

# Evolution of Shakti Peetham for **religious, mythological** and **dark tourism** in Indian sub-continent

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**Abstract** | Given the growing importance of age old cultural and mythological tourism with many other related distinctive niches, the purpose of this paper is to contextualize the impacts of Shakti Peetham on such tourism practices in South Asia. This mythological context of Shakti Peetham has several importance in age old cultural tourism to contemporaneous sustainable pilgrimages with issues associated with many niches such as dark tourism, animal sacrifice and typical Tantric rituals in Hinduism etc. This paper discusses about the concentration of those places in and to the Eastern India of South Asia and focusing on upcoming mythological tourism, dark and tantra tourism potentialities with a circuit development approach through Vehicle Routing System (VRS) for sustainable pilgrimage.

**Keywords** | Mythological, dark and tantra tourism, religious tourism, Shakti Peetham tourist circuit, VRP (Vehicle Routing Problem).

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## 1. Introduction

Hinduism is an Indian religion and considered to be the oldest extant religion in the world by many scholars. Maximum number of Hindus are living in Indian Sub-continent. The Hindus practice Sanatan Dharma or way of life. Today, with about 900 million followers, Hinduism is the third-largest religion behind Christianity and Islam. Having been the oldest extant religion, it has a diverse system of thought marked by a range of philosophies, shared concepts, cosmological system, pilgrim sites and shared textual resources. Hinduism does not prescribe more, rather describing, pluralistic, diverse in nature.

Mythologically, Shakti Peethams are believed to have come into existence when Mother goddess departed Parvati or Shakti's body was mutilated into 51 pieces and fell on earth at various places. These 51 holy places are known

as Shakti Peethams. Apart from India, some of these Shakti Peethams are also situated in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Tibet (in China). This feminine divinity is a powerful entity in Hinduism with paradoxical nature of creation and destruction. It is exuberated in the concept of the ten Mahavidya or ten great wisdoms called Kali, Tara, Tripura Sundari (Shodashi), Bhuvaneshvari, Tripura Bhairavi, Chhinnamasta, Dhumavati, Bagalamukhi, Matangi and Kamala respectively (Chakravarti, 1956; R.K.Mission, Calcutta, 1953; R.K.Mission, Calcutta 1956).

With due course of time, different non-Vedic offerings or tribal rituals got mixed and modified rituals or prayers came into being e.g. Durga Puja, Kali Puja etc. (Urban, 2019). This goddess Kali or Durga and their different consorts (Bhairava) are worshipped in entire South Asian region including some places in Tibet, China as mentioned in the spatial map (figure 1).

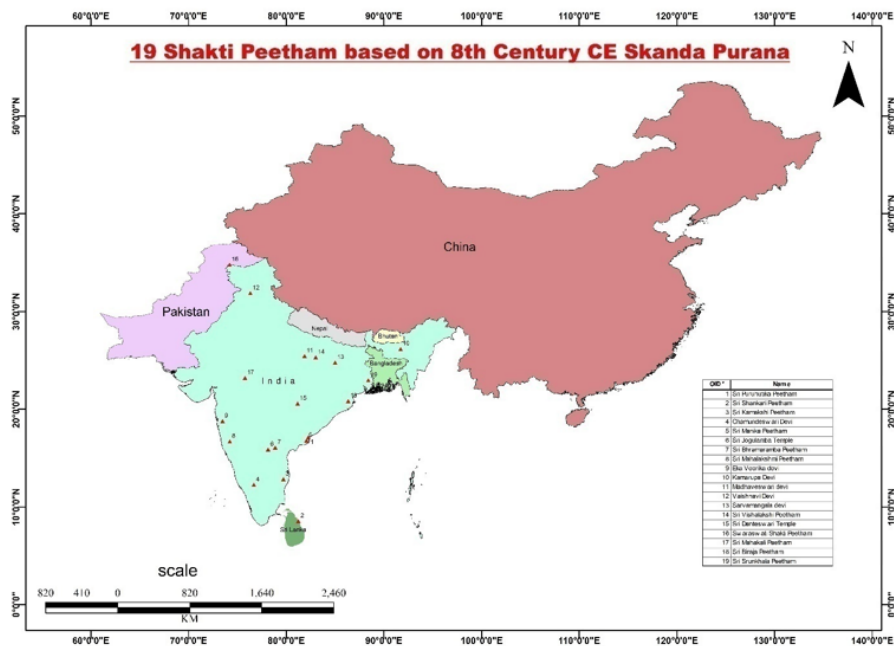


Figure 1 | 19 Shakti Peetham based on 8th Century CE Skanda Purana

According to Hindu mythology, these are the main places with specific rituals for invoking Shakti

