

A Geographical Overview on the Development of Santiniketan and Its Surroundings as Tourist Site

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Abstract: Santiniketan is one of the most prestigious heritage sites of India. This small cultural town was a meditation centre of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore and a vision of the famous Bengali poet and Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore that has been carrying itself for more than 150 years of developmental history. Thus, Santiniketan has a history of its growth and development consisting of major changes of its environment. In this connection Rabindranath Tagore played a vital role. The present paper is focusing on changes of the Physical and socio-cultural environment of Santiniketan and its surroundings to promote tourism activities in these areas. Through this paper, the present author has visualized that Santiniketan is moving towards a critical phase of tourism development that is drifting away from its actual entity. At the same time the author would like to proclaim some leading ways which would rejuvenate and retain the substantial ecology and regal spirit of its tourism.

Keywords: Prestigious heritage sites, Cultural town, Changes of the environment, Rabindranath Tagore, Critical phase of tourism development.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Tourism is a term derived from the word "Tour". According to the Oxford English Dictionary (1993) the meaning of the word "Tour" is "Going or travelling from one place to another place, a round or an excursion or journey includes visiting a number of places in a circuit or sequence, often termed, as cycling, especially a circuitous journey embracing the principal places of the country or region". Tourism is the interaction between people and space through movement primarily for leisure and recreation. The essence of tourism is the positive interaction of man being curious to know the immediate surroundings with the attributes of space (Hajare, 2012). Both the physical and cultural environment of Santiniketan and its surroundings makes this place an attractive tourist destination to the human society.

1.1 Location of the Study Area:

Santiniketan is the popular tourist spot ranked 1st in Birbhum district, 4th in West Bengal, 35th in India. Geographically, the area i.e. Santiniketan and its surroundings lie between 23°38'15"N - 23°42'45"N latitudes and 87°37'33"E - 87°42'51"E longitudes in the northern hemisphere. Santiniketan and its surroundings are in the fringe area of Chotanagpur plateau. It is situated in the inter-

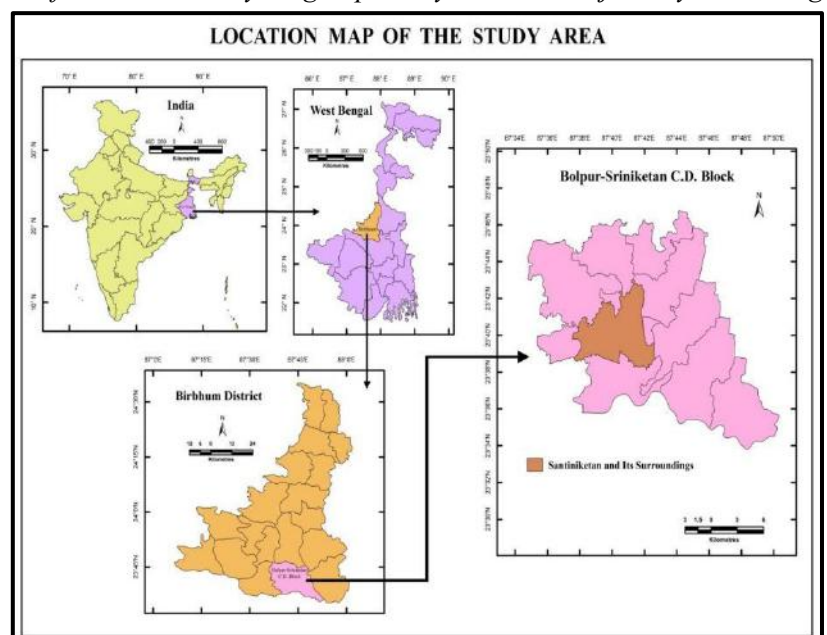


Figure-1: Location map of the study area

(Source: National Atlas and Thematic Mapping Organization, Kolkata;
Block Land and Land Revenue Office, Bolpur)

fluvial region of Ajay and Kopai River (Hunter, 1876).

The mouzas, which are physically attached with Visva-Bharati area, are taken into consideration as region in the name of 'Santiniketan and Its Surroundings' (As Visva-Bharati institution located in Santiniketan as well as Santiniketan and Sriniketan are two wings of Visva-Bharati). It is located within Bolpur-Sriniketan Block under Bolpur Sub-Division in Birbhum district (southernmost part) of West Bengal (see vide fig. 1). At present, the area belongs to the SSPA (Sriniketan Santiniketan Planning Area).

