

# A Study on the Changes of the Physical and Social Environment of Santiniketan through the Activities of Rabindranath Tagore

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## Abstract:

The study of location and space is a crucial component of the field of geography. Like other locations, Santiniketan has a history of expansion and change. As a result, major changes of the environment of Santiniketan have occurred. In this regard, Rabindranath Tagore was essential. The main topic of this study is Tagore's significant undertakings and how they have affected the physical and social environment of Santiniketan. It was figured out by contrasting Santiniketan with the human life cycle. The current author has envisioned that Santiniketan is approaching a pivotal stage and is eroding from its true being through this work. At the same time, the author would like to announce some innovative strategies that would revitalise and preserve the environment's rich ecology and regal spirit of Santiniketan.

**Key Words:** Study of place, Growth and development, Endeavour, Life cycle of a human being, Critical phase, Rejuvenate, Environment.

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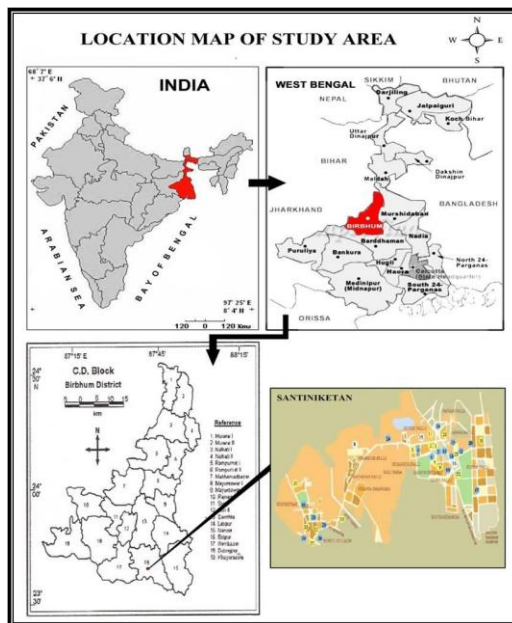
## 1. Introduction:

The description and analysis of space and place have been central to geography since ancient times. Every location has distinct spatial pattern features. However, human intervention can bring a new addition to a community. One among them that has certain phenomena is Santiniketan. Santiniketan, an eminent place as well as a cultural heritage of the world, has carried down its name through more than 150 years. In the history of Santiniketan from its initiation, growth and development of the place has taken a lot of events which is the cause of present condition and will be the causes of future condition also. Therefore, a series of events in the life history of growth and development of Santiniketan through time have similarities to the events of the life cycle of human beings from the viewpoint of psychology. At the same time, being a humanized landscape, Santiniketan would come to the forefront of disturbance and get a new trend.

## 2. Selection and Importance of the Study:

Every location has a unique history of transformation. Through the transitions of many eras, individual locations have altered both their internal and external appearance. An explanation of Santiniketan's history can provide insight into the current situation and the direction the city is likely to go. It will be beneficial to comprehend and create some plans for Santiniketan's future development. That is the topic's most persuasive argument.

## 3. Location of the Study Area:



**Figure-1: Location Map**

Geographically, Santiniketan is located in the northern hemisphere between latitudes 23°38'30"N and 23°39'30"N and longitudes 87°41'30"E and 87°43'00"E. This region falls under the 45Q zone, under the Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM) projection. It is located in the Rarh region of the Lower Ganga Plain, which is an interriverine tract of the rivers Ajoy and Kopai.

Within the Bolpur-Sriniketan Block, it is located in the southernmost section of Birbhum District. The district headquarters in Suri, the hub of the district administration, has complete control over the region, which is also under the jurisdiction of the Bolpur Police Station. Santiniketan is located 4 km from Bolpur station, the closest train station, and 168 km to the northwest of Dumdum Airport, which is located in Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal.

#### 4. Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives for the aforesaid study are as follows-

- To know the pattern of growth and development of Santiniketan through time.
- To describe major efforts that have been implemented in the history of Santiniketan.
- To find out major environmental changes both physical and Social in Santiniketan.
- To lead the way about the suitable position of Santiniketan in respect to the future and predict the potential survival of Santiniketan.

#### 5. Database & Methodology:

Most of the data was gathered from secondary sources. Numerous publications and reports from the Visva-Bharati Central Library, Rabindra-Bhavana Library, and distinguished individuals with expertise in Tagore's views and actions are included.

Significant work is done in the pre-field session topic selection process, including gathering secondary data and information. During field sessions, the research area was directly seen. Data processing, representation, and interpretation are completed during the post-field period.

