
Santiniketan (India) No 1375

1 Basic information

Official name as proposed by the State Party

Santiniketan

Location

West Bengal
District of Birbhum
India

Brief description

Established in rural West Bengal in 1901 by the renowned poet and philosopher, Rabindranath Tagore, Santiniketan was a residential school and centre for art based on ancient Indian traditions and on a vision of the unity of humanity transcending religious and cultural boundaries. The tangible and intangible aspects of Santiniketan embody ideals of internationalism that sought local, Asian and western sources of inspiration. A 'world university' was established at Santiniketan in 1921, recognising the unity of humanity or "Visva Bharati". Distinct from the prevailing British colonial architectural orientations of the early 20th century and of European modernism, Santiniketan represents orientations toward a pan-Asian modernity, drawing on ancient, medieval and folk traditions from across the region.

Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *site*.

Included in the Tentative List

20 January 2010

Background

This is a new nomination. A previous nomination for Santiniketan was submitted in 2010 but was withdrawn before consideration by the World Heritage Committee. The current nomination is substantially revised, including a new justification for Outstanding Universal Value and changed delineation to the boundary and buffer zone.

Consultations and technical evaluation mission

Desk reviews have been provided by ICOMOS International Scientific Committees, members and independent experts.

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the nominated property from 24 to 28 October 2021.

Additional information received by ICOMOS

A letter was sent to the State Party on 24 September 2021 requesting further information about the comparative analysis, boundaries, legal protection, development pressures, community involvement and management system.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 1 November 2021.

An Interim Report was provided to the State Party on 20 December 2021 summarising the issues identified by the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel.

Further information was requested in the Interim Report including: comparative analysis, evidence of cultural interchange, legal protection, inventory and documentation, buffer zone, campus master plan and heritage impact assessment.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 28 February 2022.

All additional information received has been incorporated into the relevant sections of this evaluation report.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

9 March 2022

2 Description of the nominated property

Note: The nomination dossier and additional information contain detailed descriptions of this property, its history and its state of conservation. Due to limitations on the length of evaluation reports, this report provides only a short summary of the most relevant aspects.

Description and history

Santiniketan is situated in a rural location in West Bengal, and is associated with the work and philosophies of Rabindranath Tagore, a world-famous poet, artist, musician and philosopher, and a recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature (1913). The site was established as an ashram and given its name in 1863 by Tagore's father, Debendranath Tagore. In 1901, Rabindranath Tagore began its transformation to a residential school and centre for art, based on the ancient Indian tradition of *gurukul*. His vision was oriented at the unity of humanity, or "Visva Bharati".

Tagore was able to attract prominent scholars and educators to Santiniketan and the school grew both in the number of pupils and breadth of its curriculum, ultimately embracing the philosophies of many cultures and religions, as well as modern languages and western sciences. Training in carpentry, weaving and book-binding was included, along with academic disciplines, as well as literature readings and communal singing. In 1919, Nandalal Bose arrived at Santiniketan to teach art and under his supervision, Kala-Bhavana grew as an Art Department. In subsequent years, teachers from Europe and the West were invited to teach at Kala-Bhavana and

western art techniques were introduced. In 1934 the Department of Music or Sangit-Bhavana moved into its own premises.

Tagore's philosophies developed in the direction of a universal humanism that compelled him to travel abroad. These influences gradually opened Santiniketan to international horizons, leading to the foundation of Visva-Bharati or 'World University' ('where the world would form a single nest') in 1921. Santiniketan developed into a pan-Indian University, due to the diversity of its teachers and its subjects. The national profile sought for Visva-Bharati by Tagore was enriched by foreign scholars.

Tagore died in 1941, and his son Rathindranath took over, and established the Rabindra-Bhavana museum. In 1951 the Parliament of India passed the Visva-Bharati Act, which confirmed its national importance, and established regulations for its perpetuation and functioning.

The nominated property has an area of 36 ha, and is enclosed by a single buffer zone of 537.73 ha. The buffer zone corresponds to the boundary of the area under the ownership of Visva-Bharati. The Visva-Bharati campus extends throughout the proposed buffer zone, and includes the site of Sriniketan, which was introduced by Tagore in 1922 to experiment with rural reconstruction and community building. The nominated property and buffer zone area are under the control of the Visva-Bharati University according to the Visva-Bharati Act (1951).

Santiniketan today is a large, low-density built-up area where multi-functional buildings of different sizes and architectural characters are set within landscaped complexes. Many of the key buildings were built by Surendranath Kar who, along with Nandalal Bose, travelled with Tagore.

The diversity in building designs and materials, together with artworks, plantings, water bodies and landscape modifications have created a distinctive built environment through experimentation with a number of traditional and modern architectural models. There are examples of low-level reinforced concrete buildings, thatched cottages, earthen huts and brick or concrete houses. Artworks include sculptures, murals and elements within buildings such as furniture, panelling and decorative pillars. All educational structures and residential buildings are integrated within specifically designed landscapes intended to create a favourable environment for students to learn and to experience nature. Both local vegetation and exotic trees and plants have been used. Many of the lectures and other educational programs were held outdoors or in open-sided pavilions.

The nominated area is comprised of three main areas: the Ashrama or Hermitage, the residential quarters or Uttarayan, and the area with Kala-Bhavana and Sangit-Bhavana, the Schools for Art and Music.

The Ashrama or Hermitage is the earliest part of Santiniketan, established by Debendranath Tagore, and is

comprised mostly of residential buildings. Santiniketan Griha (built between 1858-1863) is the earliest residential building; and a small platform flanked by chhatim trees marks the spot where the Maharishi stopped to meditate, seen as the starting point for what became Santiniketan. Other buildings include various hostels, library, office, educational buildings, pavilions, and residences for the Tagore family.

The Uttarayan area was established to the north of the Ashrama from 1919 with the construction of two mud brick buildings (one of which, Konark, still stands), followed by five additional houses for Rabindranath Tagore. These show various experiments with the thermal performance of mud buildings. Included here is the three-storey residence known as Udayan, used by Tagore to receive visitors. It demonstrates local traditions and elements of western modernism. The elevated pavilion/house known as Udichi was the last house built for Tagore, and was designed to allow enjoyment of the environment. In the 1920s, the gardens of Uttarayan were designed by Tagore's son Rathindranath, a horticulturist who imported exotic plants from Africa and Latin America.

