

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

Educational Excursion -2024

Santiniketan: *A Journey through Words and Art*



Introduction

"Nothing happens twice"

- Samuel Beckett

It is true that nothing happens twice. A journey to Santiniketan by the Department of English is never to be forgotten. "Santiniketan" is a place that reflects our rich history, pride, culture, education, and art altogether. The place is situated at Bolpur in Birbhum district of West Bengal, India.

As we start to think about Santiniketan, the thing that first comes to our mind is the name of Rabindranath Tagore and his colossal contribution to the place to make it the centre of art, education, and literature. In our one-day trip, we visited many places that carry our heritage.

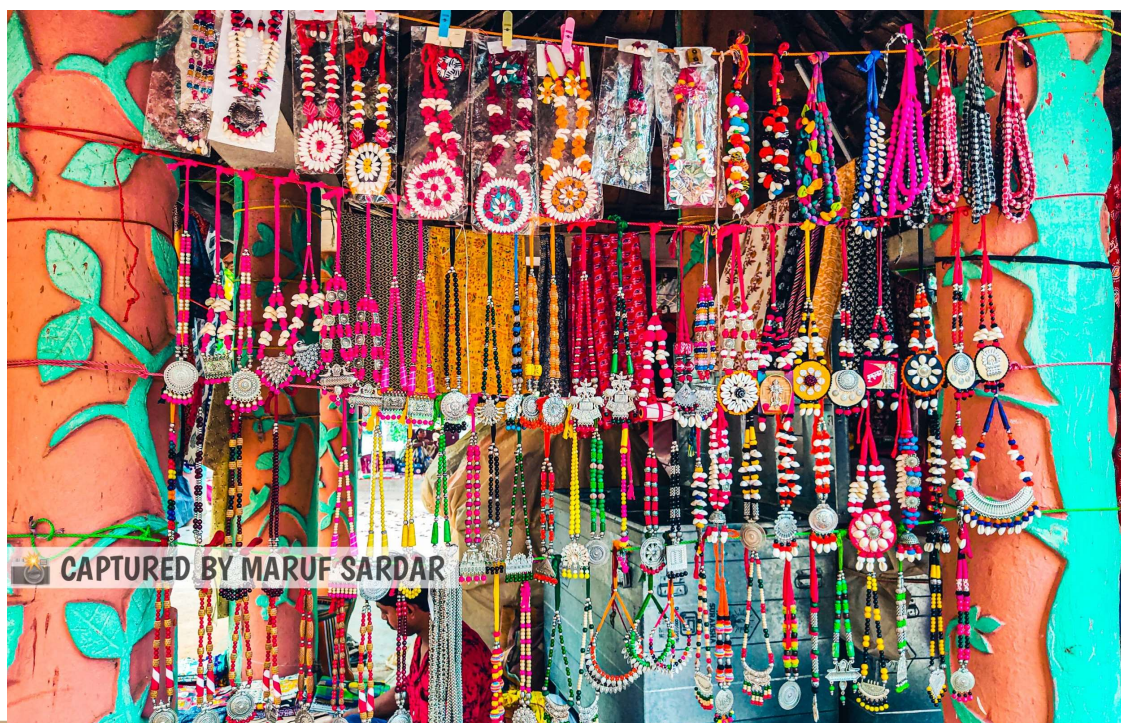
In this report, we, a group of students from Gangadharpur Mahavidyamandir, guided by Mr. Sujay Thakur and Ms. Shubhabratta Shome Dutta from the English Literature department, share our experiences from the college tour to Santiniketan, organized by various departments. Our visit to this culturally rich town in Birbhum district, West Bengal taught us about its unique way of teaching, beautiful nature, and creative atmosphere started by Rabindranath Tagore. We will present our observations, experiences, and photographs captured during the tour, giving a complete overview of our educational excursion.

PEOPLE AND OCCUPATIONS IN SANTINIKETAN

In Santiniketan, many people make their living through handicraft, and with their skilled hands, they have been creating beautiful creations from generation to generation. This art form reflects their expertise, creativity, culture, intimacy with nature, and their labor. Their handiwork is scattered everywhere, blending into every art and architecture. It is because of these creative individuals that this art, culture, education, creation, landscapes, forests, and Santiniketan still exist today. These people are preserving the trees, their birthplace, their culture, their livelihood, their art, and everything else. In Srijani Shilpagram we get to see different art forms of different states and they're not just mere pictures, they depict stories of different cultures and times. One of the major attractions in Santiniketan that touches our mind is the 'Baul song' which is very peaceful and relaxing. Some people have taken up this 'Baul song' as their occupation. It diverts our mind and gives a delightful feeling to the atmosphere and makes it pleasant.