#### 6. Basic Characteristics of Santiniketan Place:

##### ● As a Physical element:

##### ✓ Relief-

- Santiniketan is the inter-fluvial region of Ajoy and Kopai River.
- Average height of the middle part of this region was more than 60 meters from sea level.
- Central part of the area was relatively high. Height gradually declines toward the surroundings from the central part.
- Ravine or Badlands topography- highly dissected infertile land.
- Large volumes of Laterite soils are deposited by the drifting process of the rivers.
- Generally, the average slope of relief in this region was west to east.

✓ Drainage-

- Santiniketan had a well-drained area because of rolling upland topography. The area had been contained with two river systems and some water bodies.
- Main rivers of the area are Ajoy, Kopai and several Ravines (Khoai River).
- The rivers of this region being fenced in by well-marked undulation of stiff Laterite keep well within their permanent channels.

✓ Forest-

- In earlier times, Santiniketan's outskirts had an adequate diversity of flora, while the actual Santiniketan had sporadic dry vegetation. However, the situation currently has the opposite impulse.
- Plantations of exotic plant species from around the world have left an impact on the Santiniketan area (Mondal, 2018).

● **As a Cultural element:**

✓ Education-

- In 1901 Rabindranath undertook an educational experiment through a school.
- In 1921 from humble beginnings the Santiniketan School developed into an International University named Visva-Bharati (Das Gupta & Ray, 2009).
- In 1951, it became a Central University under the jurisdiction of the Indian Constitution.

✓ Conservation Store-

- Conserved traditional culture of ancient India within the modern education system. Shantiniketan was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site on September 17, 2023.
- Developed intimate association among different cultures of the East.
- Established world peace and realized a common fellowship through communicating of the East and the West.

✓ Tourism Economy-

- Santiniketan became a heritage site which made it heavily populated with tourists and developed the tourism industry and economic status of the surrounding area.

Thus, it can be said that Santiniketan Landscape is the Function of East-West Culture on Barren Natural Landscape.

**7. An Overview of Santiniketan's Development and Growth:**

➤ *Past to present pattern- (life cycle of human being)-*

● Behind Causes:

- ✓ Spatial dimensional change through time like a human being as shape and size of body developed (areal extension and institutional development) (Sinha, 1977).

**Table 1: Expansion of Area in Santiniketan from its initiation**

Period	Amount of land (in acres)
1863	6.66
1912	31.66
1923	133.33

1927	861.92
1977	1647.09
2013	> 1700

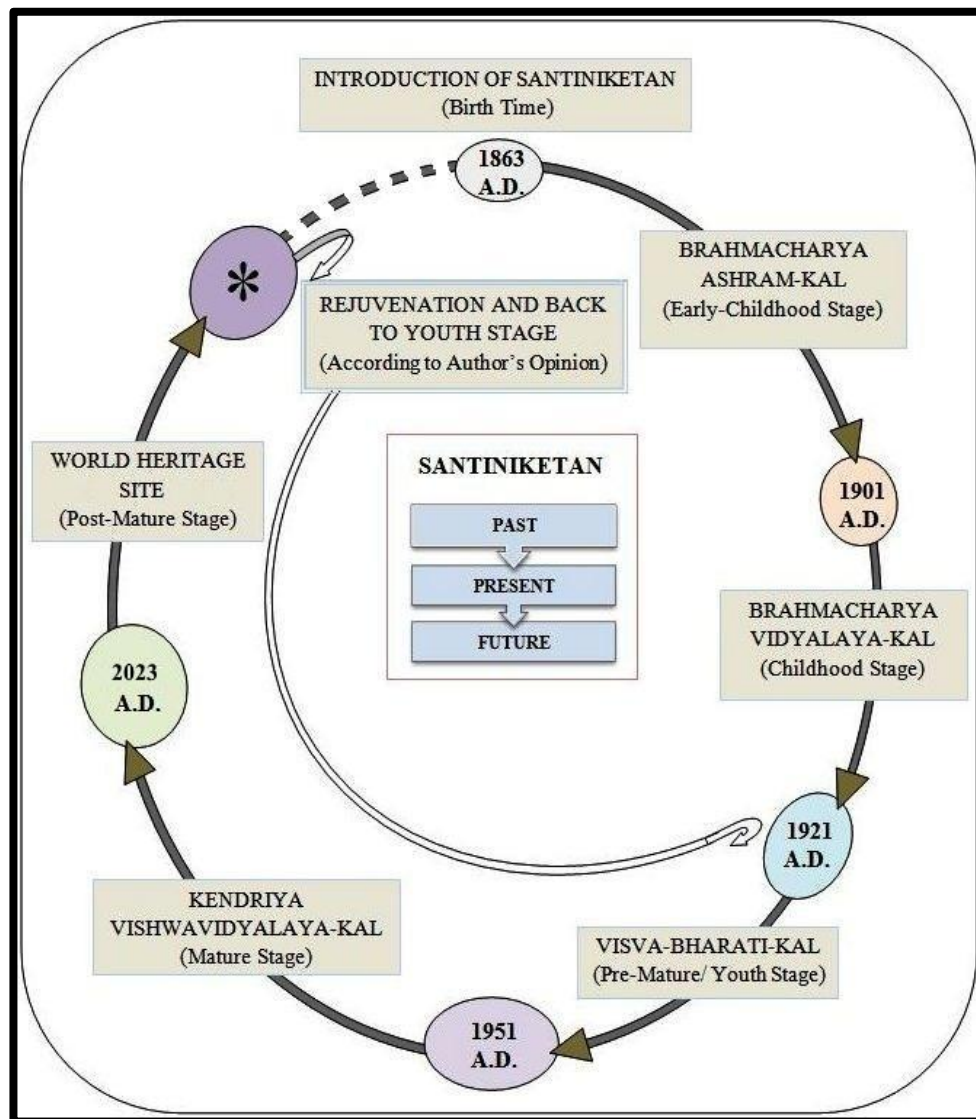
Source: Visva-Bharati Report & After Mondal, 2018

