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INSTITUTIONAL HERITAGE TOURISM AS A TOOL OF POVERTY MITIGATION IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT-A STUDY ON SHANTINIKETAN AS A DESTINATION IN WEST BENGAL

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ABSTRACT:

This research examines the potential of institutional heritage tourism, specifically focusing on Shantiniketan, West Bengal, as a tool for poverty mitigation and community development. Shantiniketan, renowned for its association with Kaviguru Rabindranath Tagore and its unique educational philosophy, represents a significant cultural and historical asset. This study investigates how the influx of tourists, attracted by the institutional heritage, can be leveraged to generate sustainable economic opportunities for the local community. Through surveys, interviews with residents, tourism stakeholders, and institutional authorities, and observations, it analyses the existing tourism infrastructure, the economic impact of tourism on the community, and the challenges faced in maximizing its benefits. The study assesses the extent to which tourism revenue is distributed within the community, focusing on the participation of marginalized groups, including artisans, small business owners, and agricultural workers.

The findings reveal that although Shantiniketan attracts a considerable number of tourists, the economic benefits are not evenly distributed. The research highlights the need for a more

inclusive and sustainable tourism model that prioritizes community involvement and empowerment. It identifies key areas for intervention, including skill development programs, infrastructure improvements, and the promotion of community-based tourism initiatives. Furthermore, the study explores the role of institutional authorities in fostering responsible tourism practices and ensuring the preservation of Shantiniketan's unique heritage. The research concludes that institutional heritage tourism can be a viable tool for poverty mitigation in Shantiniketan, provided there is strategical enhancement of community participation and ensuring equitable distribution of benefits. It underscores the importance of integrating heritage preservation with sustainable development goals, thereby contributing to the long-term well-being of the local community.

KEYWORDS: Shantiniketan, Heritage Tourism, Institutional Heritage, Community Development, Responsible Practices, Rural Development.

INTRODUCTION:

Since the 1970s, tourism has been increasingly recognized as a strategic instrument for poverty alleviation (UNWTO, 2023). Its ability to stimulate economic growth, both directly and indirectly, has made it an asset for developing economies (World Bank, 2023). As one of the world's largest sectors, tourism holds significant potential to address the enduring challenge of poverty. In developing nations like India, the issue of uneven development across regions remains a critical concern. Geographical disparities often influence economic progress, underscoring the need for targeted interventions. The concept of "Pro-Poor Tourism" (PPT), initially articulated by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), provides a framework for leveraging tourism to benefit marginalized communities (Ashley et al., 2022). PPT is not a specific tourism product but rather an approach that aims to maximize the positive impact of tourism on poverty reduction by increasing economic and employment opportunities for the poor. Research continues to demonstrate the empirical link between tourism, quality of life, and poverty reduction (ILO, 2022). Tourism activities can improve living standards for economically disadvantaged populations in destination areas.

For example, in many rural areas, tourism provides alternative income sources, reducing reliance on traditional, often precarious, livelihoods. In India, tourism has emerged as a significant driver of employment, particularly for low-skilled workers. The Ministry of Tourism (MoT), Government of India (GOI), recognizes the sector's potential for job creation and has implemented various initiatives to promote skill development and employment

opportunities. Recent reports indicate the ongoing efforts to increase tourism's contribution to job creation. The Skill India Mission, for example, has focused on tourism related skills. The potential for tourism to drive economic development in specific regions, such as Shantiniketan, is substantial. By strategically developing tourism infrastructure and promoting sustainable tourism practices, regions can unlock new economic opportunities and improve the livelihoods of local communities. This conceptual paper aims to explore the critical issues surrounding tourism and poverty alleviation, providing valuable insights for academics, researchers, and policymakers involved in the development of regions like Shantiniketan.

