

THE PRESENT SCENE

i) Visva-Bharati's Territorial Limits and Jurisdiction

The Basic Facts:

The Visva-Bharati Act, 1951 describes the territorial limits of the University in its Second Schedule as follows :

The Territorial Limits of the University

The area known as Santiniketan in the District of Birbhum in West Bengal, admeasuring 3000 hectares, bounded –

on the north by the Kopai River,

on the west by a line running from Ballavpur

and Benuria villages to Bandhgora,

on the south by a line running from Bandhgora

via Bolpur Dak Bungalow to the bridge over the Eastern Railway cutting, and on the east by the Eastern Railway line.

Section 7 of the Act lays down that the powers of the University conferred by or under the Act will be restricted to the above mentioned area.

Observations :

Notwithstanding the Act's description and the territorial limits, the hard fact can be summed up as follows : Visva-Bharati's boundaries lack a clear definition. The University must, therefore, retrieve and documents its physicality, as a priority.

The Act's description of the territorial limits of the University has to be seen as attempt at coordinates, not cartography. The authors of the Act wanted a topographical image in their minds of the spaces where Debendranath Tagore and Rabindranath Tagore had trod and where the Poet had envisioned his educational and aesthetic ideas.

The language of the Second Schedule is not very different from those of ancient land grants where natural boundaries and manmade landmarks were incised on stone or copper plates to delineate Title. The fact, however, remains that the Kopai river, like most rivers in this part of the country, is not a static phenomenon and is subject to changes of course. Tagore, in fact, in 1931, wrote a poem on the Kopai, with the lines :

*Monsoon makes her mad, loosens her limbs
Like a village girl drunk on mahua wine
- but she does not burst, she does not drown,
She only twirls her eddies
Like a dancer in a long ghaghra,
Playfully pushes at her banks
And glides along laughing loudly.*

The Kopai has and can be expected to baffle the Act's Second Schedule. The 'line running from Ballavpur and Benuria to Bandhgora on the west', is also notional, being neither a

feature on land nor a revenue boundary delineated on administrative maps. The same applies to the 'line' running from Bandhgora via the Bolpur Dak Banglow to the bridge over the eastern railway cutting. The Eastern Railway line itself, though largely unchanged since 1951, is also not an immutable phenomenon.

In other words, the limits within which the 3000 hectares are described, reflect an indication rather than a description. They give in prosaic language a 'frame' to the poetic description of Santiniketan area described by Tagore as follows: "At its southern extremity were rows of tall *sal* trees. There was a *madhobi* creeper over the gate. Behind, in the east, was the mango grove. In the west were some palm trees, some *jam* and some *jhau*, set off by scattered clusters of coconut. In the northwestern corner was a simple marble seat underneath those ancient *chhatim* trees. There were no trees in front of it. There were only open fields stretching to the horizon. Those fields were yet uncultivated. In the north was the two-storied guest house in the grove of *amloki*. Adjoining the guest house was a kitchen in the shade of some ancient *kadom* trees. There was one other brick-structure, a one-storied brick building. This was the library... Outside the *Ashram*, to its south, was a tank, then large and full of water. And to its north, on its high banks, a very old row of palm. All this was clearly visible from the *Ashram*. A shadeless red-earth road led to Bolpur along the eastern edge of the *Ashram*. Few used that road as the town was still uncrowded with only a small number of houses in it. The rice mills had not yet started to darken the skies with their smoke or to poison our food. There was total rest and quiet everywhere... In this quiet and sparsely populated garden of *sal* trees I started, with the help of Brahmabandhob Upadhyay, and with a handful of boys, a school for children. I used to teach underneath an old *jam* tree."

This was also the area which held the 'khoai' (derived from the Sanskrit 'kshaya', meaning depleted/degenerated/ disfigured/denuded) lands. These were tracts of red earth over which the run of water has been so sharp as to create ravine-like formations.