When we are talking about Shantiniketan, we would like to talk about the people of that place and their occupation. Shantiniketan is a place of peace, and its people are really very polite. Every shopkeeper in Shantiniketan was talking to us like we were their own people, even though they suggested new things to try. The owner of our lodge, who is also a bank manager, did not wear expensive clothes and ornaments; instead, he looked like a member of our lodge. His behavior was also very polite. He suggested to us many things to do in the future as friends. The tea seller, who served us tea, was a great man; he served fresh tea only for us. Their occupation was very complicated though. When we were setting out to reach our lodge, we saw a market that was filled with jewelry shops, and the very next moment, when we crossed the market, there was a plethora of lodges. Some people chose to drive as their occupation, but we think the main occupation of that place is cottage industry. Plenty of people have their own shops, and they sell handcrafted bags, necklaces, earrings, flutes, etc.



Exploring Santiniketan

❖ SRIJANI SHILPAGRAM

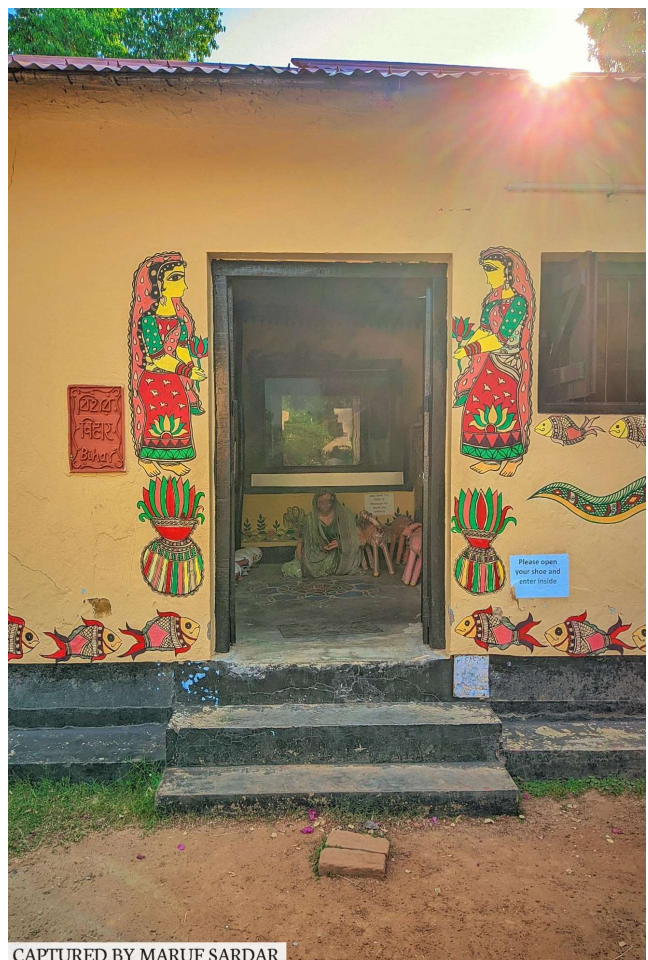
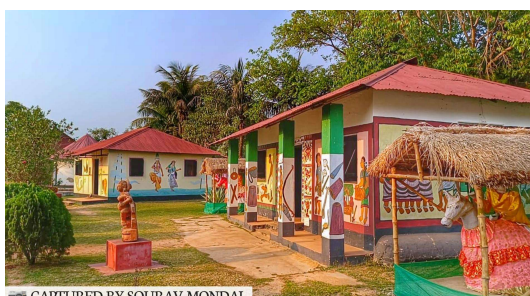


In Srijani Shilpagram we can see nine museums in the shape of nine traditional huts of states like Assam , Bihar, Jharkhand, Tripura, Manipur, Odisha , Sikkim, West Bengal and the union territory of Andaman and Nicobar Island .

Srijani Shilpagram was established to further enhance the cultural canvas of Shantiniketan. Traditional architectural characteristics and styles are incorporated into the hut. These huts depict the traditional, architectural features and designs of those nine states. Here we also find a small market, selling a lot of handmade things. These huts are not only

aesthetic recreations but also function as live workshops where artists display their skills. There is an accurate portrayal of each state's culture and historical background within each cottage. Their paintings convey deep meanings such as gender discrimination , position of men and women in the society and patriarchal influence of that time. It also exposes the division of profession in the society between men and women.