The third area is located to the west of Uttarayan and was established in 1919 for the Kala-Bhavana (Art School), and later the Sangit-Bhavana (Music School) (1934). The design of the buildings, murals and landscaping of the Art School was influenced by Nandalal Bose, a noted painter of the Bengal School of Art who came to Santiniketan as a teacher.

Historically, the establishment of Santiniketan is placed within the context of the Partition of Bengal and the Swadeshi Movement, part of the Indian freedom struggle. Set within the experiences of colonialism, Santiniketan consciously expressed the quest for indigenous forms of modernity, and Tagore's orientation to a universalism through local diversity and internationalism. Key historical figures in the establishment of Indian independence have associations with Tagore and Santiniketan – notably Mahatma Gandhi, who visited Santiniketan for several periods and referred to Tagore as *Gurudev* (teacher), as well as Nehru and Indira Gandhi (who was a student at Santiniketan). Tagore's composition *Jana Gana Mana* was adopted as India's national anthem in 1947.

Santiniketan is also situated in relation to global and local movements in art and architecture. It was consciously international in its outlook, with aesthetic and philosophical influences from India, China, Japan, Bali and Myanmar, as well as Islamic architecture and Art Deco. The development of Santiniketan drew from ancient, medieval and folk traditions from across the Asian region.

Today, Visva-Bharati has over a thousand students. Approximately a third of these live on the campus. While the University has adopted a more subject-based approach to academic curricula over time, the school has retained much of its traditional character, reflecting Tagore's ideals.

State of conservation

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the nominated property is well maintained and the state of conservation is satisfactory. A condition survey was completed in 2009, and has been used as a basis for planning and prioritising conservation work. ICOMOS commends the State Party for the improved state of conservation of the property that has been achieved since the submission of the previous nomination.

Factors affecting the nominated property

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the main factors affecting the nominated property are development pressures (particularly in the buffer zone and wider setting), construction of new roads, visitor management pressures, and deterioration of physical materials. The management plan provides an overview of the pressures affecting the property, and a condition report on the key elements.

Two proposed developments within the campus were identified in the management plan as posing potentially detrimental impacts on the nominated property. However, in the additional information provided in November 2021, the State Party reported that these have been cancelled by Visva-Bharati, and that the Vice-Chancellor has confirmed that no building additions will be approved within the nominated property.

There are also potential impacts due to the construction of bypass roads that cross through parts of the property and the buffer zone. In the additional information provided in November 2021, the State Party acknowledged these impacts, and explained that the bypass roads help to divert traffic away from the campus and alleviate congestion near the Ashram area.

The nominated property is dependent on the maintenance of local knowledge and skills. For example, many building materials need to be regularly replaced, using the same materials and techniques; and the maintenance of landscape attributes requires regular gardening and occasional replacement of plants, retaining their character. The nominated property is vulnerable to extreme weather events and earthquakes; and security has been identified as a potential factor affecting the nominated property due to the possible damage from vandalism and political unrest.

ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation is satisfactory, although some materials and elements are dependent on continued regular maintenance. The main factors affecting the nominated property are development pressures in the property, the buffer zone and in the wider setting, and deterioration of the physical materials of the buildings, landscape elements and artworks.

3 Proposed justification for inscription

Proposed justification

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- Based on the utopian and internationalist ideals of its founder Rabindranath Tagore, Santiniketan constitutes an exceptional testimony to ideas of progressive education.
- The architecture and landscape of Santiniketan are a study of interchange between local and international influences, including Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic traditions, and experimentation in construction, materials and design.
- The design of buildings, furniture, artworks and landscape is a demonstration of an Asian avant-garde of the early 20th century.
- The architecture of Santiniketan was consciously distinct from the British colonial architecture of India, reviving Indian and local construction and embracing building forms from other Asian cultures.
- Set within the historical context of colonial partition and the Indian freedom movement, Santiniketan represents an exceptional voice from within a colonised nation for indigenous forms of modernity.
- Santiniketan is directly and tangibly associated with the life, works and vision of Rabindranath Tagore and his contemporaries of the Bengal School of Art, and crystallises their ideas of humanism, inclusive internationalism and a pan-Asian modernism.

Based on the nomination dossier and the additional information provided by the State Party, the key attributes of the nominated property are the elements that express the vision of Tagore and his contemporaries including the thirty-six identified heritage buildings (including some interior elements); murals, sculptures and artworks; landscape elements, lake and gardens; and pavilions and platforms. The continuing traditions of intangible cultural heritage at Santiniketan are also attributes, such as seasonal festivals, and the continuing aspects of Tagore's educational philosophies.

Comparative analysis

The comparative analysis has been developed around the focus on 20th century architectural design movements and educational institutions on the World Heritage List and Tentative Lists worldwide, as well as other properties.

The comparative analysis demonstrates that there are relatively few World Heritage properties recognised specifically for their associations with educational institutions. These include: the Central University City Campus of the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* (UNAM) (Mexico 2007, criteria (i), (ii) and (iv)); Ciudad Universitaria de Caracas (Venezuela, 2000, criteria (i) and (iv)); University and Historic Precinct of Alcalá de Henares (Spain, 1998, criteria (ii), (iv) and (vi)); Monticello and the University of Virginia in Charlottesville

(United States of America, 1987, criteria (i), (iv) and (vi)); Bauhaus University of Weimar, part of the Bauhaus and its Sites in Weimar, Dessau and Bernau (Germany, 1996 and 2017, criteria (ii), (iv) and (vi)); Archaeological Site of Nalanda Mahavihara at Nalanda, Bihar (India, 2016, criteria (iv) and (vi)), the site of the most ancient university in the Indian subcontinent; and the University of Mumbai, part of the Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai (India, 2018, criteria (ii) and (iv)). The State Party has also provided a comparison with the 19th century New Lanark (United Kingdom, 2001, criteria (ii), (iv) and (vi)) on the basis of its underlying philosophy of progressive education and social reform.

Universities included in global Tentative Lists have also been included in the comparative analysis, including: National Schools of Art, Cubanacán (Cuba, proposed on the basis of criteria (i), (ii), (iii), (iv) and (v)); Francke Foundation Buildings (Germany, proposed on the basis of criteria (iii), (iv) and (vi)); Degania and Nahalal (Israel, proposed on the basis of criteria (v) and (vi)); Oak Grove School (India, withdrawn from the Tentative List, previously proposed on the basis of criteria (ii) and (iv)); The Remains of the Vikramshila Ancient University, Silk Roads of India (India, proposed on the basis of criteria (ii), (iii) and (vi)). A few additional sites are also included that are not on the World Heritage List or Tentative Lists, including: Dartington Hall Trust (United Kingdom) which was based on the teachings of Tagore; École des Beaux-Arts (France); Glasgow School of Art (United Kingdom); and Auroville (India), a township established on the basis of the work of renowned Indian philosopher Sri Aurobindo in collaboration with Mirra Alfassa.