The definition given in the Act of the territorial limits have been said to include the following mouzas:

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|---------------------|-------------------------|-----|
| Ballavpur | (Jurisdiction List No.) | 63 |
| Benuria | | 54 |
| Kata Mohanpur | | 64 |
| Goalpara | | 65 |
| Baira Dihi | | 66 |
| Syambati | | 67 |
| Madhusudanpur | | 68 |
| Taltor | | 69 |
| Raipur or Bandhgora | | 100 |

Thirty eight years after the VB Act was passed by the Indian Parliament in 1951, the Government of West Bengal set up an important body – the Sriniketan-Santiniketan Development Authority under Notification No 3961-T & CP/1S-25/87 dated 14.12.1989, exercising the powers conferred upon it by the West Bengal Town and Country (Planning and Development) Act, 1979. By a further Notification on 22.12.1989, in exercise of powers under the same Act, the Government of West Bengal described the "Planning Area" of the SSDA which included the whole of VB's territorial jurisdiction.

We therefore have an Act of the Indian Parliament which attempts coordinates for the VB's territorial jurisdiction and we have a State Notification giving the SSDA its own markers.

Unsurprisingly, within days, people and institutions raised questions of turf. Professor Jogen Chowdhury, the eminent artist and Professor at Kala Bhavana and others wrote a letter of concern to Shri Somnath Chatterjee, MP and Chairman, SSDA. VB's Executive Council (Karma Samiti), while welcoming the formation of the SSDA, expressed certain views on the jurisdiction of the SSDA. It specifically made the point in its meeting held on January 9, 1990, under the Chairmanship of the officiating Upacharya Professor Ajit Chakravorty that VB had not been consulted before the constitution of the SSDA. The Executive Council suggested a discussion between the Government of West Bengal and VB authorities so that a mutually acceptable form and the jurisdiction of the Development Authority could emerge.

In a constructive response, Shri Somnath Chatterjee, Chairman of the SSDA, wrote to the Upacharya, Dr. Ashin Das Gupta, (who had meanwhile succeeded Professor Chakravorty) on 20.6.1990 requesting him to nominate two representatives to the SSDA so that "we can all together seek to achieve the much needed development of the areas concerned". He also said he would "welcome any suggestions". Responding, the Executive Council recalled its earlier resolution and resolved that at that stage no nomination would be made to the SSDA and it authorized the VC to seek clarifications from the SSDA on VB's autonomy in developmental activities relating to areas and services under VB.

Over the sixteen years since then, the issue of SSDA's and VB's respective territorial jurisdictions has been the subject of representations to local authorities such as the District Magistrate by local residents of Santiniketan protesting certain developmental plans of the SSDA on ecological and environmental grounds. The SSDA, in keeping with its mandate and objectives, has initiated proposals for residential and commercial complexes in areas. A major real-estate developer, Bengal Ambuja, has worked out and put into operation a scheme for the purpose of raising residential-cum-commercial complexes with community amenities on the lands which would seem to fall within the Schedule.

A Writ Petition in the nature of a Public Interest Litigation was filed on 16.12.2003 before the Hon'ble Calcutta High Court praying for a Mandamus to declare the 'Khoai' region falling within the Second Schedule to be a historical and archaeological site of national importance and to prohibit the SSDA and/or developers empowered by the SSDA from undertaking any activities on it.

During the debates on the Visva-Bharati Act in the Provisional parliament, Education Minister Maulana Azad had said of Santiniketan "Nature has provided it with the canopy of the sky and the open places and (we) do not want to make any additions to them in the form of brick and stone". And Prime Minister Nehru, speaking in the same debate, said : "I entirely agree with Dr. Mukherji when he laid stress on certain factors that may be called external if you like, but nevertheless, which must have a very powerful influence in moulding the student there and creating a new environment, whether it is teaching in the mango grove or doing anything like that. I entirely agree with him that we should not spend our money on a large number of brick structures ..."

All this was brought to the attention of the Supreme Court and cited by it in the Judgement.

It is not the purpose of this Committee to go into the tortuous sequence of that and other Writ Petitions referring to other tracts on similar grounds including notably, a 300-year old water body known as Laha Bandh which has been taken up for conversion into a commercial

entertainment park. Nor is it the intention of this committee to bring the mandate and objectives of the SSDA into any judgmental discussion. That is an important body clothed with powers and credentials to develop an area that required a regulated direction of its growth. A point was also made on behalf of the 'development' argument that the 1951 Act may have described an area but it did not confer on the VB an all-pervasive jurisdiction over it.

The HLC cannot, however, fail to note that the Bengal Ambuja Housing Project (and the Bengal Peerless Housing Schemes) have been the subject of a Supreme Court Order dated 3.3.2005 which states : "We do not intend to stop the construction activities which are being carried out by the respondent No. 10 *but direct that in future SSDA must keep in mind the statutory provisions referred to herein before as also the observations made by us herein.*" (italics ours).