- ✓ Becoming complex from simplicity as the mind of a child becoming complex as well as mature through time (school to university).
- ✓ Through time, social space and mental space of Santiniketan grew like a man (local to universal, regional, national, international and experimental etc.).
- ✓ Enrichment of knowledge and experience through continuing age (popularity like old-age man).
- Phases:
  - *Origin Point*- Given the name and exposure.
  - *1<sup>st</sup> Stage*- Small area coverage and familiar to the local people.
  - *2<sup>nd</sup> Stage*- Combination of traditional past with modern present in a natural environment where the pupils learnt & grew in an atmosphere of joy and freedom.
  - *3<sup>rd</sup> Stage*- Then it has been aiming at developing a basis on which the cultures of the East and West may meet in common fellowship and strengthening the fundamental condition of world peace.
  - *4<sup>th</sup> Stage*- Getting national dignity and becoming famous to the world.
  - *5<sup>th</sup> Stage*- Becoming a conservative place, demarcated by walls.

Past, present and future trends on growth and development of Santiniketan has been depicted through the following diagram (see the fig.2) (Som, *et.al.* 2010).

➤ *Future trend- (rejuvenation process)- (According to Author's opinion):*

- Behind Causes:
  - It is the creation of human endeavour. Thus, it may, can be or should be fully controlled by man.
  - As being man-made phenomena, it easily cannot be destroyed and would be modified to continue its own lifestyle with proper dignity (Kaur, 2010).
- Results:
  - *Interruption of cycle*- An interruption process would become which prevents destruction of its actual spirit and conserved it through planning and their successful implementation.
  - *Back to youth Stage*- According to the author's opinion, Santiniketan is back to its youth stage which retains its actual honors and dignity.



Source: Prepared by the Researcher

**Figure-2: Model on Growth and Development of Santiniketan (1863-2023)**

## 8. Tagore's Efforts and its Implementation:

### (i) Tagore's Philosophy and Perceptions:

Ancient literature greatly inspired Rabindranath Tagore. In every instance, from the Isha Upanishad to the Ramayana epic, from the Pauranik literature to the Vaidik literature, he had observed that there existed a spiritual bond between man and nature and that they coexisted peacefully, putting aside all rivalry. The basic thinking and perceptions of Rabindranath Tagore about the society was that, an endeavour towards the transformation of subjective facts to objective reality through constructive activities (Tripathi, 2011).

There were two aspects within Tagore's thinking and perceptions about the social hazards-

1. *Theoretical and analytical exchange of ideas*
2. *Decision-making and its implementation.*

Rabindranath Tagore had expressed his perceptions through-

- Writing the first line of his well-known poem 'Bharat-Tirtho' in 1911-



*Hee mor chitta, punya tirthe jagore dhire  
ei bharater maha-manaber sagoro-tire.*

(‘On the sacred shores of the ocean of humanity of this India,  
Awaken my heart!’)

- Tagore’s song ‘*jana gana mana adhinayaka*’ (1911) taken as an icon of modern India’s legacy of universal humanity.