Although further examples could be included, such as the University of Coimbra – Alta and Sofia (Portugal, 2013, criteria (ii), (iv) and (vi)), ICOMOS considers that these comparisons drawn from the World Heritage List and Tentative Lists are limited in their ability to place Santiniketan in its comparative context due to the wide span of historical periods and cultural contexts.

The State Party also provided information on other educational institutions in India established in the 20th century. These include: Banaras Hindu University, established in 1916 and oriented at teaching of Hinduism and Sanskrit literature; Sevagram, established by Mahatma Gandhi in 1936 (influenced by Santiniketan), and Sabarmati Ashram, also associated with Gandhi; and Kalakshetra, established in 1936. In Additional Information provided in February 2022, the State Party described the influences of Santiniketan's philosophies on the Theosophical Society campuses at Adyar, Varanasi and Madanapalli; Anand Bhawan, the Nehru family home in Allahabad; and Sri Palee in Sri Lanka, where Tagore laid the foundation stone in 1934. What emerges from this information is an understanding of the intensity of exchanges in the region (particularly India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh) between Tagore and his contemporaries, and their influences on emerging institutions for culture and education.

The comparative analysis also contrasts Santiniketan with global developments in architecture and design in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The justification for criterion (ii) relies in part on a comparative assessment of architectural interchange and innovation, within the context of the Asian region and of tensions between the colonial and the local in West Bengal. For this reason, the State Party has briefly discussed examples of modernism and 20th century architecture recognised in the World Heritage List. These are quite diverse and include: Bauhaus and its Sites in Weimar, Dessau and Bernau (Germany, 1996 and 2017, criteria (ii), (iv) and (vi)); Luis Barragán House and Studio (Mexico, 2004, criteria (i) and (ii)); Stoclet House (Belgium, 2009, criteria (i) and (ii)); Works of Antoni Gaudí (Spain, 1984 and 2005, criteria (i), (ii) and (iv)); The 20th-Century Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright (United States of America, 2019, criterion (ii)); and The Architectural Work of Le Corbusier, an Outstanding Contribution to the Modern Movement (Argentina, Belgium, France, Germany, India, Japan, Switzerland, 2016, criteria (i), (ii) and (vi)). There are also some interesting parallels drawn in the comparative analysis such as an exhibition of Bauhaus in Kolkata organised by Tagore.

ICOMOS notes that the State Party has provided a comparative analysis that is both locally and globally framed. The comparative analysis identifies some areas of commonality and difference between the nominated property and others, and highlights gaps in relation to Asian expressions of modernism. ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis establishes the basis for consideration of the Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property as an embodiment of the local and internationalist philosophies that were deployed in the development of Santiniketan by Tagore and others. This search for modernity looked beyond colonial templates to an experimentation with internationalism, pan-Asian cultural exchange and education during this period.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage List.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (ii) and (vi).

Criterion (ii): exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the architecture, furniture, artworks and landscape of Santiniketan are tangible demonstrations of an Asian avant-garde of the early 20th century. Tagore and his associates travelled widely and drew inspirations from many sources. The interchange of traditions is demonstrated in the strands of local and Asian regional cultural influences, including Japanese and Chinese art and architecture, as well as Art Deco, creating a new design language and an interest in a pan-Asian aesthetic.

Additional Information received in February 2022 explains that this was an aspect of the search for an architectural identity in the late colonial period in India and neighbouring countries. Experimentation with both local and other Asian building traditions and educational philosophies was facilitated by interpersonal networks and knowledge flows, and by collaborations with key thinkers inside and beyond the region.

In response to a request for additional information, the State Party explained that there were myriad intellectual and stylistic elements and outcomes which are broadly defined as the Asian avant-garde. A modernism rooted in traditional values, local techniques and a search for the universal is manifested in different ways throughout the nominated property, including the use of vernacular materials and traditions, as well as expressions drawn from multiple faiths.

The State Party has explained that the influences of Santiniketan on other places can be seen in the role of art and architecture in mediating between the western world and local cultures during this period in other parts of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The links between Tagore and various global leaders in movements for progressive education in Asia and Europe is also an indicator of the qualities of interchange.

ICOMOS considers that while Santiniketan was clearly shaped by many cultural influences, the arguments offered by the State Party concerning the influences of its architecture on other places, or on the development of an Asian avant-garde or Indian modernism, are not strongly substantiated. It was the ideas of Tagore and his contemporaries as expressed in and throughout Santiniketan that have been influential, rather than the architecture. ICOMOS considers that the justification is more compelling in relation to criterion (iv), and in combination with criterion (vi).

Criterion (vi): be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance. (The Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria);

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that it tangibly demonstrates the humanist ideology of Rabindranath Tagore, a key figure in early Indian Modernism. Santiniketan was developed as a counterpoint to colonial models, imbued with both Indian cultural ideals, humanism and internationalism. Set purposefully in a rural environment, the educational philosophy, architecture, artwork and landscape were intentionally inter-related elements.

ICOMOS considers that through the work of Rabindranath Tagore, Santiniketan represents an unusual and important nexus between artistic and political movements significant in the region, and a focus on the cultures of Asia. The buildings and works of art, along with the

philosophy of learning implemented at Santiniketan, tangibly represent the spiritual and intellectual ideals of Tagore. The model of the 'living' educational institution, and the connections to seasonal and cultural cycles in its rural setting are significant in relation to the justification for this criterion. Much of the material presented in the justification for criterion (vi) demonstrates the wider influence of Santiniketan through the ideas that it conveyed, particularly in the south Asian region.

Criterion (iv): be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;

While not initially nominated according to criterion (iv), ICOMOS considers that it would be useful to examine whether Santiniketan represents in an outstanding way the emergence of post-colonial centres of cultural, philosophical and spiritual exploration in the early 20th century in Asia.