The HLC finds the following observation of the Supreme Court in its Order dated 3.3.2005 relevant : "It is not suggested that Santiniketan should remain as it was in 1921 but it cannot be permitted to become full of concrete jungles and an industrial hub. For carrying out further constructional activities, it may not be necessary for a builder to apply to the University for seeking its permission but the local-self government which is responsible therefore must take into consideration the salutary principles laid down in the pollution control laws as well as the Act. *The land use and future planning of Santiniketan must be done in such a manner so that the changes be brought about which would not be beyond the recognition of the poet* as also the provisions of the Act (the Visva-Bharati Act). SSDA in that sense must distinguish itself from the other development authorities. *It has an extra-burden to shoulder.* It cannot shut its eyes to the provisions of the Act and the object and purport it seeks to achieve. It cannot ignore the environmental impact assessment made by the Board. It is one thing to say that the SSDA may permit small constructions to be made by the owners of the land or additions or allow alterations to the existing building for residential purposes but it is another thing to say that it would not consider the effect of the changes which may be brought about by turning Santiniketan into a commercial and industrial hub." (italics ours).

This Committee would refer those interested to the full text of the Order No. 3.3.2005 for further details. The judgement is seen by SSDA and by the plaintiffs as upholding their respective positions. In our view the judgement encourages constructive collaboration between the two agencies.

Suffice it for the HLC to say that it now discerns a positive change in the prospects for SSDA-VB collaboration. Even as the Chairman SSDA had written constructively to the then VC Dr. Ashin Das Gupta in 1990, seeking VB's cooperation the present VC, Professor Rajat Kanta Ray, has written to the Chairman, SSDA, on 26.9.2006 : "In fact, there is a wide and fruitful area of cooperation between SSDA and VB. I wish to assure you that I want cooperation between the two bodies most sincerely."

The HLC is confident that in the spirit conveyed in the Upacharya's letter, SSDA and VB should be able to find in the Supreme Court judgement a new opportunity for cooperation.

The HLC received a substantial number of representations, oral and written, from persons of distinction expressing serious concern over the impact of residential, commercial and industrial constructions on what was the 'Santiniketan' of Tagore's times. The HLC, naturally, took these into account. But it was aware, at the same time, of the fact that alumni, with their strong feelings about the past, would want to roll back changes to the sepia tones of their album of memories. The HLC was also not unaware that over the '50s, '60s and '70s many private houses had come

up on the lands which residents are now wanting to insulate from further construction activity. The HLC recalled, in this connection, the speech made in the Lok Sabha on 29 November, 1971 by the late Professor Hiren Mukerji that we have quoted earlier : “Let there be an investigation made by competent people. Let Tagore’s ideals be thrown overboard if they are no longer in conformity with the requirements of today. But have we made that investigation? What are we doing? Setting up a few buildings, putting in a lot of money; and then having a complete picture of demoralization, degradation and inefficiency.”

The emphasis laid by Hirenbabu on investigation, on enquiry, on understanding is valuable, as is his observation on a few people wielding influence locally wanting to decide what others should or should not do in the area.

The HLC appreciates the importance of an authority that can regulate impulses which result in unplanned growth. The SSDA is such an authority and through its medium, a measure of order and planning has been sought to be introduced over an area which because of its special features attracting real estate investors and city dwellers seeking rural retreats, can see chaotic growth. Furthermore, the SSDA, at present, has the benefit of being headed by the Hon’ble Shri Somnath Chatterjee, who has a commitment to Santiniketan’s heritage as also a knowledge of heritage towns such as Stratford-Upon-Avon, which combine conservation with organized development methodologies.

But the HLC feels that the Supreme Court has struck the right note in drawing attention to the distinctness of Santiniketan when it says that the “changes brought about by the processes of development should not be beyond the recognition of the Poet”. Tagore was not against change and he would have certainly not liked anyone to suggest that Santiniketan should remain a bubble of unchanging rusticity in the 21st century. At the same time, the Supreme Court has again touched the right chord in saying that when it comes to a place like Santiniketan, a development authority “has an extra burden to shoulder”. That “burden” can be described as the mandate of heritage conservation.

ii) Planning for the Future of the Campus

Professor Tan Lee, son of Professor Tan Yun-shan, the Founder-Director of Cheena Bhavana, a civil engineer and architect now retired in Canada after working in the fields of city-planning and urban design and an alumnus of VB, has made the following relevant comments :

“I use the term ‘campus’ to denote the land area within which VB has jurisdiction. Jurisdiction can include a host of authority and administrative responsibilities that need to be documented. Although the boundary of the campus is not always clearly defined, and neither VB nor Santiniketan has the status of a local government (village, town, panchayat), for the purposes of long range planning, it is critical that the campus be given some such designation...”