Rabindranath wrote several essays- ‘Shiksha Sanskar’, ‘Shikshar Samasya’, ‘Jatiyo Vidyalaya’, ‘Tapovan’, ‘Shikshar Bahan’, ‘Shikshar Herfer’ etc. on prevailing educational institution of his era for raising societal consciousness (Tripathi, 2011; Das Gupta, 1977).

### ***(ii) Invention of Tagore’s Education System:***

Rabindranath Tagore believed that technology was the result of the human mind changing itself and becoming practical. To mitigate and manage societal dangers, Tagore devised environmentally friendly techniques (Chattopadhyay, 2003). Rabindranath perceived the concept in experience of his life that mitigation of social hazards as well as social wellbeing can be possible after changing or and modifying the existing colonial education system (O’Connell, 2003).

*“To accept the truth of our own age it will be necessary to establish a new education on the basis, not of nationalism, but of a wider relationship of humanity.”* (Rabindranath Tagore, *Visva-Bharati*, 1919, pp. 9-10).

Rabindranath Tagore was a strong opponent of the educational system that the British had imposed. Therefore, he had an idea for a new educational system that would work with both the old and new systems. He created the hermitage education system at Brahmacharyashram, where classes would be held outside under the shade of trees. When the institution was established in 1921 A.D., he chose a quote from a Vedic text as its motto and renamed it ‘Visva-Bharati’ (Tripathi, 2011)-

*Yatra visvam bhavati ekanidam*  
(‘Where the world makes its home in a single nest’)

### ***(iii) Plantation of Indigenous and Exogenous Trees:***

Between 1920 and 1938, Rabindranath and his son Rathindranath planted both native and imported trees to create a lovely garden in Uttarayan, Nandan, and Malancho, Santiniketan. Sansane jhau, Ashok, Chandan, Sarnachapa, Parijat, Shisu, kadam, Neem, Magnolia, Naglingam, Sonali Simul, Gulancho, Palash, Bakul, Sanajhuri, Malati, Aparajita, Homskiyoladia, Kanak Chapa, Bonpulak, Kurpur, Safada, Bel, Dalim, Kamranga, Kanthal, Jam, Aam, Jamrul, Tut, Sabuj Golap, Kardya, Adeno-kalimona, and so on are a few of them. In this situation, Rathindranath made a significant effort to learn about plant ecology to create the variety tree plantation. Gardens are created using eco-cultural architecture and methods from developed nations (China, Japan, England, and others) (Mondal, 2018; Som, *et.al.* 2010). Rabindranath and his son Rathindranath brought in a variety of foreign trees from all over the globe (See the table-2).

**Table 2: The contributions of several nations on the plants in Santiniketan**

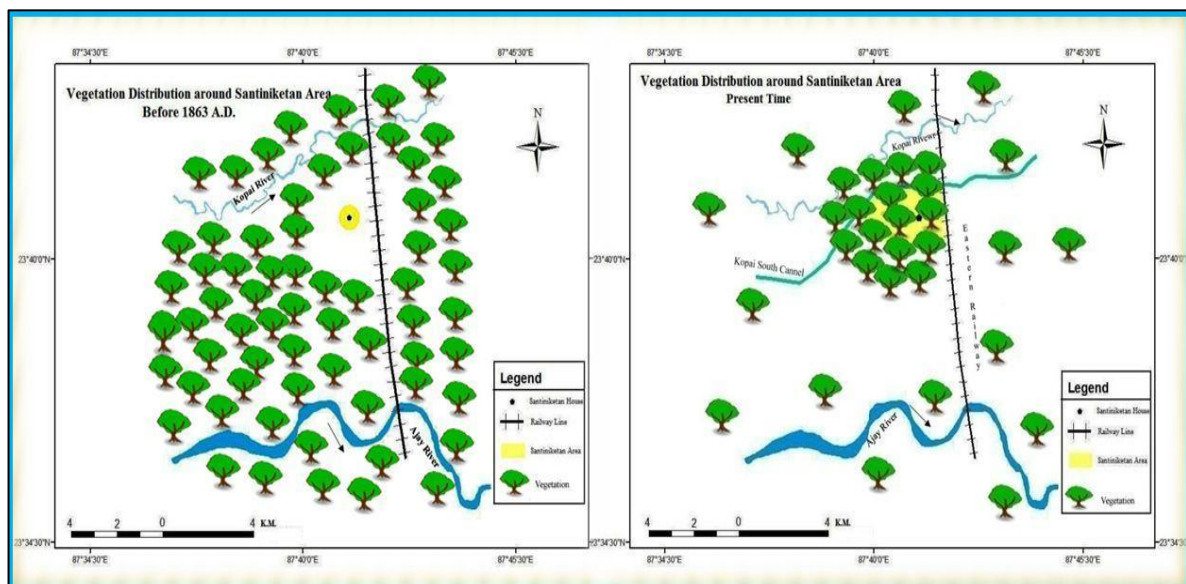
Countries/ continents	Name of the plants
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Australia	Batal-Brush(Kalistimon), Sonajhuri, Arokeria,
Bangladesh	Camellia flower
Brazil	Lata Jhumko, Edenokalimona
Burma (Myanmar)	Miletia
Mexico	Uforbia (Kaakti)
Madagascar	Panthapadap
North America	Magnolia
South Asian Island	Maranta, Enthuriam
Singhal (Sri Lanka)	Debdaru, Pathos
Tropical Africa	Adan Sonia (Baobab)
Tropical America	Jakumontia, Petriya (Nilmonilata)
West Africa	Clirodendron
Uganda	Spathodia (Rudrapalash)