In suggesting the relevance of criterion (iv) ICOMOS is not arguing that the nominated property be placed within an architectural typology, but instead sees this property as one where there has been a purposeful physical manifestation of influential ideas and educational philosophies (as described in the justification for criterion (vi)). Santiniketan arose in a particularly significant and dynamic period of south Asia's history that included experimentation with ideas, forms and materials. It was purposefully located within a rural environment away from colonial templates, and drew inspiration from local traditions as well as other cultures, reflecting the universalism of Tagore's philosophy. ICOMOS considers that the Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property is best found in the inseparable interaction between criteria (iv) and (vi).

ICOMOS considers that criteria (iv) and (vi) are demonstrated.

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

The nominated property contains thirty-six buildings and other attributes (landscape elements, plantings, sculptures, artworks) which tangibly demonstrate the development of Santiniketan, its architectural diversity, and its foundational philosophies.

ICOMOS considers that all the elements needed to demonstrate the proposed Outstanding Universal Value are included in the property boundary. As a functioning educational campus, some modifications have been made, including the installation of new artworks, but these seem to be compatible with the ethos of the educational institution. There are some development pressures of concern discussed below that could impact on the integrity of the nominated property.

Authenticity

The authenticity of the nominated property is based on the ability of its buildings, art, landscape and planning to demonstrate the ideals underlying the establishment of Santiniketan as an educational institution, and as an example of cultural interchange. The thirty-six identified buildings in the nominated property retain their form and design, layout and functions. Likewise the layout of the landscape, and the artworks inside and outside the buildings have been maintained in their original form and location.

The State Party points to the continuing use of traditional materials and methods in the conservation and maintenance of several of the structures and murals. The importance of the awareness and maintenance of the spirit of the place throughout the landscape itself is also emphasised by the State Party.

ICOMOS considers that the authenticity of the nominated property is demonstrated although it is potentially vulnerable due to the deterioration of traditional and other materials and changing uses. The authenticity of the spirit and feeling of Santiniketan are particularly vulnerable to educational and social changes.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity of the nominated property have been met, although both are potentially vulnerable and require the support of an effective management system.

Boundaries

As per 2021, there are approximately 4,619 inhabitants within the nominated property, 2,795 in the buffer zone, and 7,414 in total.

The property boundary encloses the three areas that accord with the establishment of Santiniketan by Rabindranath Tagore, and the evolution of the residential school during his lifetime. The boundary therefore contains all the areas, buildings and other features necessary to express the proposed Outstanding Universal Value.

The property is enclosed by a single buffer zone. It accords with the boundary of the Visva-Bharati campus, and the area covered by the Visva-Bharati Act of 1951. In administrative terms, the clarity of the ownership and legal protection of the buffer zone is advantageous to the establishment of an effective management system. ICOMOS notes that parts of the buffer zone are relatively narrow, leaving the nominated area vulnerable to development pressures. In additional information provided in February 2022, the State Party emphasises that sufficient protection is in place for the buffer zone and wider setting through the operation of the State level Apex Advisory Committee, and cooperation between Visva-Bharati and relevant state and local authorities.

In addition to the delineation and protection of the property and its buffer zone, the State Party acknowledges the importance of the wider setting to the sense of place for

Santiniketan. In addition to the provisions of the Visva-Bharati Act, the wider area is also a Protected Area of 2,037 ha established by the West Bengal Apex Advisory Committee in 2014.

Evaluation of the proposed justification for inscription

In summary, ICOMOS considers that criterion (ii) is not met, but that the Outstanding Universal Value of the property is demonstrated through the interaction of criteria (iv) and (vi). The conditions of integrity and authenticity of the nominated property have been met, although they could be vulnerable.

4 Conservation measures and monitoring

Documentation

The nomination dossier maps and describes thirty-six buildings, a lake and five sculptures within the property that demonstrate the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of Santiniketan. Detailed photographs were submitted with the nomination dossier, and architectural drawings have been made for the identified heritage buildings. Additional information provided in February 2022 included an inventory of twenty-one landscape elements/areas, eighteen sculptures, thirty-four murals, five platforms/pavilions and four building interiors.

Santiniketan has on-site museums, including the Rabindra-Bhavana established by Rathindranath Tagore following the death of Rabindranath Tagore. It has a collection of documents associated with Tagore's life.

The management plan sets out the requirements for ongoing documentation, recording and information management. It is acknowledged that the documentation of the tangible aspects needs to be improved, and standards and techniques are outlined including: preparation of a completed and detailed base map; a comprehensive documentation of architectural elements (including significant interior features); and comprehensive fabric mapping. Recommendations for periodic documentation are also made. ICOMOS considers that an overall inventory would be a useful improvement to underpin the implementation of the management system, including fully integrated documentation and monitoring of buildings, landscape elements, artworks and intangible heritage elements of the nominated property.

Conservation measures

Santiniketan is the subject of regular maintenance by the Visva-Bharati grounds staff and Visva-Bharati Engineering Department. Building conservation projects are implemented by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI); and the murals, sculptures and other artworks are monitored and restored by the Kala-Bhavana within Visva-Bharati. Various specialist agencies cooperate on conservation projects, such as the ASI, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), and the National Research Lab for Conservation of Cultural

Property (NRLCCP). The involvement of these agencies has been facilitated by an assessment by a Presidential High Level Committee (2006) and a report by the Ministry of Culture (2009).

While ICOMOS observes that effective coordination has been established to plan and conduct needed conservation projects, it would be desirable to develop conservation plans and policies for each of the identified tangible attributes.

Monitoring

The Heritage Committee of Visva-Bharati oversees maintenance and monitoring of the nominated property. The nomination dossier outlines a programme according to different objectives such as conservation, visitor management, buffer zone management, risk management and so on. Monitoring indicators are provided for buildings, landscape elements, artworks and the buffer zone. The management plan outlines information management systems for the information collected.

ICOMOS considers that the indicators are adequate, but is uncertain about the degree to which this system of monitoring is in operation. Monitoring should be developed to regularly examine the state of conservation and identify changes at an early stage, particularly for aspects that are vulnerable or exposed to pressures.

ICOMOS considers that it would be advisable that the monitoring system be fully implemented, ensuring that all attributes of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value are included, and that it is adapted for easy integration of monitoring outcomes into the Periodic Reporting questionnaire.

5 Protection and management

Legal protection

The entire property and its buffer zone are owned by Visva-Bharati, an institution of national importance established by a specific act of the Indian Parliament. Protection of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property relies on the provisions of the Visva-Bharati Act of 1951. This is a national law established to continue the ideals of Rabindranath Tagore. A 2005 judgement of the Supreme Court of India upheld the protection of Santiniketan by prohibiting incompatible development in the area. A range of State land management laws apply to the wider setting.