The campus had a natural drainage system quite capable of handling major downpour during monsoon. In fact the storm drainage was a joy to the young students who floated varieties of paper boats down the rivulets. This natural drainage system has been completely disrupted while constructing additional buildings, to the detriment of the environment...”

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Professor Anandarup Ray, a student in Patha Bhavana (1951-55) and Siksha Bhavana (1955-57) and now living in retirement after a distinguished tenure of work in the World Bank,

recalls the time he spent in Santiniketan with his parents – Annadasankar Ray and Lila Ray – with the following comments of nostalgia and regret:

“Santiniketan is now a prime tourist area. As a tourist resort, and as a weekend retreat of the wealthy in Kolkata, Santiniketan has changed almost beyond recognition. Haphazard, unregulated, and unserved urbanization has become the rage. There are no land-use rules or zoning, no property taxes, no control over drainage or sewerage, no garbage collection, and no traffic planning. The most heavily travelled road is the Bolpur road which is immediately adjacent to the Ashram’s kindergarten and the main part of the Ashram where students still take classes under mango trees in the traditional manner. Buses and trucks endanger children, and spew noxious fumes over the *sanctum sanctorum* as they rumble through. When new housing schemes or amusement parks are discussed, their assessments somehow always miss the extra traffic load to be placed on that road and the resultant increases in air pollution. The Pollution Control Board of West Bengal has declared the Ashram to be a polluted area. The traffic has also increased noise to unacceptable levels.

Rabindranath was not opposed to change; he was in fact an anti-traditionalist as is abundantly clear from his many essays, novels and dramas. But he did not want Santiniketan’s special features to change. If he had his way, the new Santiniketan today would have had much more research of internationally recognized excellence, the main campus would have been much less crowded, would have had a multicultural flavor, and the old environment would have been largely intact. The growth that would have occurred since 1951, would have been spatially dispersed and carefully selected to preserve the uniqueness and distinctiveness of Santiniketan.

Going backwards is not an option. *The true target is not the situation of 1951, but the situation that would have resulted today if the right path had been followed since 1951.* With that in mind, it should be recognized that there is considerable scope for large improvements in the current situation. If Rabindranath’s vision remains the driving force, and all changes from now on are designed to move us towards that vision, at least some of his glory can be restored.”

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Shri Samar Bagchi, the noted educationist, environmentalist and social activist, in a Note to the HLC has said “The Visva-Bharati Act, 1951 in its second schedule has earmarked the Visva-Bharati Jurisdictional Area of 3000 ha. The Act also provides right to the University by Section 6 (32) ‘to establish campuses within the territorial limits of the university specified in the second schedule.’ It is sad that no planned development has been undertaken by Visva-Bharati authorities within its territorial limits. Unplanned construction of houses by outsiders have taken place by taking away the land from the original holders of lands mainly Santhals. All these constructions in Prantik and Santiniketan earlier were mainly by individuals. But with the establishment of Santiniketan-Sriniketan Development Authority (SSDA), the creation of which is claimed to be illegal, huge constructions are coming up in the Santiniketan Jurisdictional area in the name of development. Land is being acquired by SSDA and handed over to corporate sector to build gigantic housing projects for making profit. During the debate in the Parliament while passing the 1951 Visva-Bharati Act speaker after speaker emphasized the importance of maintaining the ambience of Santiniketan and the ideals of Tagore and not to make Santiniketan ‘concrete jungle’. The Master Plan should include areas for future development of VB as per the ideals of Tagore. Archives may be searched to find out the work of internationally reputed scientist and city planner Patrick Geddes and of his son Arthur Geddes if they have thought of

any such development plan. Tagore had developed unique architectural design in Santiniketan suiting to its environment. In fact, he is the creator of a new concept of ecological architecture. While sanctioning any new construction programme Tagore's thoughts on architecture has to be borne in mind. Attempts should be made by VB and the India Government to get VB jurisdictional area declared as World Heritage Site."