and exhibits the scope for one of the most powerful pilgrim tourism circuits for several thousand ye-

ars. Interestingly and co-incidentally, such was the acceptability and popularity of this mythology associated with Shakti incarnation that many more new Shakti Peethams came into being in the sub-continent with due course of time. During 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century, the popularity reached at the apex of its level with new literature and manuscripts, and the tendency was to incorporate and promote new places of the same religious importance. Pilgrim routes, temples, shrines, mausoleums etc. have immense heritage values. The growing worth of this heritage in the renegotiation and dissemina-

tion of a nation's identity is considerate of many scholars and academicians. It is also found that India is consistently represented as an ethnically diverse nation in which Hinduism preceded and prevailed over all other ethnicities/religions (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2008).

The figure 2 in the study, exhibits such trend with a unique two-fold concentration important for religious tourism circuit with Shakti Peethams. This mythological and religious exuberance in South Asia chronologically found to be sub-continental and thereafter almost regional.

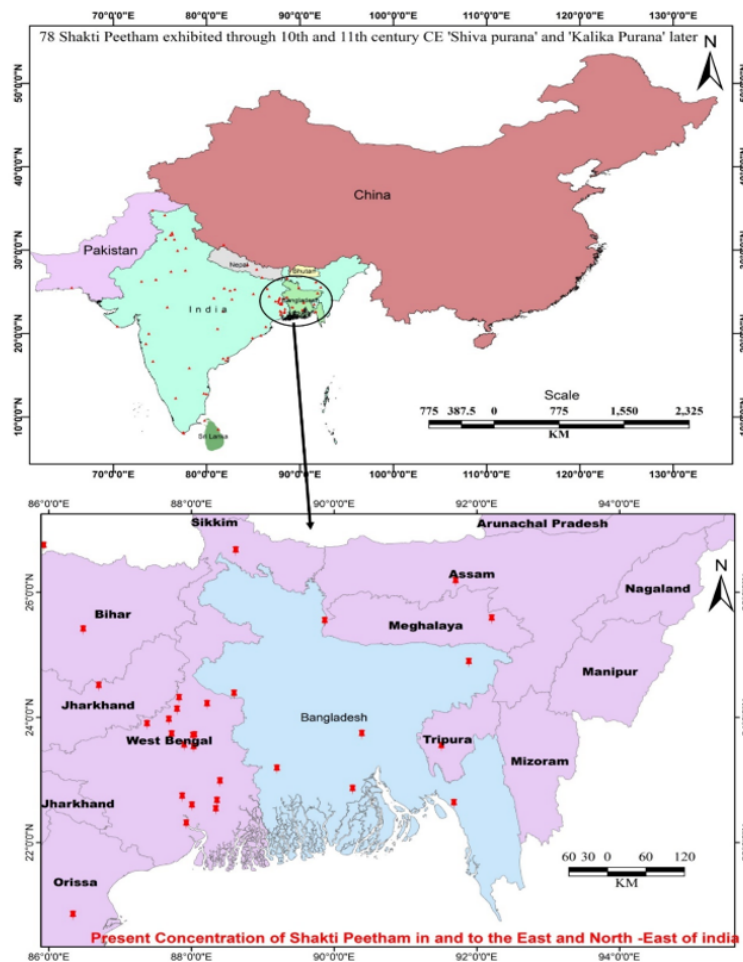


Figure 2 | 78 Shakti Peetham exhibited through 10th and 11th Century CE Shiva Purana and Kalika Purana

This incidental concentration, of course, gets a new opportunity for Shakti-circuit develop-

ment in the eastern part of erstwhile India.