We are introduced to the dances of different states like Chou dance . And we also notice that the masks used in Chou dance preserved in a hut. One of the major attraction in Santiniketan that touches our mind is the 'Baul song' which is very peaceful and relaxing. Some people have taken up this 'Baul song' as their occupation. It diverts our mind and gives a delightful feeling to the atmosphere and makes it pleasant. There are a market also. There are few stalls selling saris, other clothes and bags adorned with Kantha stitch, a popular embroidery style, accessories and ornaments, simple furniture made of wood or terracotta; jute bags and mats, clay puppets and bags, wallets, and boxes with batik on leather, a popular art form in Shantiniketan.







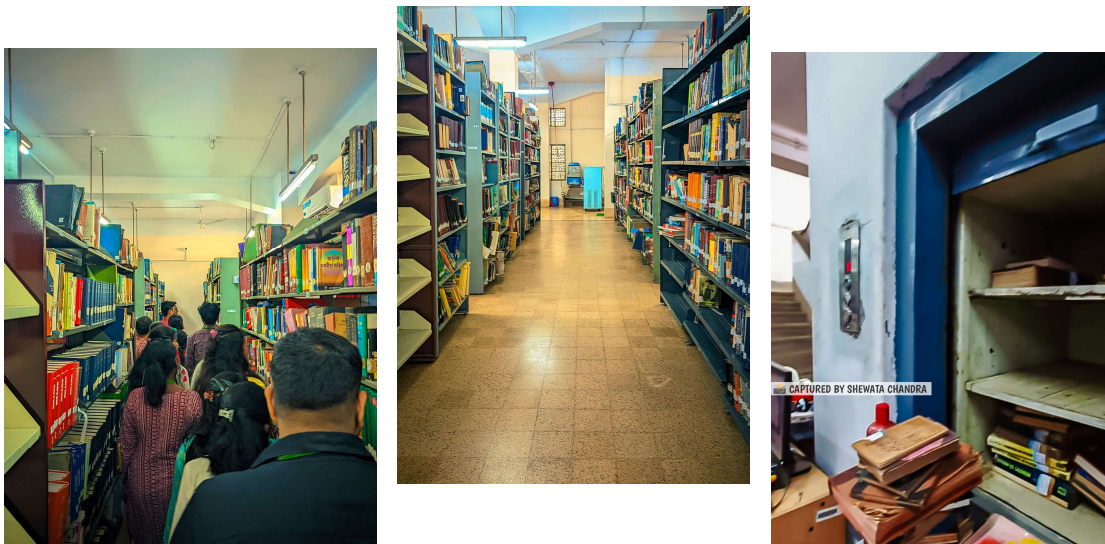
❖ RABINDRA BHABAN MUSEUM



It was on 15 March when we explored Rabindra Bhaban and the Visva-Bharati Museum as well. While visiting the Rabindra Bhaban Museum we once again observe that how truthful it is to call Rabindranath a multi talented person. He was an outstanding poet, playwright, dramatist, composer, philosopher, social reformer and a talented painter. At the museum, where many items that Tagore had used in his daily life are displayed, we notice how universally he was celebrated and honored by observing the countless gifts he received. This museum also displays photograph collections,

statues, and the Nobel Peace Prize. There are many valuable items from places like Rome, China, Japan, England, Odisha, etc., all honoring Tagore. Items such as painting brushes, books, color palettes, paints, and utensils used by Rabindranath Tagore are kept there, along with many of his own books, handwritten essay notebooks, and, above all, Tagore's "Gitanjali."

❖ CENTRAL LIBRARY



The Library is a place that helps to enlighten the lives of thousands of students. We also visited the central library, which houses a vast collection of books. It feels like a boundless sea of books. While visiting the central library we have seen how the NTA-qualified students are studying there for hours. The environment is surrounded by nature and is very peaceful and congenial that it provides energy and optimism to the students to reach their goals.

While visiting the Central Library, we observed a unique concept, which is the book lift. It helps students move many books together to the upper floor or ground floor. There are many collections of rare books and theses. Apart from this, there are many facilities for differently abled people so that they can be self dependent using the technique like 'Braille' (it is a system of raised dots that can be read with the fingers, used by people who are blind). There are braille keyboards and different printing machines for their use. This is a glimpse of our endeavors toward "Exclusive Education

❖ SONAJHURI HAAT



One of the main attractions of Santiniketan is the "Sanibarar Haat" or "Sonajhuri Haat". The haat is held on every Saturday at Sonajhuri. This market contains all the things from clothes to ornaments, food items to home decor. The haat is placed amidst the salbon, under the open sky. The baul songs and tribal dances also enthrall us at the same time. All these illustrate our rich culture.



CULTURAL ACTIVITIES



At the end of the day, we returned to Rituranga Lodge. After freshening up, we all got into a cultural frenzy. On the rooftop, an anonymous Baul started singing folk songs like 'Milon Hobe Kotodine', 'Tomay Hrid Majhare Rakhbo', 'Gacher Pata Taka Keno Hoy Na', and many more. In the end, we started singing and dancing as well. That moonlit evening of March 14 will be etched in our memory forever.