1.2 Selection and Importance of the Study:

During 1863 (when *Maharshi* came to Santiniketan and established Santiniketan Ashram), Santiniketan was an undulating barren land enriched with artistic khowai landscape as a part of Kopai-Ajay interfluves. Presently, Santiniketan is nothing but a miniature cultural landscape (INTACH, 2015). Santiniketan as a cultural landscape, cultural behaviour and its changing nature are the prime concerns to recognize the dynamic character of Santiniketan area.

The entire phase is categorized under two sub heads-

- (i) *Barren land to Heritage land*
- (ii) *Ashrama area to University area*

It will help to understand and formulate some planning for developing the future prospect of tourism in Santiniketan and its periphery area. That is the most valid point of this chosen topic.

2. Objectives of Study:

The main objectives for the aforesaid study are as follows-

- To know the nature and extent of tourism in Santiniketan and its surroundings.
- To identify the major causes and impacts of tourism in the Santiniketan area.
- To lead the way about future development of tourism in respect to the potential survival of Santiniketan.

Source of Data:

- ❖ Data is collected mainly from secondary sources. Several books and Reports from Rabindra-Bhavana Library, Visva-Bharati Central Library and eminent personalities having knowledge about the area in the old days of Santiniketan area.
- ❖ As primary information, some photographs are taken from Santiniketan and its adjoining area with due legal permission.

3. Methodology:

- ❖ In the pre-field session selection of topic, collections of secondary data as well as information etc. work are done significantly.
- ❖ Observation of the nature of tourism activities in the study area, taking some meaningful photographs etc. has been completed in field sessions.
- ❖ In the session of the post-field period, data processing, representation and interpretation are done.

4. Literature Review:

A book written by Cooper C. (1999) entitled '*Tourism Principles and Practices*' elaborates the theoretical framework of tourism. He underlined the concept and indicators of tourism demands. He also emphasized on economic, environmental and socio-cultural impact on tourism development. He highlighted the issues pertinent to the future of tourism development. Manish Ratti (2007), in his '*Tourism Planning and Development*' book which deals with the tourism industry also provides several job opportunities to the local people, adverse effect on the destinations; it contains vital information on tourism planning and management, crucial issues are given an elaborate treatment. All these matters are very useful to understand the nature and extent of tourism activities in the Santiniketan area.

5. Chronological Overview of Santiniketan:

Explanation of the history of Santiniketan can offer an idea about the situation, where the place will go in future. The history of Santiniketan has exposed various events that change the route of developmental activities and made some paradigms attached with the development of tourism. Table- 1 shows the major phases of development in chronological order.

Table- 1: Phases of Development since 1863 (Temporal Basis)

<i>Phases</i>	<i>Time Period</i>	<i>Distinguishing Events</i>
Phase-1	1863-1901	1863- Recognition of Santiniketan as <i>Ashrama</i> for Meditation
Phase-2	1901-1921	1901- Establishment of <i>Brahmacharya-Vidyalaya</i> as School
Phase-3	1921-1951	1921-Introduction of Visva-Bharati as Cultural Centre with Internationalism
Phase-4	1951-2023	1951- Declaration of Visva-Bharati as a Central University with National Importance
Phase-5	Afterward 2023	2023- Preservation of Santiniketan as World Heritage Site (Listed as Cultural Site by UNESCO)

(Source: Som, et.al., 2010; Visva-Bharati Estate Office, 2016)

Growth of Santiniketan as Tourist Site:

Santiniketan has become a pilgrim site of Birbhum district (Som et. al., 2010; HLC, 2006).

- Before 1863 Santiniketan was an inaccessible and impenetrable place, due to lack of proper communication and coverage of dense forest. After that, people have started to come to the area that has increased nowadays at a significant rate.
- In the time of (1863-1900A.D) Santiniketan was a *Brahmacharyasram* where people might come and meditate in peace and seclusion. Consequently, local people of surrounding villages came to Santiniketan for contemplation of God.
- After 1901 when *Brahmacharya-Vidyalaya* started to go, students started to come from different parts of the country.
- After 1913 when Rabindranath received the Nobel Prize and started travelling foreign countries, people from different countries started to come to Santiniketan for a visit.
- After 1951 when Visva-Bharati was recognized as Central University, a large no. of people and students came. Present day it continues its trend mainly in the festival period.

