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Developing an Integrated Tourism Circuit in Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati in the State Of West Bengal, India

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ABSTRACT

The Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit is a popular place of pilgrimage in the state of West Bengal and with the burgeoning increase in the number of visitors to this circuit, tourist infrastructure needs to be developed to meet the growing needs of the tourists. The underlying theme is "Sustainability" of the tourism phenomenon by involving the local community from the grass roots level and empowering them with the right to make conscious decisions for the long-term sustainability of tourism in the concerned villages. Due importance has been given to the emancipation of women so that they are provided with avenues that would ensure a better quality of life by being involved with avenues that would ensure a better quality of life by being involved in the rural tourism industry. The environmental problems facing the world are of such great magnitude that it is not just the government – local or central whose cooperation is required. There is always the need for involving the entire community and all the individuals to contribute positively if we are to survive on planet earth. Tourism in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit has to be human. After all, one of the greatest human exemplar of *"Living in Harmony with Nature"* was Sri Ramakrishna himself. Thus, it would be in the fitness of things that his native villages acts as a torch bearer of *"Sustainable Rural Tourism"* in West Bengal and show the path of eternal bliss and tranquility through a tourism phenomenon, which is rooted in the platform of sustainability. By going back to nature, we are in no way hindering our spirit of self discovery. Rather, we are only consolidating the ground for the future generation to flourish.

KEY WORDS: *Religious Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, Rural Tourism, Pilgrimage Tourism, Tour, Environment, Conservation.*

Introduction:

Gar Mandaran with its scenic natural vistas is an idyllic picnic spot and is most renowned for the ruins of an ancient fort – Mogli Fort, a major part of which is beneath the ground. The entrance to this fort is through the Orissa Gate. The fort needs to be thoroughly revamped and restored to its former glory. If one travels a further 2 Kms. from Mogli Fort along the meandering walking trail, one will come across a small hillock, on top of which is located the Darga of Gazi Sahib. Pilgrim tourists often climb on top of the hillock where the tomb of Ismail Gazi who served as the Chief of Hussein Shah's army. The tomb of Ismail Gazi attracts visitors of all faiths who offer their prayers and lit candles for their well being. The dreamy landscape of Gar Mandaran is further accentuated by the shimmering Damodar River that flows by perennially and the majestic Mogli Fort hillock on the banks of river Damodar provides a fascinating natural backdrop. A little distance away are the sparkling water bodies like Kajla Dighi (water reservoir) and Lakshmijala Lake, both of which are ideal for boating and soft water sport activities. In fact, boating facilities are presently available at Lakshmijala Lake but is at a nascent stage. The villages of Kamarpukur and Joyrambati being the native places of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and his holy consort Sri Sarada Devi are

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amongst the most holy places of pilgrimage in the state of West Bengal. These two villages are not only visited by pilgrims from India but a large number of visitors from abroad too pour in during the peak touristy season in search of inner peace and tranquility. In both the villages, the Ramakrishna Math & Mission have centers that are run and administered by Belur Math, the worldwide headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission. Apart from preserving the sanctity of the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sarada Devi by way of ritual worship, discourses on religion and celebrating important festivals like the Durga Puja, Kali Puja etc… there are numerous other philanthropic services rendered by the Ramakrishna Math & Mission by way of providing primary and vocational education, free medical checkup, upgrading rural livelihood etc… all of which aims at the development of the rural folks. A vast majority of the village folks are poor and their primary source of income is agriculture. Both the villages present a sad tale of retarded growth and their rich heritage, both natural and cultural too seems threatened. The principal goal of this Tourism Project is alleviation of poverty through eco-friendly tourism that is sustainable in nature. The project aims at contributing positively to the eradication of poverty in all the three tourist spots of the circuit and keeping this in mind the project will be pro-poor, pro-rural folks and pro-women, all of which will enable the benefits accrued through Tourism to reach the grass roots level workers of the tourist circuit. This Tourism Project also envisages enhancing not only the religious and spiritual heritage of the villages but also developing a form of tourism, which would be community oriented and fully sustainable in nature. The project aims at developing world-class tourist infrastructure like Tourist Information Centers, high quality way side amenities, folk museums, craft bazaars as well as renovating the age old temples and monuments that are closely connected with the life and times of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sarada Devi. Overall the Project envisages social stability, improvement in the working capacity of communities and extending the right to leisure and recreation to the least privileged sections of the society.