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In a publication titled *Comprehensive Perspective Plan for the Development of Visva-Bharati during 2005 to 2025*, we find the following candid observations under the heading 'Weaknesses' :

1. 'Visva-Bharati has inadequate infrastructure often even affecting teaching and research negatively.'
2. 'Is handicapped for the poor condition of the existing infrastructure like roads, houses, laboratories, etc
3. 'Suffers from inadequacy of hostel, guesthouses, staff accommodation, sports, and auditorium facilities'

The foregoing assessments are something of an understatement but should, nevertheless, be welcomed for their attempted introspection. The HLC agrees with them.

The same publication says, in a section titled 'Correcting the Course':

1. 'The residential nature of the University will be restored. As such, new hostels so as to accommodate all students without exceptions will have to be constructed. Presently, the hostels can accommodate not more than 25% students. This gap would be filled up in phases.'...
2. '...a properly equipped 1000-seated auditorium will be built in the campus. Besides, museums and archives for display and scientific storage of valuable assets in possession of Visva-Bharati, a science centre, a modern sports complex complete with a gymnasium and swimming pool, a senate hall, etc will be put up to meet the bare necessities of curricular and co-curricular life on campus.'...
3. 'The campus boundary will be demarcated and boundary walls and fencing will be constructed to improve campus security and protect the properties of the University from encroachment and unauthorized use.'

The HLC would like the first to be done circumspectly, aesthetically and in a manner that is linked to our suggestions (made later) on admissions. The HLC disagrees entirely with the second 'correction'. It regards the third 'correction' as sound.

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Recommendations :

1. The first thing a University requires is a campus. Visva-Bharati hardly has one. Therefore, Santiniketan must retrieve its sense of its physicality. The HLC commends to the attention of the developing authorities, the following observations of the Supreme Court: "As VB has the unique distinction of being not only a University of national importance but also a unitary

one, the SSDA should be well-advised to keep in mind the provisions of the Act, the object and purpose for which it has been enacted as also the report of the West Bengal Pollution Control Board. It is *sui generis*. It is idle to compare Santiniketan with any other university. Truism is that Santiniketan has unique features. Its environmental ambience, thus, must be maintained. There is no other university which having regard to the purport and object of the Act, as would appear from the objects and reasons thereof, can be compared with VB. Our attention has not been drawn to any other statute establishing any university which has such unique features as VB. Only because some advantages would ensure to the people in general by reason of the proposed development, the same would not mean that the ecology of the place would be sacrificed. Only because some encroachments have been made and unauthorized buildings have been constructed, the same by itself cannot be a good ground for allowing other constructional activities to come up which would be in violation of the provisions of the Act. Illegal encroachments, if any, may be removed in accordance with law.”

2. It recommends that a distinguished retired Judge of the Supreme Court of India or a retired Chief Justice of a High Court be appointed by the Paridarśaka to preside over a Panel with two representatives each of VB, one of who should be the VC himself (or at meetings that he cannot attend, the Registrar) and SSDA. It should also have two representatives of the residents of Santiniketan unconnected with VB and SSDA, to be proposed by District Magistrate, Birbhum. The panel, assisted by relevant experts should have the following programme :

3. The scanning of the holdings of the VB in Santiniketan and Sriniketan and subsequent grants to it; the preparation of a detailed map laying down these territorial boundaries of VB. The definitive map should show the features of the University and various facilities including the heritage core which require urgent conservation. The use of GIS technology for drawing up a detailed map is recommended as a task which the Paridarśaka of the University himself has indicated to the Upacharya. (The Paridarśaka has in the course of a meeting with the Upacharya on 11 September, 2006, specifically asked for a map).

4. Specifying the dos and don'ts of construction, land use alteration, and the causing of any man-made changes on existing buildings or natural features by any other agency working under or outside the SSDA.

5. Specifying the heritage areas within the territorial limits of VB, both natural and manmade which require to be totally protected from human interference and preserved as far as possible against the ravages of time.

6. The HLC recommends that the Judge be appointed by the Paridarśaka on the recommendations of the Acharya and that this Panel should take into account the views, among others, of the following :

- a) The Chief Minister of West Bengal
- b) The Chairman of the SSDA
- c) The present and past VCs of Visva-Bharati

7. This Panel should also take into account the large number of privately owned individual houses in the area described in the Second Schedule, which have been built to no pattern of design or materials and compromise VB's and SSDA's ability for an organized future development and planning. The Panel should set up norms for the construction of private houses on university property and the demarcation of those from the areas constructed by VB.