Scale of Tourism:

Santiniketan gradually turned into a gorgeous tourist destination to the peoples of India and abroad at different scales of extension ((Som et. al., 2010; HLC, 2006))-

- **Local-** Before 1863 Santiniketan was an inaccessible and impenetrable place, due to lack of proper communication and coverage of dense forest. After that people started to come to the area.
- **Regional-** In the time of (1863-1900A.D) Santiniketan was a *Brahmacharyashram* where people might come and meditate in peace and seclusion. Consequently, local people of surrounding villages came to Santiniketan for contemplation of God.
- **National-** After 1901 when *Brahmacharya-Vidyalaya* was started, students started to come from different part of the country.
- **Global-** After 1913 when Rabindranath got the Nobel Prize and travelled to foreign countries, people from different countries started to come to Santiniketan for a visit.

Major Attractions of Santiniketan as Tourist Site:

The basic components of successful tourism are attraction, transportation and accommodation. These three elements have a dynamic and phenomenal impact on tourism to transform it into massive activity. The movement for a short spell is also responsible for diffusion of cultures and increasing understanding between varied societies and cultural groups of the world (Sonule, 1998).

a. Spatial Attractions:

Spatial attractions to the tourist in Santiniketan are as follows (Das, 2013; SSDA, 2015; Som et.al. 2010; Pal, 2000) (see vide fig. 2)-

- **Uttarayan Complex:** This complex having immense historical significance as Rabindranath spent his most of the life here including Konarak, Udayan, Shyamali, Punachha & Udichi (see vide plate-1).



Plate-1: Uttarayan complex (residential complexes of Rabindranath Tagore)

(Source: Photograph taken by researcher)

- **Rabindra Bhavan (Bichitra):** This building houses a Library and a Museum. In the Museum one will find Tagore's manuscript, Title Deeds, Letters, Pictures & Paintings, Tagore's belongings, Prizes & Medallions etc.
- **Chhatimtala:** It is an important landmark of Santiniketan. Rabindranath's father, Debendranath Tagore during his travel to Raipur took rest & performed meditation (Upasana) at Chhatimtala and set up Santiniketan Ashram right there.
- **Santiniketan House:** In 1863 the two storied house is the oldest of all houses in Santiniketan (see vide plate-2).



Plate-2: Santiniketan Bari (first building at Santiniketan)

(Source: Photograph taken by researcher)

- **Glass House (Upasana Griha):** As per wisdom & planning of Debendranath, this House was established on 23rd December, 1891 & Upasana or Prayer is being performed here (see vide plate-3).

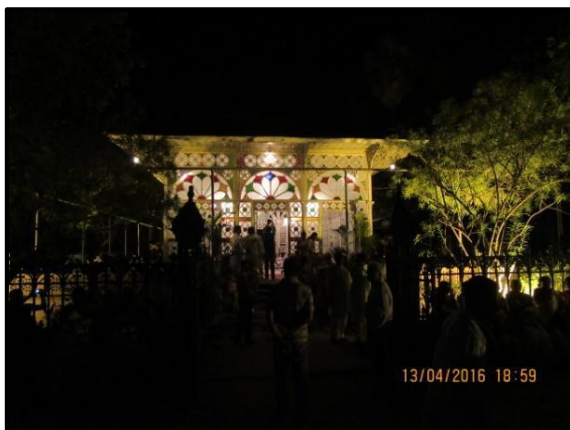


Plate- 3.a



Plate- 3.b

Plate- 3(a,b): Glass Temple (Upasana Griha) (Source: Photograph taken by researcher)

- **Aamra Kunja (Mango Garden):** open air classes are held under lush green garden full of Mango trees.
- Some other spots are- *Three Hills (Tin Pahar), Taladwaja, Chitrabhanu Cave House, Natun Bari (New House), Deholi, Salbithi, Singha Sadan, Vidya Bhavan (old), Toron Houses, Patha Bhavan (Old Library), Gour Prangan, Dwija Biram, Samindra Sishu Library, Ghanta Tala, Hindi Bhavan, China Bhavan, Mukut Ghar, Santoshalaya, Benikunja, Dinantika (Tea Party): Chaiti, Kala Bhavan, Black House (Kalo Bari), Sangeet Bhavan, Drama House (Naty Ghar), Central Library, Nippon Bhavan, Ratan Kuthi, Deer Park & Ballavpur Wildlife Sanctuary (see vide plate-4), Khowai, Anandadhara, Pratichi, Saturday & Sunday's Hut (Mela/Fair), Shilpa Gram etc.*



Plate- 4.a



Plate- 4.b

Plate- 4: Ballabhpur wildlife Sanctuary (Deer Park) (a- Deers in Ballabhpur wildlife sanctuary; b- migratory birds at Forest Lake) (Source: Photographs taken by researcher)