Visva-Bharati has therefore protected the character of Santiniketan in a manner which the management plan describes as protection through an inherent respect for tradition.

In the nomination dossier and management plan, the State Party acknowledges that “there is, at present, no statutory protective designation of the property as a legally notified

heritage zone and neither is any structure on the property protected under Central or State legislation as a monument/heritage building”. The management plan also states that the Visva-Bharati Act’s provisions may not be adequate to protect the tangible aspects of the property without additional legislative and statutory provisions. However, in the additional information provided in November 2021 and in February 2022, the State Party clarified these statements regarding legal protection, emphasising that because the Visva-Bharati Act is enacted at the national level, the property and its buffer zone is subject to the highest level of protection. According to the State Party, because Visva-Bharati is an ‘Institution of National Importance’, the lack of heritage designation should not to be interpreted as an absence of protective designation. The State Party considers that the Visva-Bharati is cognizant of the protection of the entire campus that includes the nominated property and the buffer zone and has adequate protective and legal framework to ensure this through the responsibilities and functions of the Heritage Committee.

In support of these arguments, the State Party points to the listing by Visva-Bharati of thirty-six individual buildings and structures as heritage as per its official estate map, and the establishment of the Heritage Committee to review, monitor and ensure their protection and conservation. The State Party also considers that the involvement of the Archaeological Survey of India in the Heritage Committee, the responsibilities of the Ministries for Education and Culture, and the roles assigned to the President of India and the Prime Minister of India in the Visva-Bharati Act emphasise the national importance placed on the protection of the nominated property.

ICOMOS acknowledges the significance of the national legal framework of Visva-Bharati. ICOMOS notes that Visva-Bharati’s heritage list is currently focused on the historic buildings, rather than on the potential Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property (and the full range of potential attributes that also include landscapes, artworks, pavilions and so on). ICOMOS agrees that the Visva-Bharati Heritage Committee is essential to the effectiveness of the legal protection and management system. This could be further strengthened through the development of guidelines for the Heritage Committee’s responsibilities.

Management system

According to the additional information received from the State Party in November 2021, Visva-Bharati has a Heritage Committee chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. It reviews all development proposals prior to their approval, although as far as ICOMOS can discern, there are limited formal processes of Heritage Impact Assessment in place. In June 2019, it was agreed to further expand the scope of the Heritage Committee to include approval of a list of heritage items of Visva-Bharati, and to frame policies for their conservation.

Regarding Heritage Impact Assessment processes, additional information received in February 2022 explains

that the Visva-Bharati Campus Committee and Building Committee are given roles in assessing the impacts of new actions on the heritage buildings within the campus, a role also entrusted to the Heritage Committee. A detailed description of the Heritage Impact Assessment processes has not been provided. ICOMOS recommends that the Heritage Committee be tasked with overseeing these processes, and that the assessments are prepared in a written format according to the guidance materials prepared by the Advisory Bodies. Given that this is part of the expected standards for World Heritage properties, ICOMOS considers that this is an aspect of the management system which requires further work.

Management of the wider setting of Santiniketan is coordinated by the Apex Advisory Committee of the Government of West Bengal. There are established protocols with the Santiniketan Sriniketan Development Authority (SSDA), Government of West Bengal, Visva-Bharati, and municipal authorities to coordinate on issues such as transportation, roads, water supply and waste management. The Apex Advisory Committee is chaired by the Chief Secretary of the Government of West Bengal, and is responsible for a regional planning and development framework, including the protection of Santiniketan from adverse impacts of development in the wider area.

In 2009, a national inter-disciplinary process involving ten national cultural institutions provided an action plan for Santiniketan. It addresses conservation works to the tangible elements, documentation and digitisation of records and artworks, and improvements to the museums. The action plan has been the basis of subsequent projects. The University Estate Department of Visva-Bharati has responsibilities for the maintenance and management of the University campus, and cooperates with specialist agencies in India in the completion of conservation projects.

The management plan contains a condition report on the property and analysis of threats. It is organised to address planning needs, interpretation and visitor management, documentation, maintenance, conservation works, research and funding. The need for disaster risk management is also briefly discussed.

The management plan is largely descriptive. It details recent and current conservation initiatives, identifies urgent treatments needed, specifies the approaches to fabric conservation and information management, and sets out some long-term objectives.

The management plan foreshadows the development of a master plan for the Visva-Bharati campus. In additional information received in February 2022 the State Party states that the campus master plan is being operationalised. It is not clear whether this means that the master plan has been written or whether it is under development. ICOMOS considers that it is an important component of the management system and recommends that once the master plan has been developed, it should

be submitted to the World Heritage Centre and Advisory Bodies for comments.

Visitor management

Santiniketan receives different types of visitors, including scholars and students, tourists and visitors interested in the teachings of Tagore. The on-site museum is open to visitors, as are the five houses in which Tagore lived in the last four decades of his life (all within the Uttarayan complex of the nominated property). These have interpretive displays and signs. The management plan has identified several intrusive impacts within the Uttarayan complex associated with visitor management such as traffic congestion, growth of hawkers, and litter. Several strategies are outlined to mitigate these issues. Visits to the Ashram area and the areas used for education are generally guided, with less signage provided.

Visva-Bharati has a policy of minimising tourism in order to maintain the educational functions of the property, although Santiniketan is promoted to tourists by the West Bengal Tourism Development Corporation. The management plan states that there is currently an absence of comprehensive visitor interpretation, although authorised guides operate within the nominated property. While accommodation is provided inside the nominated property for visiting scholars, faculty and students, there is no tourism accommodation.

Festivals at Santiniketan and Sriniketan attract large numbers of visitors, and most visits occur during a four-month period each year. Consideration of the carrying capacity is outlined in the management plan, and indicators relating to visitor pressures have been developed as part of the monitoring system.

ICOMOS considers that the interpretation and presentation to visitors could be improved through the development of a post-pandemic plan for visitation.