Relevance of an Integrated Tourism Circuit in Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati

There has been a long felt need of an Integrated Tourism Circuit covering the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati circuit. The state of West Bengal has unique tourism attributes and there is a very rich potential for tourism that is sustainable and eco-friendly in nature. It is a state that is blessed with a diversified eco-system, a great historical past, unique cultural diversity and breathtaking natural beauty. But in spite of possessing a great many tourism assets, tourism as an industry hasn't been able to sustain and evolve. This tourist circuit is unique for the fact that there exists a harmonious blend of Cultural / Spiritual and Nature based tourism. Sri Ramakrishna and his holy consort Sri Sarada Devi were born here and renowned international scholars of the stature of Romain Rolland and Max Muller have unequivocally stated in many of their scholarly works that modern India's spiritual regeneration began with the birth of Sri Ramakrishna. From the obscure village of Kamarpukur and Joyrambati on to the world stage, the Ramakrishna Movement is now a global spiritual phenomenon. This meteoric rise of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission, despite the bottlenecks in terms of tourist infrastructure, with very little support of the government is the stuff of legends. Apart from Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual legacy, this tourist circuit has a unique traditional way of life, rich in culture, crafts and folklore. Nature has blessed this circuit with a fascinating rural charm – marshy wetlands, verdant agricultural lands, shimmering rivulets and exotic tribals.

USP of Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati Tourist Circuit

According to Christopher Isherwood, who was the chief proponent of the Vedanta philosophy in the West and credited with popularizing the Vedanta movement in the US from the 1940s through the 1980s, in his tribute to Sri Ramakrishna unequivocally declared that the Ramakrishna Movement is a phenomenon. In his best selling book "Ramakrishna

and His Disciples", which he completed after visiting the ancestral villages of Kamarpukur, Joyrambati, the Dakshineswar Kali temple and other places associated with Sri Ramakrishna, he begins with an introduction thus – *"This is the story of a phenomenon. I will begin by calling him simply that, rather than 'holy man', 'Mystic', 'saint' or 'avatar'; all emotive words with mixed associations which may attract some readers, repel others".* According to Isherwwod, a phenomenon is often something extraordinary and mysterious. Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother Sarada Devi were both extraordinary and mysterious; most of all to those who were best fitted to understand them. A phenomenon is always a fact, an object of experience. That is how he approached the Ramakrishna movement. In one of his moving accounts on his journey from Kolkata to the ancestral village of Kamarpukur and Joyrambati, Isherwood was overwhelmed by the simplicity of rural Bengal and he states – *"If you leave Kolkata airport early one morning on a West-bound flight, you will be able to have supper that night at Rome. If instead, you take a car to Kamarpukur, Sri Ramakrishna's birthplace, you will easily arrive in time for lunch. In the first case, you will have traveled well over four thousand miles; in the second, about seventy. Yet in one sense the shorter journey can be said to be the longer, because it takes you backward in time.* In spite of the backwardness of the villages of Kamarpukur and Joyrambati, devotees and pilgrim tourists from the Western world as also domestic pilgrims have continued to flock to this part of rural Bengal, braving pot holed roads, lack of electricity, lack of sanitized drinking water, telecommunications and other bottlenecks in tourist infrastructure. The tourist circuit of Gar-Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati have changed little in appearance during the last hundred years and according to Isherwood – *"if Kamarpukur has changed more than its neighbors, it is in having become an international center of pilgrimage with a modern temple dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna. That is to say, it is less concerned with the possibilities of its future than with the great event of its past".* The houses of these village hamlets are predominantly built of mud the roofs are made of thatch. The rural hutments are more often than not barren with just a single cot and a bunch of sleeping mats. The kitchen floors are still rubbed with cow dung as it used to be century's back. The village roads, although narrow, meanders through in a zigzag manner with sewerage gutters on either side. Except for the areas surrounding the Math & Mission at Kamarpukur and Joyrambati, power supply or electricity haven't yet penetrated into the interiors of the villages. The well or the village pond still serves as the primary source of drinking water and these rain-feed ponds or reservoirs also doubles up as places for bathing and washing clothes. These villages even if taken together is not large enough to find mention on the tourist map of India or for that matter the tourist map of West Bengal. The characteristic features of these villages are that usually they will be shielded by groves of banyan trees or even mango orchards. Most Western visitors are truly charmed by the sight of rice growing agriculture lands and the century's old system of ploughing through Ox and Water Buffaloes. However, with India positioning itself on the world stage, the winds of change are there for all to see. Due largely to the pioneering charitable-philanthropic activities of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission, public education, state-of-the-art healthcare system, emancipation of women etc…are now a reality. And the slogans of democracy too are being heard in these miniscule villages. The Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati Tourist circuit offers all the simplicity of an Indian village along with the lofty ideals of Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy of "Harmony of World Religions" and "Service to Mankind". Today stress, frustration and emptiness. Grief, loneliness and despair have become a global phenomenon. Those of us who have experienced any one of these know what a devastating effect it can have upon our lives. At such times our entire being sends out an SOS. Then we ask, "What Went Wrong?' "Why me?' Sri Ramakrishna believed that to find contentment, we must go to its source. – the Atman, the blissful self. His entire life was a living example of how one could attain the highest spiritual bliss or "Nirvana". The age old and time tested ideal of "Doing Good to the World with a Spirit of Worship and thereby paving the Path for One's Own Salvation" *("Atmano Mokshartham Jagad Hitaya Cha")* is what drives the Ramakrishna