Source: Literature Survey at Rabindra Bhavana, After Mondal, 2018

## 9. Changing Phenomena of Physical and Social Environment:

### (i) Reversal Position of Forest:



Source: Prepared from Topographical Map (73 M/10), Literature Survey and Satellite Image, After Mondal, 2018

**Figure 4: Reversal position of vegetal coverage at Santiniketan and its surroundings (Present scenario in respect to the past)**

Prior to 1863, the centre of Santiniketan was a desolate, desert-like area with only two Chhatim trees to provide some texture to the soil. However, because of the afforestation effort of various native and foreign plant species and the replacement of the arid soil with fertile soil, it is now a verdant home with a variety of trees. In contrast, Santiniketan's surroundings were covered in thick, impenetrable forest and bushes before to 1863. However, because of deforestation for the building of homes, roads, and expanding agricultural fields, these areas have gradually lost their forests (Fig.4) (Mondal, 2018).

### (ii) Issues of Social activities:

Education system of Rabindranath Tagore made changes of such social phenomena through following aspects (Mondal, 2016; Tripathi, 2011; Chawdhury, 2010; Basu & Mishra, 2021)-

- *Easy and less demanding lifestyle*- The hermitage education system teaches children how to live well, which is a good approach to counteract the materialistic demands of human civilisation.
- *Increasing awareness of society*- A child's unrestricted learning fosters the development of the mind's visual ability, creative thinking, and awareness of the mind.
- *All round Development of Child*- A child's holistic development includes their physical, social, moral, and spiritual growth as well as all facets and activities of life that will help them become self-sufficient.
- *Manifestation of personality*- in relation to people's spiritual understanding and self-realization.
- *Environmental balance*- because of afforestation initiatives and forest area preservation.
- *International understanding and universal brotherhood*- strengthening interpersonal bonds, emotions of camaraderie, altruistic endeavours, and cooperation.
- *Rural reconstruction*- constructing an agricultural farm house and 'Siksha-Satra' for the core of rural community, enhancing their social and economic well-being.
- *Preservation of culture*- maintaining culture is beneficial to society.
- *Cultural upliftment*- via East-West assimilation.

#### **10. Major Findings:**

- There were significant events in the life history of Santiniketan.
- Santiniketan is moving away towards a critical as well as complex phase like a human being which makes a barrier in respect to its actual dignity.
- Santiniketan has lost its actual spirit in terms of education as well as cultural system and has become commercialized like other places.
- Tagore had very strong and contemporary views, which he expanded both practically by establishing Brahmacharyashram and conceptually through his works, songs, etc.
- Rabindranath Tagore is credited for establishing the intellectual fusion of the materialistic West with the spiritual East.
- He had tried to develop the society by various techniques within the flowing channel of the education system.
- Education system of Brahmacharyashram made a strong relationship between traditional past and modern Indian education.
- The dynamics of the local environmental system were altered by Tagore's strategy of reforesting this land with a variety of alien and heterogeneous plant species, according to the geoenvironmental point of view.

#### **11. Conclusion:**

Santiniketan is a national as well as an internationally dignified peaceful place. Especially to the world for poet *Rabindranath Tagore's invented education system* (a synthesized culture of



the world's people community). Along with that he planted vegetation coverage for making 'Topoban' (Hermitage). Therefore, it is a universal gift to us. Thus, we have a common duty to preserve the glorious place through its actual way of growth and development that can be managed through changes of Physical and social environment. Author has already envisaged his opinions through the depicted model of Santiniketan. At the same time the author has full faith that the *implementation of human endeavour or modification of character of human behaviour* would act as an emerging force for future development of Santiniketan which would mitigate its problems, as being a physical and cultural landscape.

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