## 2. Objectives

Shakti Peethams are of immense religious, cultural and heritage values in Indian sub-continent. It is possible to reorient and promote religious tourism, mythological tourism, dark and tantra tourism and many such interesting niches. Therefore, international tourists can also be equally interested in special interest and niche tourism exhibited through the Shakti circuits. The objective of the study is to find out location-wise concentration of the maximum number of Shakti Peethams and thereafter to explore Shakti Peetham circuits on the basis of surface distance for future pilgrimages. Another objective is to explore all possible niches of related tourism in the region for sustainable pilgrimages and development without animal cruelty, killings and, in certain cases, superstitions.

## 3. Data collection and chronological exuberance

This study follows a descriptive research based on a chronology of advent and inception of ancient scriptures associated with the mythology and history of establishment of Shakti Peetham and its popularity. A unique mythology-religion relationship with future trans-boundary and regional religious tourism circuit development scope has been explored for several other types and forms of tourism in recent future. Explored circuits are on the basis of surface distance from one point to another irrespective of interstate and trans-national boundaries.

### 3.1. Software Section

Based on availability of Data found in the Purana firstly Microsoft office excel is used to make the table and filtering the Peetham. Google Earth

Pro, 7.3.3.7786 (64-bit) has been used for marking the Peetham and making a KML (Keyhole Markup Language) file. Then another software ArcMap 10.5 which is a Geographical Information System (GIS) software which allows handling and analyzing of spatial data or Geographical information through visualizing of various geographical graphs and statistics in Layer format is used extensively for Map design.

### 3.2. Map Layout Design

As discussed in the Software section, after successful verification and marking the Peetham in Google Earth Pro the placemarks has been converted and saved in KML file. Then using ArcMap 10.5 this KML file is converted into Layer file format. Then Data frame is created and shape file of South Asian country is added and those point is marked for finally making the Map.

### 3.3. Method of identifying feasible route structure

To find out an optimal solution, we have applied the vehicle routing problem (VRP) (Hadjiconstantinou & Roberts, 2002). Algebraically, the problem can be written as:

$$\begin{aligned}
 & \min \sum_{i=1}^n \sum_{j=1}^n d_{ij} x_{ij} \\
 & \text{subject to } \sum_{j=1}^n x_{ij} = 1 \quad \forall i=2, \dots, n \\
 & \sum_{j=1}^n x_{ji} = 1 \quad \forall i=2, \dots, n \\
 & \sum_{j=1}^n f_{ji} - \sum_{j=1}^n f_{ij} = D_i \quad \forall i=2, \dots, n \\
 & 0 \leq f_{ij} \leq Cx_{ij} \quad \forall i, j=2, \dots, n \\
 & x_{ij} \in [0, 1]
 \end{aligned}$$

In solving the selection of tourist spots in

the study area, we have applied a sophisticated VRP Spread sheet Solver as developed by Erdogan (2017).

#### 4. Discussions and future implications

These chronological fact-finding enquiries highlights two broader areas of four trans-boundary and national Shakti Peetham circuit development and immediate attention for sustainable pilgrimages. It is empirically found that mass pilgrimage has both the worst- and the best-cases: worst be-

cause extreme crowding occurs; best because there is mutuality between hosts and visitors as all are worshippers (Bleie, 2003). These include future threats to mass pilgrimages amidst COVID 19 outbreak to very sensitive rituals of animal cruelty, killings etc. Dark and tantra tourism, associated supernormal practices. Sakta pilgrimages and tantra tourism are, to a great extent, similar but the Shakta pilgrims look at the presiding mother goddess as supreme tantra tourism is agnostic, Vedantic and include many Buddhist and Jain works (Banerjee, 1992). The figure 3 shows the possible concentration of Shakti Peethams for pilgrimages.