Community involvement

Tagore's philosophy and vision for Santiniketan included care for the local community, and the functions of the educational institution create a community within Visva-Bharati. There are therefore a number of different communities associated with Santiniketan. These include the staff, students, faculty and alumni of Visva-Bharati, as well as the residents of local villages and surrounding areas. Community members participate in daily rituals of the Ashram, musical and theatre performances, and in seasonal festivals. These activities are considered by the State Party to be directly related to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property. According to the additional information received from the State Party in November 2021, the Visva-Bharati Vision 2030 outlines strategies for community engagement and empowerment through its programmes for Rural Integration and Women and Tribal Development. Local communities are also involved in traditional maintenance activities such as the renewal of thatched roofs and mud plasters.

ICOMOS considers that there is ample evidence of the strong interests of the local and campus communities in maintaining the character, uses and integrity of Santiniketan. However, there is less clarity about the extent of direct involvement of communities in the management system itself. This is an area that could be considered further by the State Party and Visva-Bharati.

Effectiveness of the protection and management of the nominated property

In summary, ICOMOS observes that the management system is functioning satisfactorily, despite the disruptions caused by the global pandemic. It is essential that the Heritage Committee and the Apex Advisory Committee regularly meet and implement their responsibilities. The value of the maintenance regimes for the landscape and buildings cannot be over-stated; and the engagement with national and state specialist agencies for heritage conservation, such as the Archaeological Survey of India, is an important component of the management system. ICOMOS considers that the effective operation of the Heritage Committee is essential for the protection and management of the nominated property. The reliance on the Visva-Bharati Act to ensure the long-term protection of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the property could be further strengthened through improvements to the documentation and mapping of the property, development of guidelines and other tools for the Heritage Committee, and the preparation of written Heritage Impact Assessments that align with the requirements of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.

6 Conclusion

Santiniketan is strongly associated with the life and achievements of Rabindranath Tagore, an internationally recognised Nobel laureate, poet, writer and thinker, known for his humanist ideals. The nomination of Santiniketan includes parts of the Visva-Bharati campus that were developed during Tagore's life and demonstrate the continuing legacy of his experiments, educational philosophies and humanist ideology. The emergence of Santiniketan in the context of early 20th century India also reflects a push away from colonial templates, seeking local, Indian and pan-Asian cultural approaches.

The justification for Outstanding Universal Value developed by the State Party emphasises these characteristics in relation to criterion (vi). ICOMOS considers that this criterion is strongly demonstrated due to the direct associations with the influential ideas, works and vision of Rabindranath Tagore and his associates. Santiniketan represents the distillation of these ideas and a continuing legacy of a unique model of education based on both ancient Indian ideas and internationalism that is embodied in the buildings, landscape, artworks and continuing festivals and traditions. This occurred within the specific historical and geocultural context of early 20th century colonial India influencing the leaders of the Indian

Freedom Movement, (such as Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru and Indira Gandhi). The influences of the ideals and philosophies represented in Santiniketan can be traced through other early 20th century locations of cultural learning in south Asia.

The State Party also nominated the property on the basis of criterion (ii) due to the many cultural influences that Tagore and his associates introduced at Santiniketan. This argument relies on the importance of Santiniketan's architecture as a tangible expression of an Asian avant-garde, Indian Modernism and the creation of a new design language and interest in a pan-Asian aesthetic. ICOMOS considers that while it is clear that many cultural influences and ideas have been purposefully brought into the development of Santiniketan, the reliance on the qualities of the property's architecture to demonstrate these interchanges was not well demonstrated. As explained above, Santiniketan can be understood as an embodiment of Tagore's philosophies, but its architecture has not been shown to be specifically influential. This is not to suggest a diminished importance, but rather provides a basis for consideration of other cultural criteria. In its evaluation of this nomination, ICOMOS has considered the importance of the site as an ensemble (buildings, landscape and artworks in an inter-related whole) that embodies the philosophies that flowed through the establishment and development of Santiniketan. ICOMOS has found that the arguments presented are pertinent for the justification of criteria (iv) and (vi).

ICOMOS considers that the continuing educational and cultural uses of the nominated area within the Visva-Bharati campus, the high national importance of Santiniketan, and the eclectic character of the architecture, landscapes and artworks of Santiniketan that resulted from experimentation with Tagore's philosophies are well established by the materials presented by the State Party.

The importance of Rabindranath Tagore as a prominent individual in India and globally in the early 20th century is undisputed, and is not the primary issue for this nomination. ICOMOS appreciates that the State Party has recognised the necessity for World Heritage nominations to focus on the values and characteristics of the property in question, rather than as a means to celebrate the lives and achievements of famous individuals. The test for this nomination therefore lies in how the nominated property can demonstrate Tagore's ideals in discernible ways, and how this can be considered exceptional in some specific way, demonstrating one or more of the cultural criteria.

In combination with criterion (vi), criterion (iv) is considered by ICOMOS to provide a basis for the articulation of the Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property. Santiniketan was an experimental settlement in education and communal life in a rural setting, combining Indian cultural traditions with those drawn from other Asian cultures and religions. Through experimentation and internationalism, progressive

education and visual art are intertwined with architecture and landscape, transcending available colonial templates. Santiniketan represents in an outstanding way the emergence of post-colonial centres of cultural, philosophical and spiritual exploration in the early 20th century in south Asia.

Visva-Bharati has a complex responsibility to ensure the long-term conservation of the property within an operating university campus. The management system should be further strengthened, based on a clear articulation of the Outstanding Universal Value and related attributes.

Regarding the legal protection, the State Party has clarified that while none of the historic buildings, artworks or landscape elements are currently designated within heritage laws, the Visva-Bharati Act itself provides a strong basis for protection. ICOMOS considers that this is adequate, but that it also relies heavily on the high respect given to the institution by all levels of government, and the intentions of the Visva-Bharati administration to continue the legacy of Tagore. The mechanisms of the Visva-Bharati Act were not intended to address heritage management decision-making, placing a heavy reliance on the effectiveness of the Visva-Bharati Heritage Committee and the continuing cooperation of national agencies for culture and heritage, such as the Archaeological Survey of India. ICOMOS considers that these key elements of the protection and management of the property are adequate, but recommends further strengthening, possibly through the future application of national or state heritage laws, and through actions to support the operation of the Heritage Committee.

ICOMOS understands that the boundary of the nominated area has been drawn to locate the most important historic buildings, landscape elements and artworks, demonstrating the beginnings and development of Santiniketan during Tagore's lifetime. This boundary seems appropriate. ICOMOS also understands that the buffer zone has been delineated to reflect the area under the control of Visva-Bharati. This pragmatic approach is supported, although there are some sections of the buffer zone which ICOMOS considers to be too narrow, leaving the nominated area vulnerable to development pressures. While the area surrounding the buffer zone has its own forms of protection, ICOMOS recommends that the State Party continues to consider how to reduce this vulnerability.