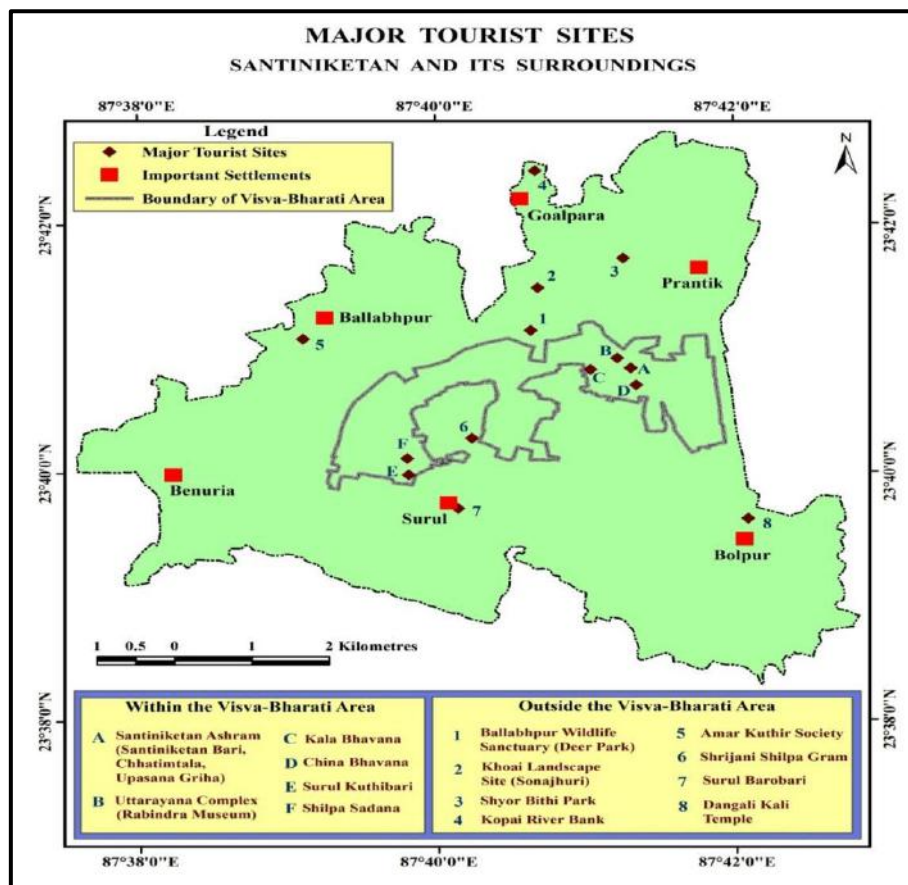


Figure- 2: Major tourist sites of Santiniketan area

(Source: Map of Bolpur- Santiniketan Area, published by National Atlas and Thematic Mapping Organization, 2015)

b. Seasonal Attractions:

Main seasonal attractions (fair and festival) of Santiniketan area (Chowdhury, 1996; Dey, 1982) (see vide plate-5) are-

- **Pous Utsav (December):** A fair is held from 7th to 9th pous (December 22/23-25) at Santiniketan and Visva-Bharati observes its foundation day with various functions, Tribal sports, dances and folk songs including Boul.
- **Vasanta Utsav:** It is held on the date of Holi. The students in colourful dresses dance and sing their ways through Amarkunja-Mango grove, which is followed by open air variety programmes.
- **Magh Mela:** The anniversary of Sriniketan is held in Bengali calendar month Magha (February) through various functions. A mela is held as a part of the anniversary function.
- **Nandan Mela (1, 2 December):** An art-fair is held in Kala Bhavana Art complex. The drawings, paintings, sculptures, toys, and musk-handicrafts created by the student of Kala Bhavana sold in this fair.
- Some other seasonal attractions (fairs and festivals) are- *Rabindra Janmotsav, Briksharopan Utsav, Halakarshan Utsav, Varsamangal, Saradotsav, Shilpo-utsav Ananda Bazar (Mela), Rakhi Bandhan Utsav Maghotsav, Nabobarsha Barsho-Ses Buddho Jayanti, Rabindra Tirodhan, Rammoman Sharan, Maharshi Sharan, Dinobondh Janmo-utsav, Gandhi-purnah* etc.