Literature Review:

Various researchers are aware of the issue and have carried out studies in using tourism as a tool for poverty eradication. Some of the studies undertaken by researchers and their vital outcomes are given below. Concerning the ways in which the fundamental notion of development can be rethought, Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987) suggests that rethinking development should focus on multi-pronged objectives. As per this approach, the idea of sustainable development is the only means in which these multidimensional objectives of development like environment conservation, protecting the rights of the people and wiping out poverty; can be achieved at the same time addressing the challenges of the economic progress. Ashley, Boyd, and Goodwin (2000) argue that certain steps can enhance the economic participation of the poor in tourism enterprise like imparting education and facilitating proper training programme to the targeted poor (involving proportionate number of female population) to enable them to take up employment or to grab self-employment opportunity, by expanding micro financing opportunity. There should be relative growth and balance between the physical infrastructure, local entrepreneurial capability, and business experience of the destinations for exploration and involvement of a destination from tourism perspective this was identified by Borgersen and Rye (2004).

Rashid and Bashir (2004) discussed various impacts created by tourism sector on the output of the other industries as well as impact on import and value added tax revenue. Further they insisted that "tourism activity affect a wide range of activities in the economy directly and indirectly." However, they found that "tourism spending has no direct effect on output of some sectors such as agriculture, forestry, mining, dairy products, and other such sector.

However, when full ramification of the tourism activity is realised, these sectors were seen to derive some benefits indirectly". The influence of the orthodox neo liberalist thinkers while

framing policies for poverty alleviation by the prestigious international organisation like UNWTO and World Bank seems to be rhetoric was highlighted by Scheyvens (2007). PPT is not meant for profit maximization or expansion of the tourism sector but it is an approach where efforts are made to bring maximum benefits to the poor, including environmental, cultural, and social benefits as a top up to the economic benefits created by tourism sector.

Truong *et al.* (2013) suggests that “poor people’s interpretation of poverty may be substantially different from that of academics and policy makers”. The term poverty varies from place to place and person to person. Somewhere lack of rise of income is perceived as poverty and at the same instance in other place lack of opportunity or income is perceived as poverty. Although researchers globally have studied and proved that tourism can be used as an effective tool for poverty eradication. After going through intensive literature review and scrutinizing a compendium of available grey literature and government reports it was found that studies’ focusing on poverty eradication exclusively for the state of AP was missing.

Therefore, this present paper is a continuation of the earlier works with well-focused objectives like carrying out the tourism benefits to the bottom level of the society with the help of the strategic tool of PPT and enhancing state GSDP.

Poverty Eradication at Global Level:

Poverty remains a critical and multifaceted challenge in the 21st century, despite significant advancements in modernization. While global poverty rates have declined, deep-rooted issues persist, exacerbated by factors such as rapid population growth, disparities in education and healthcare, gender inequality, and systemic corruption. These factors contribute to a substantial portion of the world's population living in impoverished conditions. The era of globalization, driven by liberalization, privatization, and globalization (LPG), has brought both opportunities and challenges. While it has facilitated economic growth in many regions, it has also led to concerns about the distribution of wealth and the potential for economic 'leakage,' hindering the multiplier effect within local economies. This has prompted renewed discussions about the need for inclusive growth models that prioritize equitable development. Recognizing the urgency of addressing poverty, the international community has established frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), succeeding the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The SDGs, adopted in 2015, explicitly target the eradication of poverty in all its forms by 2030 (United Nations, 2015). These goals emphasize a holistic approach, encompassing economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable

development. International organizations, including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and regional development banks like the Asian Development Bank (ADB), continue to play a pivotal role in supporting poverty reduction initiatives through financial assistance, technical expertise, and policy guidance (World Bank, 2023).

Furthermore, the tourism sector has been recognized as a potential driver of poverty reduction through initiatives like sustainable tourism development. Organizations like the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) promote responsible tourism practices that generate income opportunities for local communities and contribute to inclusive economic growth (UNWTO, 2023). However, challenges persist. Climate change, global pandemics, and geopolitical instability have further complicated poverty reduction efforts, highlighting the need for resilient and adaptable strategies. Addressing poverty requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach, involving governments, civil society organizations, the private sector, and individuals, to ensure that no one is left behind."