8. The Panel should take not more than 3 months to conclude its work.
9. The HLC recommends that between now and the recommendation of the Panel, which should reflect a consensus, all construction, development and realty work within the area described in the Second Schedule of the Act be put on hold. Meanwhile, the HLC recommends that the PWD public road running through the traditional Ashrama area and the University carrying heavy traffic, including lorries bearing construction material, be subjected to some regulation. This, the Committee feels, should be by way of drop gates near the State Bank of India and the Canal, on either side of the University, to control the flow of traffic which is not only disturbing to the peaceful working of the University but also endangers the children who study at Patha Bhavana. The HLC also recommends that the PWD of the Government of West Bengal should consider constructing a road on the eastern side of the railway track to divert these heavy duty vehicles plying between Bolpur and Goalpara through Santiniketan. Simultaneously the Ashrama Area should be a 'no-horn' zone.
10. The Panel along with the SSDA and the VB should lead to a process of conjoint planning and action so that what needs to be protected and preserved receives the conservationists' care and what needs to be developed receives the consensual and organized attention of competent authorities. The HLC recommends that to monitor the programmes of restoration and preservation (separately suggested) and to maintain a conservator's eye on the heritage buildings, installations, and objects at VB, a Visva-Bharati Conservation and Preservation Society be set up under the powers of the University as enshrined under Section 6 of the Act, or otherwise, headed by the VC with a representative of the Sriniketan-Santiniketan Development Authority among the members. The mandate of the Society should be to ensure the upkeep and preservation of the heritage areas and aspects of Santiniketan coming within the domain of VB University and also of the *Uttarayana* Complex in coordination with the respective Ministries, Departments and Agencies of the Government of India and, wherever necessary, those of the Government of West Bengal. It is noteworthy that at a meeting of the Karma-Samiti on 7 November, 1970, Dr. Ashoke Rudra (then Principal of Vidya Bhavana) formally moved a Motion recommending that Visva-Bharati should set up a Committee "to act as a watchdog over the aesthetic aspects of Santiniketan's layout, sites for new buildings, installation of lights, presence or absence of gardens, etc". He probably had in view an earlier comment by Sir Jadunath Sarkar in an article entitled "Visva-Bharati – its problem" published on 26.1.1958 in *The Hindustan Standard* in which the distinguished historian had asked for the Visva-Bharati precincts to have a "strictly limited size", as well as a "planned and integrated township."
11. The HLC regards the Perspective Plan's comment on a campus boundary as sound and valuable but would propose that action on this be taken after the Judge Panel's work is completed.
12. Some 105 years after VB came into being, 60 years after the Independence of India and 55 years after the enactment of the VB Act and its conversion into a Central University, Santiniketan is still without its sewerage and drainage. This is not on account of a respect for pre-modern rural sanitation, but, quite simply, faulty priorities.

The HLC recommends :

- (i) An early action to prepare and implement a sewerage and drainage system in Visva-Bharati which is worthy of the campus of a University of international renown.

(ii) A conservancy and sanitation cell of the VB and the SSDA together should be set up which, in coordination with the concerned local body, will monitor the cleanliness of the open spaces in the Visva-Bharati and the Santiniketan area. This Cell should be a leader in solid waste management technology, offering to all that may behold Santiniketan holistically, a method of garbage disposal involving segregation, collection, lodgement and final disintegration of the garbage along scientific lines. For this an area and not a 'dump' on the campus margins would need to be identified and used for the generating of biogas or, as in Salt Lake, Kolkata, for vegetable cultivation.

(iii) A complete and immediate ban on the use of polythene bags and disposable plastics should be imposed in the heritage abounding Ashrama areas of Santiniketan;

(iv) The same Cell should also take steps to manage Santiniketan's unregulated canine population. Bani Sinha, the veteran carer of stray dogs in Santiniketan, can give invaluable advice on the immunization and sterilization of the animals. Can Santiniketan forget Tagore's poem *Chheleta* (1932) about the ten-year old boy who prefers the company of stray dog to others'?