Math & Mission's spiritual-philanthropic activities. Through the manifold activities that range from discourses on the Bhagvad Gita by senior monks to holistic Ayurvedic healing therapies and local community activities to the mind elevating meditation sessions, an amazing array of new age survival strategies relevant to every generation is on offer in the sylvan surroundings of rural Bengal – the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati pilgrim tourist circuit. This circuit is at once the birthplace of Sri Ramakrishna and his holy consort Sri Sarada Devi and blends splendidly with the fascinating undisturbed, unpolluted and untainted rural bliss, which is the trademark feature of this tourist circuit. The circuit has the authenticity of rural India and an ocean of spiritual bliss that still attracts the crème de la crème of the world. In the light of the above observations, it is only logical that an Integrated Tourism Circuit be developed for the new age traveler to undertake the journey of spiritual discovery from the place from where modern India's spiritual regeneration or the great Indian Spiritual Rennaissance began. A revolutionary change is sweeping the world of tourism. A new breed of travelers who are better educated with more disposable income and living a high standard of life is compelling the tourism industry to constantly re-invent itself with more and more innovative tourism products. One such product is the *"Sustainable Rural Tourism"*, which is what this particular tourism project envisions.

Imagine the following scenario

Day 1: You get up from your bed, step on the rubber slippers. Perhaps, the next thing you do is to sip a cup of hot coffee; watch television and prepare yourself for a fixed routine. Your day starts by standing in a long queue for a bus, which tears the crowded traffic moving under the smog umbrella. Till the sun sets under the polluted horizon, you call it a day.

Day 2: The birds chirp around your thatched mud hut at the village of Kamarpukur / Joyrambati and the tooling of the temple bells wakes you up. The cattle stray beside your mud hut with bells tied to their necks. You start your day with meditation and stretch your body with Yoga asanas, which is followed by specially cooked Vedic breakfast. You spend the entire day visiting verdant farmlands with farmers ploughing their fields with Ox and Water Buffaloes or visiting rural artisans organizing their artefacts. As the time passes on, you take a fishing rod to fish from a local pond. By the time it is evening, you watch the clear sky bidding goodbye to the day and you immerse yourself in contemplation of the divine at the temple of Sri Ramakrishna. This is the dream, which every urban tourist aspires for, but they limit themselves to work and their squalor. However, to cater to the discerning needs of today's jaded traveler, both the Central Government and the State Governments have undertaken a number of steps for the promotion of Sustainable Rural Tourism and developing Integrated Tourism Circuits. Apart from meeting the aesthetic needs of the new breed of tourists, the introduction of Sustainable Rural Tourism in Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati circuit will offer immense benefits to the rural populace as well, which are enumerated below –

Economic Benefit:

Presently the rural economy of Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati is in tatters. It needs urgent attention and through tourism the local economy can be made robust and dynamic given the fact that tourism is known for its multiplier effect. The unemployment rate in this part of West Bengal is alarming, which is inclusive of the educated unemployed. It has to be borne in mind that tourism being a service oriented industry, human labor remains the basic need. None of the technological progress achieved thus far has succeeded in rendering the human factor less indispensable in the tourism sector and the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati circuit can make its employment scenario a lot better. The large hinterland surrounding the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati circuit is a rich source

handloom and handicraft products. But due to the non-availability of a ready market, this indigenous craft industry is dying a slow death. Through Sustainable Rural Tourism these indigenous craftsmen can hope to sell their exotic products to the tourists and gain sizeable profits without the involvement of the middleman. Introducing tourism calls for developing the infrastructure and the benefits of infrastructure investments justified primarily for tourism like transportation, accommodation, water supply, sewerage and other public utilities may be widely shared by the local entrepreneurs. Overall, once the Integrated Tourism Project is successfully implemented, it will serve as a model for other similar circuits to be developed in the state of West Bengal in the form of a "Demonstrative Effect".

