experience:

Increasing of amenities such as restaurants, coffee shops, seating areas and handicraft shops should be developed to more engaged and enhance the experience of tourist. These local shops can offer produced local based productivity handicrafts, including terracotta items, pottery, paintings and miniature souvenirs representing the cultural heritage of the area. In addition, recreational and interactive activities can be introduced to encourage greater tourist participation. The government should also provide trained tourist guides for both national and international visitors. Local residents can be involved in guiding and tourism-related activities after receiving appropriate training. Such measures would improve tourist facilities, generate employment opportunities for the local community, and increase tourists' interest in visiting the destination.

vii. Connected to another non-popular place:

Karnasubarna is surrounded by several important cultural and religious sites, including Bhimeshewar Temple, Baro Sitala Mandir, Choto Sitala Mandir, Jagatbandhu Dham, and Kiriteswari Temple. Each of which has its own distinctive cultural and religious significance. These sites connectively have properly considerable potential for the development of cultural, historical, and religious tourism in the region.

viii. Engage to local people:

The local community's active involvement can help to generate awareness about the importance of sites, surveillance its status, and save the adjacent environment. Warmly treating tourists, providing fare guidance, and encouraging the visitors to visit their sites again—these services are to be done by the local people. Their engagement can create opportunities for employment, strengthen the local economic condition, and improve the way of life. Also, they can play a significant role in preventing the misuse and enhancing the sustainable uses and conservation of land.

Conclusion:

At present, Karnasubarna faces different problems through their visitors and local people experience such as transport and accessibility, environmental pollution, misuse of land, and improper management. All of these issues have to improve its appeal: the implementation strategies are social media engage and signage,

promote to marketing, exploration of other site and connect to other sites, offering better amenities and activities, and exhibition of different types of objects during this time period to attract and engage tourists. In addition, these three remaining sites under the Karnasubarna region can increase their identity; tourists are more attracted to the place, and from the status of solitariness, it will become converted to solidify, and this region will open a new chapter of history and make a great acceptance of the global as remarkable historical tourism destination.



Plate 1. Excavated Archaeological Remains of Rajabaridanga, Karnasubarna



Plate 2. Front View and Enclosure Wall of Rajabaridanga Site

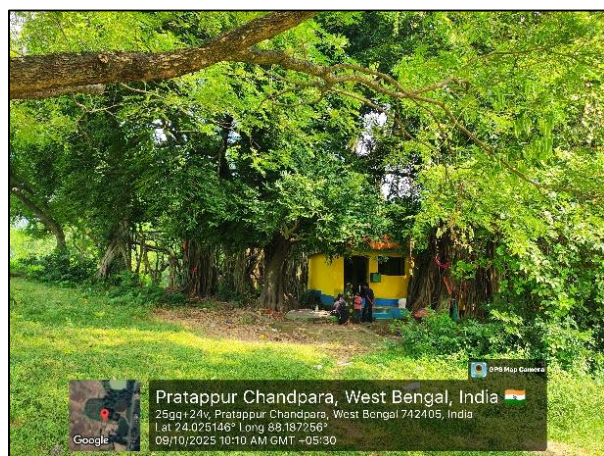


Plate 3. Present State of Rakshashidanga Mound



Plate 4. Historic Chimney Structure of Nilkuthi



Plate 5. Processing Tank of the Historic Nilkuthi

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