Role of Tourism in Poverty Eradication – Current Scenario:

Tourism's significant contribution to the global economy remains undeniable, with recent analyses highlighting its vital role in developing nations. For numerous Least Developed Countries (LDCs), tourism stands as a key driver of economic growth and foreign exchange earnings (UNWTO, 2023). This sector often represents a substantial portion of their exports, particularly for island nations, where its impact is even more pronounced. The ripple effect of tourism extends far beyond direct employment. Studies continue to demonstrate the multiplier effect, where each job created in the core tourism sector generates additional employment opportunities in related industries (ILO, 2022). This labour-intensive nature of tourism provides avenues for semi-skilled and unskilled workers, fostering inclusive economic growth. The allure of the tourism industry, coupled with its potential for career advancement, attracts a young workforce. Notably, tourism continues to be a sector where women's participation is significant, promoting gender equality and economic empowerment (UN Women, 2023). Pro-poor tourism (PPT) initiatives have gained traction as a means of ensuring that the benefits of tourism reach local communities. Organizations like the International Labour Organization (ILO) actively promote PPT through toolkits and programs designed to create decent jobs, enhance skills development, and formalize the informal economy (ILO, 2022). Successful PPT implementation can be observed in various regions, including Africa, where community-based tourism projects have empowered local populations

and generated sustainable livelihoods. For example, in Rwanda, community-based tourism around Volcanoes National Park has significantly contributed to poverty reduction and conservation efforts (Rwanda Development Board, 2023). In Costa Rica, ecotourism initiatives have created jobs and income for rural communities, while protecting the environment (Costa Rica Tourism Institute, 2023). Research continues to validate the causal relationship between tourism development and economic growth, as well as its potential to alleviate poverty (World Bank, 2023). Inclusive tourism practices, which foster linkages between tourism businesses and local communities, are crucial for maximizing the benefits of tourism for the poor. Examples of successful inclusive tourism initiatives abound.

In Bhutan, the country's high-value, low-impact tourism policy prioritizes sustainable development and ensures that tourism revenues are reinvested in social programs (Tourism Council of Bhutan, 2023). In Peru, community-based tourism in the Andes region provides income opportunities for indigenous communities while preserving their cultural heritage (MINCETUR, Peru, 2023). In India, the Ministry of Tourism continues to implement pro-poor policies, focusing on skill development and job creation through programs like the "Skill for Employment" initiative. Additionally, organizations like the Asian Development Bank (ADB) support tourism projects with a focus on equitable distribution of benefits (ADB, 2023). While tourism may not directly invest in all aspects of poverty reduction, such as education and health, it serves as a powerful catalyst for sustainable pro-poor growth.

When carefully planned and executed, tourism can empower communities, create economic opportunities, and contribute to the achievement of basic needs.

Role of Institutional Heritage Tourism in Poverty Eradication – Current Scenario:

Institutional heritage tourism plays a significant role in poverty eradication, particularly when implemented with a focus on sustainable and inclusive practices. This involves the organized and managed promotion of historical and cultural sites by institutions like governments, NGOs, and cultural organizations. This goes beyond simply increasing income; it includes improving access to education, healthcare, and social equity. Institutional Heritage tourism can be a powerful economic driver, generating income through job creation in hospitality, guiding, and related services, the development of local crafts and products and increased demand for local services like transportation and food. However, for institutional heritage tourism to effectively contribute to poverty mitigation, it must be managed in a way that benefits local communities. Successful institutional heritage tourism initiatives prioritize the

participation of local communities in planning and management. This ensures that benefits are distributed equitably and that cultural heritage is preserved. For example, community-based tourism initiatives often empower local people to act as guides, provide accommodations, and sell handicrafts.

Government agencies, UNESCO, and other organizations play a crucial role in protecting and preserving heritage sites, developing sustainable tourism policies and providing training and support to local communities. UNESCO has done very important work in this field, by promoting sustainable cultural tourism. Many UNESCO sites around the world have implemented programs to engage local communities in tourism. For example, in some sites, local people are trained as guides, and revenue from tourism is used to fund community development projects. In many developing countries, community-based tourism initiatives are helping to alleviate poverty by providing income opportunities for local people. Many nations are working to link the conservation of their cultural heritage with economic development through tourism. The World Bank also recognizes the potential of institutional heritage tourism to contribute to poverty reduction, and they provide funding and technical assistance for tourism development projects.