Cultural Benefits:

Tourism in West Bengal remains basically a cultural phenomenon and the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati circuit can hope for a stimulating cultural impact with the introduction of tourism. This circuit has remained in isolation for a long time and this isolation is intended to be broken by the activity of tourism. This circuit is replete with historical temples and monuments, a majority of which are connected with the life and times of Sri Ramakrishna. The great Swami Vivekananda, founder of the Ramakrishna Math & Mission had dedicated his life for bringing about a synthesis between the East and the West, which is what is going to occur with the introduction of tourism in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati circuit. One can also foresee a lot of superstitious ideas and beliefs crumbling and prejudices being broken through the phenomenon of tourism. The proposed Integrated Tourism Circuit plan would be developed in such a manner that the cultural expressions of the circuit and heritage are presented in all its manifestations, including support to arts and crafts. It has been observed that the local population is often the unwilling host for tourism development schemes as the local communities are excluded from them. All too frequently they are only employed for menial work while the major share of employment goes to the outsider. The proposed Integrated Tourism Circuit project will make it a policy priority to recruit local guides as they more often than not become delightful raconteurs of local legend and folk tales along with local history. When it comes to the promotion of indigenously produced crafts, craftsmen through the tourism markets are able to keep their traditional skills alive. It is often argued by the purists that tourism is causing a decline in art and craft. It is important to note that the skill is not being compromised. It is the product that is adapting to contemporary market forces. The proposed tourism project will encourage local art and crafts and will ensure that the art and crafts of the region have a spontaneity and dynamism of their own. In living cultures, their survival has to be ensured by enhancing the craftsmen's ability to be contemporary. Another important aspect is that tradition is also something that is continuously being created, which amounts to the *"Invention of Tradition".* The proposed tourism plan will ensure that the cultural assets are well preserved but at the same time the creation of tradition is also very important. One wrong step is the commercialization of traditional culture instead of creativity, which is exactly what the proposed tourism plan has to watch out for. Even a decade back, tourist art was not considered to be authentic art. But how does one define authencity? Old things are authentic and new things are not? It has to be admitted that the culture created by human beings are all authentic. But most people do not think so, and tourist art is considered to be of a low class, which is meant for selling to the tourist. The bottom line is that it is important to carry on the preservation of tradition, but on the other hand, the creativity of tradition is also important, which is what the proposed tourism project will ensure.

Environmental & Conservation Benefits:

An Integrated Tourism Development Plan or Holistic Tourism Plan has to include in its scope of implementation detailed land-use plans designating sensitive areas and buffer zones, infrastructure development, public amenities and community facilities, long term

conservation and management plan, landscape and environmental protection etc….The creation of a substantial database will provide a sound basis for the communication methodology for tourists and more importantly as a tool for education and local awareness. Entrusting of environmental and conservation issues to the appropriate central / state departments like the Ministry of Environment & Forest, Ministry of Culture etc….will ensure that regulatory measures and mechanisms are implemented at the ground level. Upon their assessment, the type and scale of tourism development, which is compatible with the environment will be adhered to. A state-of-the-art Management Information System (MIS) too will become a necessity when it comes to monitoring the project impact. Conservation be it environmental or cultural, is a highly specialized job requiring technical know-how, equipment and institutional framework. The proposed Integrated Tourism Plan intends to work in close collaboration with International agencies like UNESCO, which has over the past several decades strengthened its vast network of training institutions, encouraging establishment of international, regional and sub-regional institutions, organization of training workshops, preparation of guidelines for the inventory and recording of data concerning the state of conservation of the environmental/cultural sites, exchange of conservation experts and last but not the least award of fellowships for training purposes. Presentation of monuments and environmental sites to visitors is an essential component of all conservation programmes. The proposed tourism plan will ensure that the information pertaining to the concerned historical /environmental sites of the circuit are so interpreted that they are easily understood by the visitors. It is a fact that the monuments and natural sites have limitations and often the needs of conservation and the needs of tourists come into conflict. To avoid such pitfalls and reconciling the demands of the two and thereby creating a balance will be the topmost priority of the proposed tourism plan.