As described above, ICOMOS notes that some conservation and restoration projects have been completed in the past decade through partnerships between Visva-Bharati and other Indian specialist agencies. This has significantly improved the state of conservation, although the submitted management plan recognises that much further work is needed. To support these projects, a much more detailed documentation of the significant elements of the nominated area is needed. The thirty-six identified historic buildings have been documented through drawings and photographs, and additional information provided by the State Party in

February 2022 included an inventory for the artworks and landscape elements. Because Santiniketan is best understood as an integrated whole, ICOMOS considers all of these to be potential attributes, underlining the importance of an integrated approach to documentation and monitoring. An inventory of the intangible aspects of Santiniketan that are considered important to the continued expression of Tagore's ideals is also recommended.

ICOMOS acknowledges the disruptions to some aspects of the management system due to the global pandemic. It is essential to re-establish these as soon as possible, including the regular processes and meetings of the Heritage Committee, the creation of a master plan for the Visva-Bharati campus, the development of conservation plans for each identified heritage element, implementation of risk management planning, Heritage Impact Assessment, and plans for visitation and interpretation.

7 Recommendations

Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that Santiniketan, India, be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criteria (iv) and (vi)**.

Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Brief synthesis

Established in rural West Bengal in 1901 by the renowned poet and philosopher, Rabindranath Tagore, Santiniketan was a residential school and centre for art based on ancient Indian traditions and on a vision of the unity of humanity transcending religious and cultural boundaries. Santiniketan is an embodiment of Rabindranath Tagore's vision and philosophy of where 'the world would form a single nest' using a combination of education, appreciation of nature, music and the arts. It represents the distillation of Rabindranath Tagore's greatest works and the continuing legacy of his model of education that reinterpreted ancient Vedic traditions with open air classrooms arranged under the canopies of trees.

Santiniketan exhibits the crystallisation of the ideas of Rabindranath Tagore and the pioneers of the Bengal School of Art. Set within the historical and geocultural context of early 20th-century colonial India, the ideas embodied in Santiniketan influenced educational and cultural institutions in south Asia. Santiniketan is therefore an outstanding example of an enclave of intellectuals, educators, artists, craftspeople and workers who collaborated and experimented with an Asian modernity based on an internationalism that drew upon ancient, medieval and folk traditions of India as well as Japanese, Chinese, Persian, Balinese, Burmese and Art Deco forms.

The built elements of Santiniketan demonstrate experimentation in construction techniques, materials and designs, a counterpoint to prevailing colonial templates. Santiniketan displays eclectic influences and a revived attention to the local in a search for a modernity based on internationalism. Santiniketan represents the physical manifestation of a utopian ideal of a community that became a crucible for intellectual and artistic ideas that were to have a decisive impact on 20th century art, literature, poetry, music and architecture in the south Asian region.

Criterion (iv): Santiniketan was an experimental settlement in education and communal life in a rural setting. The community was in many ways meant to represent a uniquely Indian example of a 'total work of art' (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) where life, learning, work and art along with the local and the global intertwined seamlessly. The built and open spaces constitute an exceptional global testimony to ideas of environmental art and educational reform where progressive education and visual art are intertwined with architecture and landscape: with the Ashram, Uttarayan, and Kala-Bhavana areas forming the prime sites of these practices in the most significant periods of development. Santiniketan represents in an outstanding way, the emergence of post-colonial centres of cultural, philosophical and spiritual exploration in the early 20th century in south Asia.

Criterion (vi): Santiniketan is directly and tangibly associated with the ideas, works and vision of Rabindranath Tagore and his associates, pioneers of the Bengal School of Art and early Indian Modernism. Against the backdrop of the Partition of Bengal, Santiniketan became the crucible for an artistic and intellectual renaissance in the early 20th century. As a cultural and intellectual incubator, it had an indelible imprint on the leaders of the Indian Freedom Movement, including Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru and Indira Gandhi. The significant influence of the ideals and philosophies represented in Santiniketan are demonstrated at other early 20th-century locations of cultural learning in south Asia. Santiniketan represents the distillation of the ideas and continuing legacy of a unique model of education recalling ancient Indian ideas as well as internationalism through a living institution, embodied in the buildings, landscape, artworks and continuing festivals and traditions. And while many of Tagore's art and literary works bear a unique association with Santiniketan, his experimentation through education with an internationalist humanist ideology finds its manifest reflection in Santiniketan.

Integrity

Part of a continuing contemporary university campus, Santiniketan is an ensemble of historic buildings, landscapes and gardens, pavilions, artworks and continuing educational and cultural traditions that together express its Outstanding Universal Value. The property is of adequate size and all the attributes needed to convey its significance are included. The property includes the

areas developed at Santiniketan during the life of Rabindranath Tagore and his family and associates, a period of experimentation and flourishing of ideas. Changes to uses, building alterations and installation of some new artworks and plantings have occurred, yet these areas and the elements within them are generally intact. The state of conservation of the property has been improved over the past decade through institutional partnerships. Santiniketan is in use as part of the Visva-Bharati campus. Spirit and feeling of the place reside in both the tangible (buildings, artworks, pavilions, gardens and landscapes) and intangible attributes (educational philosophies, building practices and cultural celebrations). The integrity is potentially vulnerable to development pressures, particularly on the periphery of the buffer zone.

Authenticity

Santiniketan meets the requirements of authenticity through its ability to convey Tagore's philosophy and global learnings. There is a high degree of continuity in the spatial layouts of the Ashram, Uttarayan, and Kala-Bhavana areas. Despite changes in uses and new artworks in some areas, the buildings and other attributes retain their eclectic forms based on experimentation with techniques and materials ranging from brick, mud, coal tar, living tree, sandstone, glass, cast iron, thatch, timber, bamboo, laterite, precast concrete, and reinforced concrete. Some of these attributes could be vulnerable through decline in traditional skills. The pavilions, gardens and platforms that were central to the education philosophies are in place and in continued use; and the murals and frescos, wooden windows and furniture retain their authenticity, depicting oriental influences and local indigenous plant species. Aesthetic development of the senses went hand in hand with intellectual development at Santiniketan. The festive celebrations that have come to form a special culture of the institution, and within the local communities use traditional Indian forms and rituals, including decoration of the site, use of flowers, alpana, chanting of Vedic hymns and blowing of conch-shells.