Plate- 5.a



Plate- 5.b



Plate- 5.c



Plate- 5.d

Plate- 5: Glimpses of Santiniketan's Festivals (a- *Basanta Utsav*; b- *Poush Utsav*; c- *Nandan Mela*; d- *Ananda Mela*) (Source: Photographs taken by researcher)

Causes behind the Development of Tourism in Santiniketan:

Tourists are thronging here to visit Santiniketan and its glorious treasure of Tagorian culture and traditional heritage (Das, 2013). The approach of Tagore in making this area green through afforestation of heterogeneous and exogenous plant species changed the local environmental system dynamics (Som *et.al.*, 2010).

a. Availability of Qualitative Infrastructure:

Infrastructure must be sufficient to cope up with the influx of tourists. More than 12 lakh tourists come to Santiniketan every year. Some ground base facilities like roads, railways, water, electricity and other utilities to serve local and regional tourists are known as infrastructure. Present day Santiniketan became very much accessible due to improvement of Roadways and Railways communication (SSDA, 2015). Once infrastructure for tourism is developed, superstructures

in the form of accommodation, hotels, restaurants, terminals are created. Though role of Govt. participation to develop the infrastructure for tourists is very minimal (see vide table- 2).

Table- 2: Number of beds in different type of lodges maintained by different government department in West Bengal

Tourist Spot	No. of Beds Maintained by		Remarks
	W.B Tourism Development Corporation	W.B Youth Services	
Santiniketan (Bolpur)	93	36	Not Sufficient

(Source- Bureau of Applied Economics and Statistics, Govt. of West-Bengal)

Most of the facilities have been provided by several private sectors. While more than 350 hotels and guest houses for fooding and lodging have come up already in and around Santiniketan to manage tourist pressure and a lot of many are being built (Mukherjee and Himatsingka, 2011).

b. Approach for Rural Tourism:

The union ministry of Tourism in collaboration with UNDP has launched the Endogenous Tourism project (for rural tourism) in the year 2004 and identified 31 villages across the country as tourist sites. In the district of Birbhum, West Bengal under this project is going on the following site: Ballabhpur Danga: A Santhal adivasi tribal village, Ballabhpur Danga symbolizes the pristine beauty of rural Bengal, etched in song and recitation. The community believes all life forms are sacred...weaving nature and culture into their daily life. A rich craft tradition shapes objects of everyday use) near Santiniketan (Sofique, 2014).

Socio-economic Dynamics of Tourism in Santiniketan:

The study of economic dynamics of tourism highlighted the connections and linkages of man's activities and behavior related to tourism. Impact of tourism is much wider and deeper. Likewise, the relationship of tourism to the economy is constantly changing (Hajare, 2012).

It is found that tourism activity in the Santiniketan area brings the transformation and changes in economic development of this region (SSDA, 2015).

1. Contribute to increase income of local peoples through generation of employment.
2. Development of infrastructure to use for tourists as well as local people.
3. Development of Santiniketan as 'Growth Foci' through providing services to its surrounding area acting as an innovative and growth promoting point.
4. Enhancement of social education and better understanding among diverse people of different regions and various cultural communities of the country and abroad changes the quality of life of the residents of a tremendous tourist destination- Santiniketan.
5. Changes in volume of urbanization and flow of migration.

As Santiniketan is a well-known tourism centre, there are lots of opportunities and facilities for people to earn. Year-round cultural festivals like- *Dol*, *Poush Utsav* etc. there is a huge toll of people who earn by engaging themselves in various activities. 22 Mobile food shops (mainly for selling fast foods), 150 handicraft shops and 10 mobile shops for selling earthen craft, 80 Rickshaw Pullers, 15 Guide, some Contractors, 29 hotels in Santiniketan and its surrounding (Field Survey, 2015; Das and Islam, 2012).

Ameliorative Measures:

a. Development of Santiniketan Tourist Circuit:

Santiniketan is the hotspot for tourism in Birbhum. The spatial patterns of tourist centres are constantly changing with time and space, which resulted in an increase in the size of the centres. Spatial organization of tourism will immensely help to make decisions and manage services, facilities or activities related to tourism (Sonule, 1998). Therefore, the tourist circuit zone should be recognized in a scientific way for sustainable tourism and to encourage the orderly growth of tourism in high potentials for growing a faster economy. A tourist Circuit is defined as a route on which at least three major tourist destinations are located such that none of these are in the same town, village or city. A tourist circuit is to increase the total number of visits to all the destinations on the circuit on the one hand and to provide to the tourist the attractions of all the destinations located on the circuit (Chowdhury, 2014).