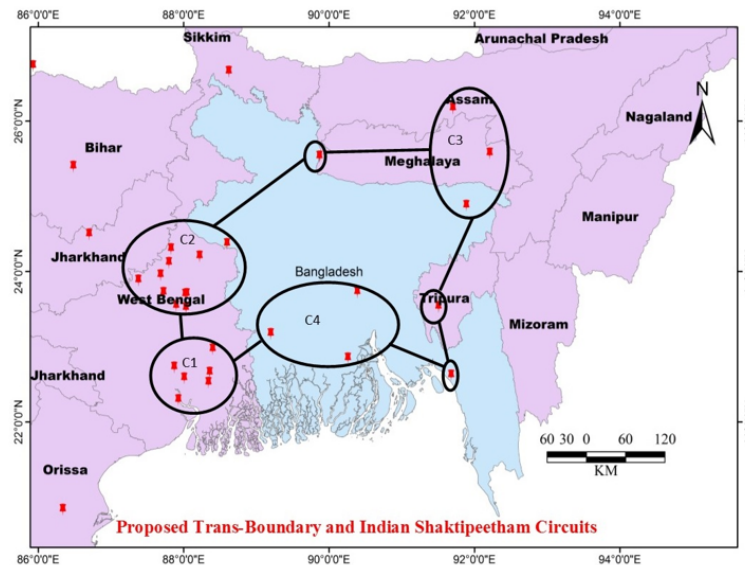


Figure 3 | Proposed trans-boundary and Indian Shakti Peetham circuits for religious tourism, mythological tourism, dark and tantra tourism

**C1(Circuit 1)** - In and around Kolkata(Includes 6 Shaktipeethams)

1) Dakshineswar (Kolkata)- 2) Kalighat (Kolkata) -3) Bargabhim (Tamluk)- 4) Maamalai-Chandi (Amta, Howrah) -5) Ratnavali (Khanakul, Hooghly)- 6) Sri SrunkhalaPeetham or Hansaswari Temple (Bandel, Hooghly)

**C2 (Circuit 2)** – In and around Birbhum (Includes 10 Shaktipeetham)

1) Bakreswar Shaktipeetham (Birbhum) – 2) Nandikeswari (Birbhum) – 3) Tarapeeth (Birbhum) – 4) Nalateswari (Nalhati, Birbhum) – 5) Kiriteswari (Murshidabad) – 6) Bahula (Keturgram, PurboBardhaman) – 7) Attahas Shaktipeeth (Birbhum) – 8) MaaJogadaya (PurboBardhaman) – 9) MangalChandika (PurboBardhaman) – 10) Kankalitala (Bolpur, Birbhum)

**C3 (Circuit 3)** – It includes 3 shaktipeetham (2

in India and 1 in Bangladesh)

1) Kamaksha Devi (Guwahati, Assam) – 2) NartiangDurga (Shilong, Meghalaya) – 3) Sri Hatta Kali (Sylhet, Bangladesh)

**C4 (Circuit 4)** – Bangladesh shaktipeetham circuit (It includes 3 shaktipeetham)

1) Dhakeswari (Dhaka) – 2) Sunanda Devi (Shikrapur, Barishal) – 3) Jasoresswari (Jessore)

These circuits are expected to enhance domestic and outbound pilgrimages and other special niches of inbound tourism. Circuit one (C1) and circuit two (C2) are proposed for intensive but planned mass pilgrim tourism, dark and tantra tourism and such other special niches. The circuit three (C3) is trans-boundary and incorporating two Shakti Peethams in India and one in Bangladesh, while circuit 4 (C4) is completely international and situated in Bangladesh. Circuit four (C4) can be useful for India's outbound pilgrim tourism and Bangladesh's inbound tourism for future. However, the policy issues for these circuit development needs a two-fold analysis. One is extensively associated with generic tourism planning and development for pilgrim centers at regional, national and international level, and another is a way forward to sustainable pilgrimages. Specifically for C1 and C2, even many lesser known-pilgrim centers would be promoted along with established one and tourism activities are expected to be radiated into many adjacent areas. C3 and C4 can initiate a trans-boundary cooperation for tourism between India and Bangladesh, with more economic benefits to be accrued to the later country.

With regard to the way forward to sustainable pilgrimage this research further initiates a research on man-animal relation in these Shakti Peethams that is critical, rather paradoxical for several thousand years in South Asia. Culture, community and religious affiliations have direct association with ritual slaughter of animals in many countries (Ler-

ner & Rabello, 2007). Tourists also randomly visit to pay respect or view such shrines or temples where animal sacrifice is offered to god or goddess, mainly the goddess Kali (abode of Shakti) in India (Tul, 2015). This is how animal sacrificing place or religious centers are rather sources of attraction. Ritualistic animal sacrificing procession involves slaying of goats, chickens, pigeons, ducks, fishes, male water buffalos, and such other animals (Sébastien, 2004). As mentioned above, ritualistic sacrifice is associated either with special worshipping or occasional, very often celebrated during a particular fair or festival.