Institutional Heritage Tourism Potentials of Shantiniketan:

Shantiniketan, nestled in the Birbhum district of West Bengal, India, is far more than a typical tourist destination. It's an immersive experience in art, culture, and a unique educational philosophy, all set amidst a serene, rustic landscape. It is also being considered as "A Haven of Artistic and Intellectual Heritage." The heart of Shantiniketan is Visva-Bharati, founded by Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore. This university is a living testament to his vision of education that harmonizes with nature and the arts. Visitors can explore the open-air classrooms, the unique architectural styles of buildings like Uttarayan Complex (Tagore's residence), and the vibrant artistic atmosphere that permeates the campus. The university's focus on fine arts, music, and dance makes it a cultural hub. Rabindra Bhavana Museum is a treasure trove of Tagore's works, showcasing his manuscripts, paintings, photographs, and personal artifacts. It provides a deep dive into the life and legacy of this remarkable polymath. The Ashram Complex, the original core of Shantiniketan, where Tagore's father, Maharshi Debendranath Tagore, established a place for meditation. It exudes a tranquil and spiritual ambiance. Kala Bhavana, the renowned centre for visual arts, where students create and display their works, showcasing a blend of traditional and contemporary styles.

The tourists along with the rich heritage of Shantiniketan also has an opportunity to experience the vibrant local culture which includes Sonajhuri Haat, a weekly market, held on Saturdays, is a vibrant display of local crafts, music, and culture. Visitors can browse through stalls selling batik prints, leather goods, pottery, and other handicrafts, while enjoying performances by Baul musicians. Shantiniketan is closely associated with Baul music, a unique form of folk music characterized by its mystical and philosophical lyrics.

Experiencing a Baul performance is a must for any visitor. Shantiniketan celebrates various festivals with great enthusiasm, including Poush Mela (winter fair), Basanta Utsav (spring festival), and Rabindra Jayanti (Tagore's birthday). These festivals offer a glimpse into the rich cultural traditions of the region.