Community Participation

This section attempts to undertake a systematic study on socio-economic impact of tourism development in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit, the approach to make the local community partners in the sustainable eco-tourism development and to develop human resources for the envisaged employment opportunities. During the period of the Master Plan preparation, extensive interactions were held with the local community and other stakeholder representatives, Mahila Samity representatives, trade community etc. at various levels including individual discussions and brain storming sessions to understand their perception towards development and community participation. The rural residents of the circuit in general are more than willing to actively participate in the tourism development. The approach to development should therefore be such that it reaches the grassroots level. Most of the work involved in tourism development is labour intensive and hence local villagers should be involved in these activities. Most of the activities are proposed to be run by the local community themselves. This will provide local job opportunity at one hand and on the other hand will win local goodwill and support. Also, eco-tourism is about being managed by the local community and to make it sustainable in the long term. This approach can be applied across the following areas of attention:

Community-based Tourism:

An effective way to improve the economy in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit and to enable communities to improve the quality of life will be through social mobilization of people, especially into Self Help Groups (SHGs). This will involve community participation in tourism activities such that the benefits of development are equitably distributed. This will include improved access to education/training and other social services of the community. There are already initiatives like the "Pallimangal" (*a Ramakrishna Math & Mission run philanthropy works organization*), which has carved a niche for itself as far as women's empowerment in the circuit is concerned, the same way there

could be more women's initiatives.

- **Focus on self-help -** Activities should be aimed to help people to better understand the opportunities that tourism will create and they have to improve their own situation. Trainings should be given to Mahila Samitys and local NGOs, village Panchayats, Gram Sabha, Yuva Samities, etc. to form Self Help Groups in the area to set up sustainable activities.
- **Government Role as a Facilitator –** The State Government should try to avoid implementing activities themselves, but rather build the capacity of existing local/regional organisations to be able to plan and implement tourism activities on their own in a sustainable manner. Role of Government bodies is particularly important in imparting development and management regulations.

Groups have been formed in many villages of West Bengal wherein women's groups have been mobilized to form small groups for savings & credit for improving the economic conditions of the individual women. Micro-credit has been given to them for starting small enterprises for generating additional income and thus improving their overall economic condition. The same model can be adopted in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukr-Joyrambati tourist circuit as well.

Benefits to Local Communities

Development of tourism in rural West Bengal provides an excellent opportunity for achieving a diversification in addition to providing a wide range of benefits, both direct and indirect, to the local host community of the region. This is true for any region where tourism development has taken place anywhere in the world. Tourism has the potential to change the economic face of any region and benefits of planned tourism development are manifold. Moreover, the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukr-Joyrambati tourist circuit being surrounded with a large hinterland which is rich in agriculture, art and crafts, a well-planned and regulated tourism for this region is the need of the hour. For this the involvement of local community is very critical. Already tourism, particularly pilgrim tourism has emerged as an important economic activity in Kamarpukur and Joyrambati region and the local populace has been able to participate and benefit directly from limited tourism activities, but not at all in a planned way and with less consideration to environmental management and standards for aesthetics and quality hospitality. The following section explores the possibility of tourism benefits reaching the local community in a planned manner so as to improve the overall socio-economic condition prevalent in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukr-Joyrambati tourist circuit.

The broad objectives of such a development plan are enumerated below:

- Socio-economic development and economic empowerment.
- Enhance local participation in tourism activities.
- Providing more avenues for tourists to increase their expenditure in a way that the economic benefits reach the community.
- Economic and ecological sustainability.
- Socio-cultural consciousness and
- Improving gender equality for enhanced women participation in economic development.

The focus therefore is to:

- Establish and promote a different way of conducting tourism, wherein local people are the owners and have control over entrepreneurial activity, improving their quality of life and actively conserving the region's biodiversity and natural resources and be accountable for the same.
- Create and strengthen community entrepreneurial activities such that they are well administered, conform to standards of architectural aesthetics and hospitality, and are economically profitable.

- Establish a forum for communication, co-ordination and joint co-operation focusing on tourism quality and reliability, and environmental, social, and economic sustainability.