There are thousands of unknown villages and/or tribal festivals held responsible and do promote sacrifice of goats, pigs, dogs, rams, hens, ducks, buffaloes, snakes etc. in South Asia. Festivals which is also considered as a tourism commodity and heritage attracts a lot of tourists and locals at the expenses of different questionable animal use. Though at present animal sacrifices can create some problem still these rituals are practiced as a part of heritage from forefathers, and it also depicts one's own tradition and identity (Erschbamer, 2019). Religious trekking is one of the most popular tourist activities in South Asia though sometimes associated with cruelty and sacrifice of animals for rituals in Indian Subcontinent (Gupta, 1999). Harsh training is also very common to animals so that they are extensively used in different tourism activity like trekking, animal shows and painting. Till date, uncountable villages and tribal areas are famous for ritualistic cruelty and killings of animals and other species. In many areas, excess number of animals are also often sacrificed to fulfill their personal vows (Hiltebeitel, 1980). Many pilgrim centers in South Asia, more specifically these mythological Shakti Peetham, are known for ritualistic animal sacrifice, varying from a few to thousands in numbers. These places of touristic interest need immediate attention within the preview of policy issues and environmental laws. Recently, responsible tourism is discussing about

the welfare of the tourist in tourism but also for the welfare of the animals (Fennell, 2014; Fennell et.al, 2020). As an approach, the diversity of the world's cultures, habitats and species and the wealth of our common cultural and natural heritage, as the very basis of tourism, to be protected in different ways around the world across the generation (Goodwin, 2016). Therefore, the need of the hour is to identify the tourists spots and occasions associated with promoting animal sacrifice, killing, selling, tough training etc. This article is focusing on those tourists spots and special occasions and enhances further research for sustainable pilgrimages and related other special interest tou-

risim, niche tourism etc.

Considering the maximum number of ten Shaktipeethams in the study, circuit 2 (C2) is chosen for analyzing feasible route structure for further penetration and preparation of the most feasible route structure through vehicle routing problem (VRP). The total distance to be covered by motorable roadways is found 422 kilometers in this circuit 2 (C2) of circle trip starting from Tarapeeth, Rampurhat, in Birbhum, West Bengal India. Following is the table 1 showing latitude and longitude of each Shaktipeetham in circuit 2 to be further utilized for drawing sequence of each Shaktipeetham in the circuit 2(C2).

**Table 1 | Position of the Selected Tourist Spots**

Location	Address	Latitude	Longitude
Depot	Tarapeeth, Birbhum, West Bengal, India	24.11000	87.80000
Location 1	Bakreswar, Birbhum, West Bengal, India	23.88395	87.37762
Location 2	Nandikeswari, Birbhum, West Bengal, India	23.95463	87.66338
Location 3	Nalateswari, Birbhum, West Bengal, India	23.95463	87.66338
Location 4	Kiriteswari, Murshidabad, West Bengal, India	24.17690	88.28130
Location 5	Bahula, PurboBardhaman, West Bengal, India	23.24910	87.86940
Location 6	AttahasShaktipeeth,Katowa, PurboBardhaman, West Bengal, India	23.23300	87.86700
Location 7	MaaJogadaya, PurboBardhaman, West Bengal, India	23.23000	87.86534
Location 8	UjaniShaktipeeth Shri MangalChandi Temple, PurboBardhaman, West Bengal, India	23.24250	87.87054
Location 9	Kankalitala, Birbhum, West Bengal, India	23.71469	87.72282

Source: Compiled by the authors' from Bing map Portal

Using the vehicle routing problem (VRP), the most feasible route structure with respective sequence of each location for Shaktipeetham is exhibited in table 2 for preparing and offering tour packages for highly intensive religious tourism to different types of niche tourism associated with the circuit. Two important concentrations of locations are also evident in Birbhum and Purba Bardhaman districts of West Bengal. Tarapeetham or Tarapeeth (Rampurhat) in Birbhum is already a popular domestic pilgrim center and situated very close to Bakreswar, Nandikeswari and Nalateswari and represents the first concentration of Shaktipeetham. The second concentration is the Purba Bardhaman