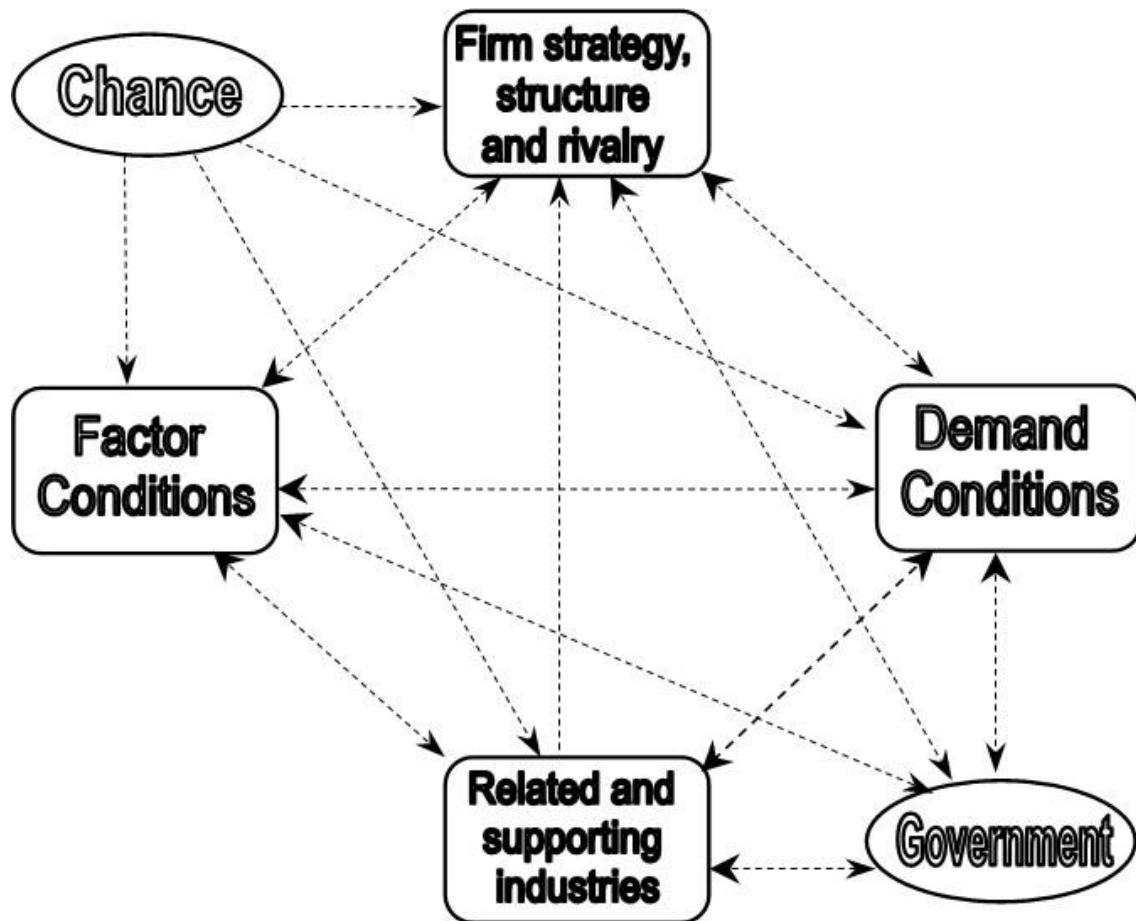
The natural beauty and serenity of Shantiniketan is another factor that motivates the tourist in visiting the destination. Shantiniketan's rural setting, with its red soil, lush greenery, and open spaces, provides a peaceful and relaxing environment. Walking or cycling through the campus and surrounding areas is a delightful way to experience the natural beauty of the region. The Kopai river runs near Shantiniketan, and is a beautiful place to see. The reasons for Shantiniketan being unique are its emphasis on holistic education and cultural expression, its serene and rustic atmosphere. Its close association with Rabindranath Tagore. The recent UNESCO world heritage site designation.

Shantiniketan is not just a place to see; it is a place to experience. It is a destination for those seeking cultural enrichment, artistic inspiration, and a peaceful retreat from the hustle and bustle of city life. Shantiniketan, recently designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, holds immense potential for institutional heritage tourism, much of which remains untapped. Its unique blend of artistic, educational, and philosophical heritage offers a compelling experience for visitors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Shantiniketan, founded by Rabindranath Tagore, is a unique blend of art, culture, and education, deeply rooted in its natural surroundings. While not possessing the same industrial limitations as other destinations for example Arunachal Pradesh, Shantiniketan faces its own challenges in sustainable development. Utilizing Porter's Diamond Model, we can examine why tourism, particularly institutional heritage tourism, holds significant promise for the region. Shantiniketan's comparative advantage lies in its cultural heritage,

artistic legacy, and serene natural environment. The presence of Visva-Bharati University, its associated institutions, and the rich tradition of rural crafts create a unique draw. The local population possesses a strong cultural identity and artistic inclination.



Source: Modified from Porter, M.E. (1990). The Competitive advantages of nations

- Shantiniketan boasts a rich cultural history, art forms (like batik, leather craft, and music), and educational institutions. This is its primary factor condition. However, infrastructure limitations, particularly in transportation and accommodation, can hinder tourism growth. The natural beauty of the surrounding landscape provides a complementary factor.
- There is a growing demand for cultural and educational tourism, both domestically and internationally. The legacy of Tagore attracts a specific niche of tourists interested in art, literature, and philosophy. However, the seasonal nature of tourist flow is a challenge.
- The presence of local artisans, craftspeople, and cultural performers provides essential support to the tourism industry.
- The hospitality sector, including guesthouses and restaurants, is developing. Further

development of supporting industries like sustainable transport, and local food production is needed.