Management and protection requirements

The property and buffer zone are within the Visva-Bharati campus. The legal protection is provided by the Visva-Bharati Act of 1951, a national law established to continue the ideals of Rabindranath Tagore that establishes Visva-Bharati as an institution of national importance. Because there are no other heritage designations in place at the national or state level, further strengthening of the legal framework and management system is recommended.

Further documentation of the attributes of Outstanding Universal Value has been identified in the management plan as a priority. While the historic buildings have been relatively well documented, the same standard has yet to be achieved for the other attributes. A fully integrated inventory is needed as a basis for the future effective management of Santiniketan, including the recording and safeguarding of traditional practices and celebrations. The main factors affecting the property are development pressures (particularly in the buffer zone and wider setting),

construction of new roads, visitor management pressures, and deterioration of physical materials. The value of the maintenance regimes for the landscape and buildings cannot be over-stated; and the engagement with national and state specialist agencies for heritage conservation, such as the Archaeological Survey of India, is an important component of the management system. The development of individual conservation plans for the attributes of the property is recommended.

There will be no new developments approved within the property boundary, and all conservation projects will be overseen by the Visva-Bharati Heritage Committee. Due to the delineation of the buffer zone based on the area within the Visva-Bharati campus, it is relatively narrow and vulnerable to development pressures in several places. The importance of the wider setting of Santiniketan has been recognised and a range of state land management laws and protective mechanisms apply to the wider setting.

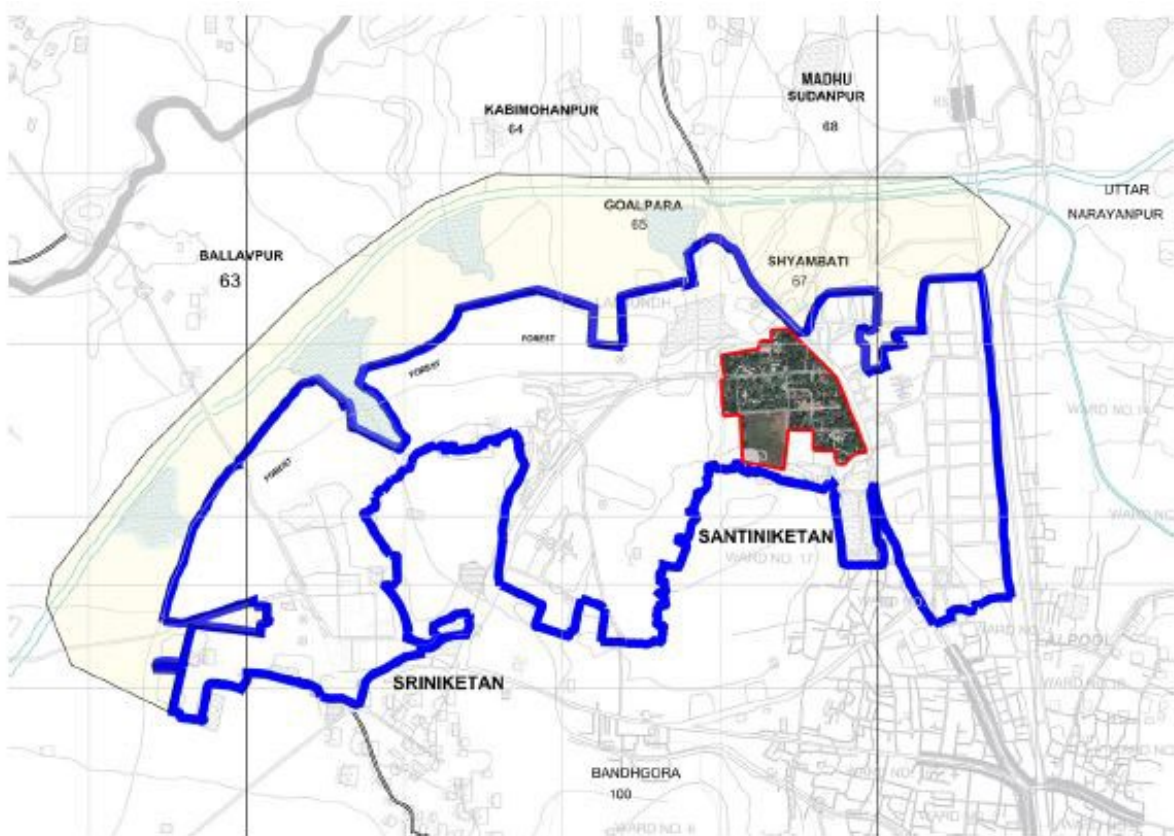
A campus masterplan is being developed to ensure that the needs of the ongoing uses of Visva-Bharati as a contemporary educational institution are aligned with the long-term obligations arising from World Heritage inscription.

Within the management system, the effective operation of the Visva-Bharati Heritage Committee is essential to the long-term conservation of the property. This should be further strengthened through the development of guidelines for the Heritage Committee's responsibilities, and by ensuring that Heritage Impact Assessments are prepared for the Heritage Committee in a written format in accordance with the requirements of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.

Additional recommendations

ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party give consideration to the following:

- a) Considering possibilities to strengthen the long-term legal protection of the property currently provided by the Visva-Bharati Act of 1951 by applying appropriate national and/or state laws for heritage protection,
- b) Developing a master plan for the Visva-Bharati campus and submitting this to the World Heritage Centre and Advisory Bodies for comments,
- c) Implementing the documentation priorities outlined in the management plan and establishing a single consolidated inventory of attributes of the Outstanding Universal Value of the property as a basis for the implementation of the management system, including buildings, platforms/pavilions, interiors and furnishings, artworks (murals, sculptures), landscape plantings and features and intangible heritage elements of Santiniketan,
- d) Developing conservation plans and policies for each of the identified tangible attributes,
- e) Closely monitoring the ability of the buffer zone to protect the property from development pressures, and consider possibilities for revising the delineation and/or strengthening the legal protection of the buffer zone,
- f) Developing and implementing formal Heritage Impact Assessment processes to aid the Visva-Bharati Heritage Committee in its role, ensuring that assessments are fully documented in written form,
- g) Fully implementing the disaster risk management strategy and monitoring system outlined in the management plan,
- h) Developing a post-pandemic plan for visitation to Santiniketan, including interpretation strategies,
- i) Identifying opportunities for enhanced community involvement in the management system for the property;



Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property