INFLUENCE OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE IN SANTINIKETAN

In Santiniketan, Rabindranath Tagore's impact can be found everywhere and in everything we turn to. We can understand how much his influence is here. He has made a significant contribution in shaping Santiniketan and its educational aspects. His fresh ideas of education have given Santiniketan a quality education system which has become a tradition and culture of the place. He showed us how art is connected with our everyday lives. Art has an essential influence on education, culture, and philosophy of everybody's life. Art plays a vital role in our study, learning, evoking our senses, creative mind, and emotions. It elaborates our creative mindset and helps us generate fresh and new ideas. It increases our thinking abilities and problem-solving skills. All these have led the education system of Santiniketan to another level. This place holds the poet's history and every activity of Rabindranath Tagore in the minds of every Bengali. When touring the place, one feels that Kabiguru is still present in every corner of Santiniketan.



M. Sardar

INFLUENCE OF GAUTAM BUDDHA



We can see a significant influence of Gautam Buddha in Santiniketan. Many statues, paintings, and sculptures of Gautam Buddha can be found in places like Srijani Silpa Gram, Ashrams and museums. This reflects the deep impact of Buddha and his teachings on the shaping of Visva-Bharati's education system, art, and its people. Discipline, a core principle of Buddha's teachings, is evident in the teachings of Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan. Gautam Buddha began his teachings under the Bodhi tree, spreading his enlightenment teachings while staying closely connected to the natural world. In Santiniketan, studying under trees is a crucial aspect of their education culture,

representing the heart of their teachings and the beauty of their education system. It's believed that Rabindranath Tagore followed Buddha's invaluable path of teaching, leading towards a closer connection with the natural world.

EDUCATION SYSTEM AND ENVIRONMENT

In Shantiniketan, the natural environment and education system can touch anyone's heart as a element of self purification. Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore tried to create a new environment of learning under the shade of trees but not in the artificial classroom, to implement this concept into reality and fulfill the purpose of real education, Visva Bharati University was established in 1921 . The entire area spreaded up to 1,128.895 acres, which was decorated by many types of trees, cultural huts, and folk culture of different states and union territories of India. All the students visited the university campus including the library and other educational departments, though all the professors and members of the cultural committee welcomed and treated students with positive affection. A big banyan tree attracted everybody's attention by standing as a strong component of nature for two hundred years, and some professors considered it as the tree that has been pictured in "Sahaj Path" book.

These characteristics have made Visva Bharati a well known environment and heritage site to the students, following its immense prosperity UNESCO has already declared it as a "World Heritage Site."

That is why, it can be said that Shantiniketan is the land where the natural environment and the creation of "Bengal's Pride" Rabindranath Tagore speak far more than anything else.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS AND PROTECTING NATURE

For decades, capitalists, corporates, and brokers have devastated the land by uprooting trees and woods to make way for hotels and resorts. Santiniketan, known for its green environment with many trees and plants, has also been impacted by this trend. According to locals, many trees and woods have been uprooted in recent years. It is believed that the Shona Jhuri forest is already close to being destroyed and may disappear completely within the next ten years. Many areas have had trees cut down to make space for building hotels, resorts, and other developments. Trees and wooded areas are essential parts of Santiniketan's identity which is not only about the university Visva-Bharati and the poet Rabindranath Tagore, but also its natural beauty. Locals argue that the special character of Santiniketan comes from the beauty and shade provided by its trees. They fear that if the trees continue to be cut down, Santiniketan will lose its unique charm and beauty. Saving trees means saving Santiniketan. Many protests have already happened against deforestation in the area. Rabindranath Tagore once said, "*Trees are Earth's endless effort to speak to the listening heaven.*" This highlights how trees communicate with the universe, emphasizing why it's crucial to protect them.

This report is the result of our collaborative effort, sharing our experiences, memories, emotions, thoughts, and photographs we took throughout our journey to Santiniketan. Here are the names of the participants who joined the tour:

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Sathi Sardar | 8. Shewata Chandra |
| 2. Neha Ghosh | 9. Maruf Sardar |
| 3. Soujannya Koley | 10. Arka Bhattacharya |
| 4. Ishani Bose | 11. Trisha Mal |
| 5. Sayani Mondal | 12. Sourav Mondal |
| 6. Shreya Bodhak | 13. Shaswata Pal |
| 7. Lipika Koley | 14. Soumalya Ghosh |

-
1. **Citation:** Beckett, S. (1953). Waiting for Godot. Grove Press.