

INTEGRATING TRIBAL HERITAGE, SUSTAINABLE URBAN PLANNING, AND ECO-TOURISM IN SONAJHURI, BOLPUR-A DEVELOPMENTAL FRAMEWORK FOR ECO-TRIBAL TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

Located near Santiniketan in West Bengal's Birbhum district, Sonajhuri embodies a unique intersection of cultural richness, ecological value, and potential for sustainable urban planning. This study investigates the integration of eco-tribal tourism and sustainable planning strategies to uplift the socio-economic and environmental well-being of the Santhal tribal community while conserving the distinct Khoai landscape. Utilizing a holistic methodology—including field surveys, spatial analysis, and stakeholder engagement—the research highlights key challenges such as modernization, infrastructure gaps, and the erosion of traditional culture. Drawing on successful models like En Ooru (Kerala) and Raghurajpur (Odisha), a site-responsive concept titled the “Living Museum” is proposed. It emphasizes community-led design, environmentally sensitive architecture, and immersive cultural engagement. By analyzing data on tourist influx, housing capacity, and occupational structures, the study proposes zoning strategies, forest-based cottage industries, and skill-based employment linked to heritage preservation. The research presents Sonajhuri as a model for sustainable urban planning that supports tribal identity while ensuring ecological harmony and resilient rural development.

KEYWORDS

Eco-tourism, Tribal community, Santiniketan, Sustainable development, Santhal heritage

1. INTRODUCTION

The rural-urban fringes of India are rapidly transforming under the pressures of tourism, urbanization, and cultural homogenization. **Sonajhuri**, situated adjacent to Santiniketan in West Bengal, presents a rare case where indigenous heritage, natural beauty, and cultural vibrancy converge. Home to the **Santhal tribal community**, the region has increasingly become a popular destination for cultural and eco-tourism, largely driven by attractions such as the *Sonajhuri Haat*, Baul performances, and local crafts. However, this growth has not been matched with structured urban planning or safeguards for community well-being.

The increasing influx of visitors and the informal spread of tourism infrastructure have begun to disrupt the ecological balance of the **Khoai landscape** and the socio-cultural life of the indigenous residents. Traditional livelihoods, tribal architecture, and community practices face threats of erosion under the combined impacts of commercialization, land-use change, and globalization. Yet, within this challenge lies the potential for a transformative approach—one that leverages tourism not as a tool of exploitation, but as a medium for cultural preservation, sustainable growth, and participatory planning.

This paper proposes an **eco-tribal tourism model** that bridges **sustainable urban planning with tribal heritage conservation**, aiming to create an inclusive and culturally sensitive development framework. Drawing from local strengths such as handicrafts, festivals, community structures, and natural assets, the