Conclusion

In earlier times people of the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukr-Joyrambati tourist circuit relied heavily on agriculture, livestock and surrounding resources for almost all their needs and were largely self-sufficient. Today agricultural farming and livestock farming are hardly undertaken by many due to the poor distribution system and poor marketing and storage facilities. It has also been observed that agriculture alone can no longer sustain households for the whole year; people also need to bring in some form of cash income, either through casual labour, marketing, running/renting - hotel/lodge/restaurant businesses or migration to nearby work centres (like Arambag, Kolkata and other cities of India etc.). It was observed that there is much concern with the lack of local employment opportunities resulting in migration, which is sometimes seasonal also. The causes can be attributed to the pressure of getting employed as early as possible leading to discontinued education beyond secondary school levels. There is a strong agreement that the development of proper tourism infrastructure, cottage industries like incense stick manufacture, making souvenir of dry flowers, indigenous handicrafts small baskets/ vase / lampshades/ hats/ stationery holders/ carry bags or hand bags etc… and the marketing as well as management of local tourism products (lodges, restaurants, nature interpretation services, eco-guides, eco-maintenance of trek paths/facilities, etc.) have the most potential to generate local jobs and income. As mentioned earlier, though the level of nature/eco-awareness amongst the local community is good, the pressures of earning as early as possible has led to the low level of formal education in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukr-Joyrambati tourist circuit.

MERGING RURAL TOURISM WITH SPIRITUAL TOURISM

The Ramakrishna Math & Mission has a proven track record as far as working for the emancipation of the rural folks are concerned. The Ramakrishna Movement, which is based on the tenets of – *"Unity of All Religions"* has become a source of peace and blessedness in not only India but elsewhere in the world as well. The fact that the "Movement" lays considerable emphasis on *"Selfless Service"* as a means towards salvation attracts many people, irrespective of their nationality, to be associated with this remarkable movement. In terms of spiritual ambience, the Ramakrishna Math & Mission offers the very best of India's 5000 year old spiritual heritage by way of religious discourses, meditation and selfless service to the poor etc…. All over the world, more and more people are falling prey to stress related disorders resulting from the fast paced urban lifestyle. People from the affluent Western countries like USA, UK, Canada, Australia, Germany and France have been visiting India in search of mental peace and solitude. The stressed out Western tourists come to India with the hope of finding solace from the sheer ruthlessness of the material world. In India, the Ramakrishna Math & Mission has been offering the nectar of spiritual peace and solitude to the citizens of the world right from its inception. Although Indian devotees outnumber foreign devotees, awareness about the Ramakrishna Math & Mission is fast spreading in abroad as well. At present the Ramakrishna Math & Mission have centers in countries like USA, UK, Canada, Australia, Germany, France, Switzerland, Brazil, Argentina, Fiji Island, Russia, Singapore, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. The villages of Kamarpukur and Joyrambati have been respected as spiritual tourism destinations by both the domestic as well as international visitors for many decades now. Thus far the Ramakrishna Math & Mission has been meeting the needs of visitors to Kamarpukur and Joyrambati villages all by itself with hardly any help from any quarters. Needless to say, the tourist infrastructure at both these villages are at best sketchy and only the bare minimum of tourist amenities are available. Given the fact that the *"Ramakrishna Movement"* is now a global spiritual phenomenon with more and more devotees being added to the already staggering numbers, there is an urgent, if not immediate need to develop the basic tourist

infrastructure like roads, hotels & motels, quality way side amenities, departmental stores, computers and high speed Internet connectivity etc… to cater to the exacting needs of the discerning visitors from India and abroad. In order to meet the existing needs of the tourists and to further add to the list of visitors intending to visit the villages of Kamarpukur and Joyrambati along with the scenic vistas of Gar Mandaran, Rural Tourism may be introduced which has of late become a policy priority with the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. By introducing Rural Tourism in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit, not only will the visitors be able to experience the spiritual dimension of this intriguing tourist circuit, but it would also go a long way in improving the quality of life of the rural folks. In terms of experience, the visitors too will be able to take back home not just snapshots but memories that will linger on for a lifetime. Rural Tourism in the Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit will go hand in hand with Spiritual Tourism or Pilgrim Tourism for which this tourist circuit is so well known throughout the world. In fact, they will compliment each other. The basic idea is to re-engineer the existing tourism product (Spiritual Tourism) for the purpose of retaining, enhancing and capturing newer markets. The entire rural populace including the womenfolk will be empowered to take decisions at the grass roots level. The circuit infrastructure has to be drastically improved so as to attract the attention of the global traveler. Both the Central Government as well as the State Government has taken a number of steps for the promotion of Rural Tourism and achieving the goal of sustainable tourism development. Now, it needs to be practically applied in one of India's most outstanding Pilgrim Tourism Circuit, which incidentally happens to be associated with the life and times of one of India's most revered spiritual giant – Bhagawan Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.