A tourist circuit of Santiniketan would be established to connect following places within the area of 100 km (Bhattacharya and Bhattacharya, 2014).

I. Surul- Near Sriniketan, Suratheswar Siva temples with exquisite terracotta carvings.

II. Kankalitola - 9 km, on the bank of the river Kopai, one of the shakti peethas. **III. Labhpur-Fullara** - 30 km, Satipitha, birth place of Tarashankar Bandopadhyay. **IV. Nanoor** - 20 km, birth place of Chandidas, 14th century Sanskrit poet, famous for his Vaishnav Padavalis. There is a temple dedicated to Devi Basuli. **V. Kendubillo** - 30 km, on the bank of the river Ajay, birthplace of 12th century Sanskrit poet Joydeb, author of the masterpiece Geeta Govinda. A fair is held here on Makar Sankranti (mid-January). Baul songs are the principal attraction of this *mela*. There is a temple with terracotta decorations. **VI. Bakreshwar** - 58 km, Satipitha, also famous for the Bakranath Shiva temple and hot springs. **VII. Tarapith** - 88 km, Saktipeetha, famous temple of Tara Devi. **VIII. Birchandrappur-Garvavas** - 100km, the place is famous for being the birthplace of great Vaishnavism reformer Nityananda Mahaprabhu and his son Bichandra prabhu. Nityananda was the principal associate of Chaitanyadev in spreading Vaishnavism in Bengal and India. **IX. Nalhati** - 100 km, Shaktipeeth, **X. Sainthia-Nandeswari** - 44 km, Shaktipeeth, **XI. Massanjore** - 75 km, in Dumka district of Jharkhand, a dam across the river Mayurakshi with a picturesque reservoir. One can travel on to Deoghar another 98 km in the same direction.

b. Understanding the Life Cycle of Tourism Planning for Santiniketan Region:

Life cycle concept is made applicable to the tourist destination area, as referred to by Plog (1973). Plog's hypothesis is that each tourist place has stages of growth through rise and fall in popularity. According to him, innovation of unique and uncrowded destinations is the 'Young' or 1st stage of the life cycle. After that it becomes publicized and crowded, this is the 'Mature' or 2nd stage. Lastly, it has lost its importance through destruction of its uniqueness that may be called the 'Old stage' (Sonule, 1998). Thus, some measurements should be taken to overcome the problems. Integrated plan of tourism development might be prepared for a sustainable tourism approach.

Tourism activity is to be organized in such a way that points, lines and areas of tourism activity should be given different actions by management. Every tourist centre has its own tourist carrying capacity. If it is over utilized by the tourist the infrastructure facilities are strained and the environment will be disturbed.

Santiniketan needs the status of a local government for the purpose of long-range planning. In case of tourism development, Santiniketan reaches beyond the 3rd phase of Butler model. Need immediate management for rejuvenation (see vide fig. 3).

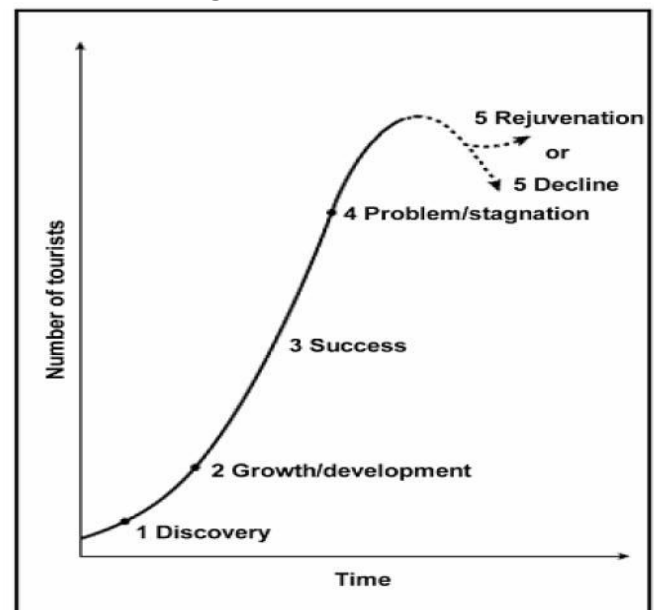


Figure- 3: Butler model of tourism development
(Source-<http://geographyfieldwork.com/ButlerModel.htm>)

5. 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, the planning and policies should be taken to preserve the glorious place through its actual way of growth and development which can manage the changes of Physical and social environment and retain sustainability of tourism development in Santiniketan area as well.

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