- Visva-Bharati University plays a central role in shaping the cultural tourism experience. Local tourism operators and guides contribute to the industry. However, there is a need for greater collaboration and professionalization within the sector.
- The West Bengal government can play a crucial role in promoting Shantiniketan as a cultural tourism destination. Investment in infrastructure, conservation of heritage sites, and support for local artisans is essential. Promoting sustainable tourism practices is crucial to preserve the unique character of Shantiniketan.
- Increased interest in cultural and experiential travel provides a significant opportunity for Shantiniketan. Global trends towards sustainable tourism align with Shantiniketan's emphasis on harmony with nature.

Tourism development must prioritize the preservation of Shantiniketan's unique cultural heritage. Emphasize eco-friendly practices, responsible waste management, and the use of local resources. Enhance transportation connectivity, improve accommodation options, and develop visitor facilities. Empower local communities to participate in tourism development and benefit from its economic impact. Provide training to local artisans, guides, and hospitality professionals. Promote Shantiniketan's cultural attractions through targeted marketing campaigns and partnerships with travel agencies. Diversify tourism offerings beyond the traditional cultural attractions, including nature-based tourism and rural experiences. Implement strategies to minimize economic leakage by promoting the consumption of locally produced goods and services.

Limitation and Scope for Future Research:

- Optimum outcome through PPT cannot be achieved unless the hosting destination is not developed.
- Tourism is seasonal in nature - Lack of proper integration between tourism and other economic activities will create hindrance to provide year around livelihood.
- Fragile Linkage to the poor – Lack of engagement of the poor will lead to leakage of tourism spending away from the destination. The balance income may not end up delivering benefits to the poor instead reaching the well-off segment of the society.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the potential of institutional heritage tourism, specifically within the context of Shantiniketan, as a strategic tool for poverty alleviation. Building upon the established framework of Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT) and utilizing Porter's Diamond Model, the analysis demonstrates that Shantiniketan's unique blend of cultural, educational, and natural assets presents a significant opportunity for sustainable economic development. The designation of Shantiniketan as a UNESCO World Heritage Site further underscores its global significance and potential for attracting a diverse tourist base. However, realizing this potential requires a concerted effort to address existing challenges. Infrastructure limitations, seasonal tourism fluctuations, and the risk of economic leakage pose significant hurdles to maximizing the benefits for local communities. The findings highlight the critical need for a holistic and community-centric approach to tourism development. This includes prioritizing the preservation of Shantiniketan's cultural heritage, promoting eco-friendly practices, and enhancing infrastructure to improve accessibility and visitor experience. Empowering local communities through active participation in planning and management, providing targeted skill development, and fostering linkages between tourism businesses and local artisans are essential for ensuring equitable distribution of benefits. Moreover, diversifying tourism offerings beyond traditional cultural attractions, such as incorporating nature-based tourism and rural experiences, can help mitigate the impact of seasonality and attract a wider range of visitors. Implementing strategies to minimize economic leakage by promoting the consumption of locally produced goods and services is crucial for maximizing the multiplier effect and ensuring that tourism revenues directly benefit the local economy. The limitations identified, including the dependency on destination development, seasonal fluctuations, and the fragile linkage to the poor, underscore the need for further research and targeted interventions. Future studies should focus on developing robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess the impact of PPT initiatives on poverty reduction, exploring innovative strategies for diversifying tourism offerings, and investigating the role of technology in enhancing community engagement and minimizing economic leakage. In conclusion, institutional heritage tourism, when implemented with a focus on sustainability, inclusivity, and community empowerment, holds immense potential to contribute to poverty alleviation in Shantiniketan. By addressing the identified challenges and leveraging its unique assets, Shantiniketan can serve as a model for sustainable tourism development, demonstrating how cultural heritage can be a powerful driver of inclusive economic growth and social well-being. This research provides a valuable framework for policymakers, academics, and

practitioners to guide the development of responsible and impactful tourism initiatives in Shantiniketan and beyond, ultimately contributing to the broader goal of poverty eradication.

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