*Have I ever managed to reach the heart of a frog
or caught the tragedy of that piebald dog?*

13. The HLC endorses and recommends the Perspective Plan's proposal for restoring the residential nature of the University but also recommends that this be done in calibrated coordination with the changes in the admission policy to the institutions of VB. In other words, the hostels should come up gradually as required by the institutions' projected strength and not under some furious crash programme. Each hostel building should be constructed with contemporary architectural experiences but equally with a kinship of design with the structures of Tagore's time. Some of the buildings in the campus of Visva-Bharati are old. During the rainy season of 2006, several roofs developed cracks and one roof partially collapsed in Sangita Bhavana injuring 4 students who had to be hospitalized. Repairs of these buildings require massive expenditure, but they are both indispensable and urgent for the safety of the students no less than conservation. The heritage buildings are also among the endangered buildings and their preservation, with an eye on the artistic and historical aspects, is a specially difficult and expensive task for which massive funding will be required. The HLC recommends that a restoration-cum-repair plan be drawn up and implemented on an emergency basis, expensive though this exercise will be.

14. As stated earlier, the HLC completely counter-recommends the CPP proposal for a 'thousand-seater auditorium' and regards the reference to a "science centre" without a full description of its potential, as premature.

15. Visva-Bharati needs, very quickly, to begin inviting guest faculty, if its languid air of insularity is to be shed. Santiniketan can do with half a dozen 'decent' guest houses which are not 5 star at all, but provide clean linen, simple food and sanitary/toilet facilities of a good standard. Visitors like academics, writers, artistes, students and historians should be able to stay there, accessing both Santiniketan and Sriniketan without having to either live in attic simplicity or in unaffordable 5-star luxury.

16. For this, the Committee recommends that the 'Panchavati' group of residences be taken up for immediate restoration and, depending on the demand for such accommodation, some more 'Panchavati'-type houses constructed on the same grounds. Each of its five units should be

comfortable enough and fully functional in terms of electricity, water supply and plumbing for visiting faculty with modern kitchenettes. A 'VIP' guest house is nearing completion for the accommodation of the Paridarśaka, the Acharya and other dignitaries of that status. It is strategically situated opposite the VC's residence and the existing Purba Palli guesthouse to take in the VIPs' 'entourage'. The HLC recommends that this VIP guesthouse be used regularly for distinguished visiting faculty from outside the State and outside India as well.

17. Priority has also to be given to the renovation of the International Guest House which, owing to poor maintenance and mis-application of use, has deteriorated to an extent that the VB authorities are embarrassed to even let visitors enter it. The IGH, however, has tremendous potential for a total transformation into a good and decent residential area for visitors.

18. All the guest-houses should, needless to say, have hi-speed internet connectivity and UPS.

19. The HLC recommends that taking into account the ecological fragility and sensitivity of the Santiniketan tract, the preservation of its environs is imperative. The HLC recommends that keeping in view the special position of the 'Khoai' lands and the river systems surrounding Santiniketan, they be insulated from mutation and conversion. Equally, the water levels in Santiniketan need to be preserved and prevented from falling further. The use of the Santiniketan underground water resources for construction purposes under housing programmes, has to be arrested. This requires administrative and legislative action in the realm of the State Government. The HLC recommends that the Ministry of HRD conveys this view of the HLC's to the State Government with the request that the DM, Birbhum be tasked to prepare a plan towards this, in consultation with experts from the Pollution Control Board.

20. In this context, the HLC would recommend designating an area within the territorial limits of VB as a 'buffer zone' with complete and inviolable protection given to it in order to maintain its ecological integrity. This zone could, apart from being 'frozen' for purposes of natural heritage, also be the field for a study of changes of land, water and atmosphere for and through a 5-year integrated course in the Siksha Bhavana that is proposed later in the report. This area could use remote sensing and GIS methodologies in the Geography Department of Vidya Bhavana while using environmental toxicology and mathematical modellings of changing eco-systems, agro-biotechnology in the Life Sciences Department of Siksha Bhavana. The 'buffer zone' of ecological integrity would, therefore, be an ideal site for the proposed integrated course and simultaneously serve the purposes of environmental and natural heritage preservation. Such a buffer zone would also be, like the Sunderbans and the Eastern Himalaya at two ends of West Bengal, a unique eco-system specimen that could invite experts from across the world for research. The HLC recommends that the MHRD, the Ministry for Science and the Ministry of Environment, Government of India, set up a task force to develop this idea further.