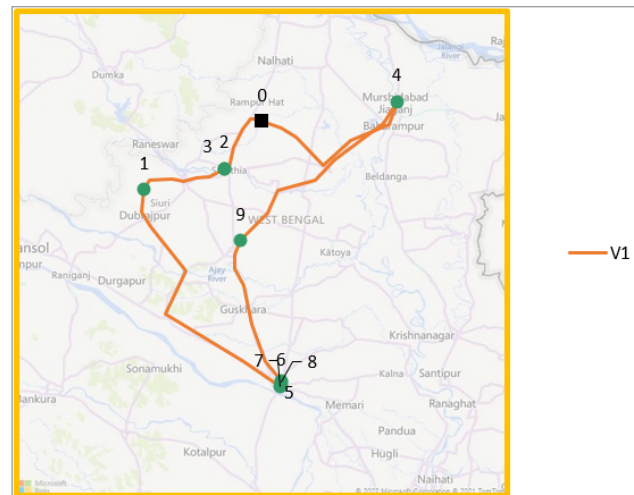
district with Bahula temple, Ujani Mata temple, Attahas temple and Maa Jogadaya temple respectively. Therefore, a district town Katwa in Purba Bardhaman, is highly recommended for overnight staying and other facilities of the tourists as this destination is not developed and promoted for tourism and pilgrimage.

The figure 4 in the study area shows the sequence and two important concentrations of Shaktipeetham and further recommends overnight accommodation at least in two places viz. Tarapeeth (Birbhum) and Katwa (Purba Bardhaman) respectively.

**Table 2** | Distance wise sequential destinations for Shakti circuit

From	To	Distance travelled
0	Depot (Tarapeeth, Rampurhat)	0
1	Location 4(Kiriteswari, Murshidabad district)	79
2	Location 9(Kankalitala, Birbhum)	171
3	Location 5(Bahula, PurboBardhaman)	235
4	Location 8 Ujani Mata PurboBardhaman	236
5	Location 6 (Attahas,Katowa, Purba Bardhaman)	237
6	Location 7 (MaaJogadaya, PurboBardhaman	238
7	Location 1 (Bakreswar, Birbhum)	354
8	Location 2 (Nandikeswari, Birbhum)	392
9	Location 3 (Nalateswari, Birbhum)	392
10	Depot (Tarapeeth, Rampurhat, Birbhum)	422

Source: Author's estimation

**Figure 4** | Location of the Selected Nodes for Circuit 2(C2)

**Route:** Depot (Rampurhat) » Location 4(Kiriteswari, Murshidabad district) » Location 9(Kankalitala, Birbhum) » Location 5(Bahula, PurboBardhaman) » Location 8(UjaniShaktipeeth Shri MangalChandi Temple, PurboBardhaman) » Location 6(AttahasShaktipeeth,Katowa) » Location 7(MaaJogadaya, PurboBardhaman) » Location 1(Bakreswar, Birbhum) » Location 2(Nandikeswari, Birbhum )» Location 3(Nalateswari, Birbhum) » Depot(Rampurhat)

## 5. Conclusion

This study discusses about trans-boundary religious tourism, typical rituals and practices for

mythological and dark tourism of international attention and interest. Through vehicle routing problem (VRP), this study exhibits the most feasible route structure for the largest circuit with the most rational sequence for destinations. Therefore, this study identifies the places of overnight accommodation and other facilities, such as Katowa, for future infrastructure development and promotion. In doing so, this study describes a cost-effective approach and how to avoid familiarization trip while developing tourist circuits and with tourism efficiencies and scientific product development (Batabyal, 2010; Ghosh & Batabyal, 2022). Together with intensive mass pilgrimage, this study contributes to the planning, development and promotion of religious trekking, religious fairs, and festivals, other alternative niches for future sustainable pil-



grimaces along with alternative pilgrim centers of equal religious and ritualistic importance. While identification of new site is a scope for developing proactive sustainable pilgrim center, intensive mass pilgrim centers draw immediate attention for assessing tourism impacts and certain sustainable recommendations without violating community sentiment.

### 5.1. Limitations of the Study

This study avoids the contradiction in literature and theology, and focuses on places of actual practice and of touristic importance for future Indian sub-continental religious, mythological, dark and tantra tourism circuit(s) through vehicle routing system for feasible tour packages. Also, the respective distances among the Shaktipeethams are initially retrieved from Google map and further investigations and clarifications are made through the interviews of the transport operators in the concerned areas only, instead of familiarization trips.

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