21. The HLC recommends that the forests, trees and, of course, the eroded 'Khoai' land be surveyed by the gardening department of VB to number all trees and water bodies, in order to prevent the unauthorized felling of trees and the disappearance of water bodies. We recommend that steps for the protection of the 'Khoai' against constructions be worked out scientifically for protective action by the society for preserving the heritage core of Visva-Bharati.

iii) Security Issues

The Basic Facts :

1. Since the theft of the Nobel medallion on 25 March, 2004, several investigation committees have inquired into the security aspect on the campus. These include the High Level Expert Committee on Security in the Campus of Visva-Bharati headed by the ex-DG Sujit K. Ghosh (IPS, retired) in 2004, the UGC Committee on Augmentation of Security Arrangements at Visva-Bharati in 2004, the Security Audit by Director of Audit Central (Kolkata) on 21.08.2006 and most recently the valuable visit to Rabindra Bhavana and Kala-Bhavana by the DIG, CID, Shri Soumen Mitra, IPS, in September, 2006. Steps, as suggested by Shri Mitra, have been taken in consequence and security has improved to a certain extent but a massive rehaul will still be necessary.
2. Based on the recommendations of the High Level Security Expert Committee, Visva-Bharati submitted a proposal for Rs. 10 crore for revamping security on the campus, and in the event, 6.5 crore was sanctioned. The UGC Committee on Augmentation of Security recommended the creation of 'a post of Chief Security Officer in the rank of Additional S.P or at least in the rank of Deputy S.P in State Police'.
3. Meanwhile, despite some resistance from the Watch & Ward Staff of Visva-Bharati to the High Level Expert Committee's recommendation of partial outsourcing of security personnel, partial outsourcing has been carried out and upon examination of the new system of combination of Visva-Bharati Watch & Ward with private security personnel, the Security Audit Team has conveyed to the Vice Chancellor on 21.08.2006: 'The problem of manpower is now being sought to be resolved by outsourcing in which the University was facing stiff resistance from its staff. However, after outsourcing a part of the security apparatus, the security system of University as a whole, seemed to have improved'.
4. Some hostels and derelict Visva-Bharati quarters have been reported by the recent security audit to have become 'dens of criminals'.
5. As regards the matter of Rabindra-Bhavana and Kala-Bhavana art treasure security, the High Level Expert Committee recommended a system of double locks for the Strong Rooms, and this was at length fully implemented during the recent visit by the DIG, CID.
6. All security committees mentioned above have strongly recommended a preservation plan for the conservation of the art heritage and heritage buildings of Visva-Bharati.

Observations :

The HLC sees the foregoing observations of the security experts as being self-evident and it recognizes their value for urgent, remedial action.

Recommendations :

1. It recommends the creation of the post (and the recruitment to the post recommended by the Expert Committee) of a Chief Security Officer from the IPS or, as an alternative, the recruiting of an Ex-Army Officer as Chief Security Officer.
2. The HLC also recommends the installing of a bio-metric system of access to the strong rooms, and systems of infra-red ray inside the Strong Rooms after office hours to detect

unauthorized entry, fire-fighting equipment and fire hazard training of security staff, walky-talkie for the security staff and a 24 hour power supply to Rabindra Bhavana and Kala Bhavana, and the other essential equipment itemized by the experts.

3. It recommends the setting up of a Central Preservation Unit with trained curators.
4. The 'dens' in the hostels and in derelict quarters are in need of being 'de-denned' without any delay.
5. The HLC recognizes the need for a body controlling the campus area and exercising jurisdiction over it as a desideratum. The composition, nature and powers of the 'body' will have to be determined by the VB in consultation with MHRD and UGC. This body would need to assume the responsibility of removing encroachments on Visva-Bharati land, and of fencing the endangered boundaries of the University. Such a body will also be able to ban shops, hutments, hotels, restaurants, etc in the Visva-Bharati area.
6. The HLC sees rapid digitization of the endangered paintings, drawings, murals, frescoes, statues, sculptures, etc. together with the physical verification of these objects with the help of complete catalogues to be prepared for the purpose as a *security measure, no less than a conservation one*. One step proposed is the preparation of a complete *Rabindra Chitravali* (The Collected Paintings of Tagore) in a suitably published form alongside the already published *Rabindra Rachanavali* (The Complete Works of Tagore). Such catalogues and printed works will serve as an inventory during physical verifications and a security by way of 'insurance'.