

Ancient Nalanda Mahavihara: A Glorious History of Indian Knowledge

Dhiraj Kr. Nirbhay (DASANANA)

UGC-SRF, Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Buddhist Studies, University of Delhi

Email: dhiraj.nirbhay@gmail.com

Abstract

India has been a land of knowledge since ancient times, and in this context, the knowledge tradition of Buddhism is most important. It once spread the light of its knowledge across the entire continent of Asia as well as parts of Europe and Africa. The Nalanda Mahavihara was one of the world's first residential universities, housing more than 10,000 students and 2,000 teachers. Founded during the Gupta era and operational from the 5th to 12th century CE in Ancient Magadha (present-day Bihar), Nalanda attracted scholars from Korea, Japan, China, Tibet, Indonesia, Persia, and Turkey. Illustrious scholars including Nagarjuna, Dharmakirti, Dignaga, Santaraksita, and Atisa studied and taught here. The Mahavihara was destroyed by Ikhtiyar-ad-Din Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khilji in 1193 CE. This paper traces the early history, golden era, global influence, and eventual destruction of this remarkable institution of learning, and argues for its enduring significance in the Buddhist and global knowledge tradition.

Keywords: Mahavihara, Knowledge, Education, Cultural Heritage, Indian History, Nalanda, Buddhist Studies, Gupta Empire.

Introduction and Overview

Nalanda had been an ancient seat of learning and a religious center that imparted manifold knowledge. It existed in Ancient Magadha (presently, Bihar in India) between the 5th century CE to 12th century CE. It was believed that the term 'Nalanda' might have been originated from the word Nalam (Lotus), or da Nalanda, signifying "Giver of Knowledge". The ancient Mahavihara at Nalanda was established during the reign of a king called *Śakrāditya*, of the Gupta Dynasty.

Nalanda was visited by both Buddha and Mahavira around the 5th and 6th centuries BCE. It was also the place of birth and parinibbana of Sariputta, one of the famous disciples of Buddha. Many of the famous Buddhist scholars had studied and taught at Nalanda including Nagarjuna, who formalized the concept of Sunyata; Dharmapala, the teacher of Hiuen Tsang; Dharmakirti, the logician; Dignaga, the

founder of Buddhist Logic; Jinamitra, Santaraksita, who founded the first monastic order in Tibet; Padmasambhava, the master of Tantric Buddhism; *Candrakīrti*, *Śīlabhadra* and Atisa.

Nalanda was one of the world's first residential universities. More than 10,000 students and 2,000 teachers resided in this monastic campus. The Mahavihara built in red bricks was an architectural masterpiece. It had eight separate compounds and ten temples, along with many other meditation halls and classrooms. The library was in a nine storied building where valued copies of texts were produced. The subjects taught by the renowned teachers amassed every field of learning and attracted pupils and scholars from all parts of the world- Korea, Japan, China, Tibet, Indonesia, Persia, and Turkey. Nalanda was ransacked and destroyed by an army of the Muslim Mamluk Dynasty under Ikhtiyar-ad-Din Muhammad Bin Bakhtiyar Khilji in 1193 CE.

Presently, the ruins of the ancient Nalanda Mahavihara occupy an area of 14 hectares and most of it remains unexplored. The historical significance of Nalanda, Rajgir and Bodhgaya attract thousands of tourists every year from both India and abroad.

Historical Development and Royal Patronage

Early History by Taranath — According to Taranath Asoka gave offerings to the Chaitya of Sariputta that existed at Nalanda and erected a temple here; he must therefore be regarded as the founder of the Nalanda Vihara, the same authority adds that Nagarjuna, the famous Mahayana philosopher and alchemist of about the 2nd century CE began his Studies at Nalanda and later became the High Priest here. It is also added that Suvishnu, a Brahmin contemporary of Nagarjuna, built 108 temples at Nalanda to prevent the decline of both the Hinayana and Mahayana schools of Buddhism. Taranath also connects Aryadeva, a philosopher of the Madhyamika, school of Buddhism of the early 4th century CE with Nalanda, Further Asanga, a Buddhist philosopher of the Yogacara school belonging to the 5th century CE, is said to have spent here 12 years of his later life and to have been succeeded by his still more famous brother Vasubandhu as the High Priest of Nalanda.

Under the Gupta's Kingdom — These statements of Taranath would lead one to believe that Nalanda was a famous center of Buddhism already at the time of Nagarjuna and continued to be so in the following centuries, But it may be emphasized that excavations have not revealed anything which suggests the occupation of the site before the Guptas, the earliest datable finds being the copper-plate of Samudra Gupta and the coin of Kumar Gupta. This is fully confirmed by the statement of Hiuen Tsang that a former king of the country named Sakraditya selected by augury a lucky spot and built here a monastery. His successors, Buddha Gupta, Tathagata Gupta, Baladitya, and Vajra built some monasteries nearby, as some of the names here were borne by The Gupta Emperors, it has been held that all of them refer or to the Imperial Guptas. Sakraditya has been possibly identified with Mahendraditya, Kumar Gupta I (413-445 CE). Buddha Gupta seems to be identical with Buddha

Gupta (476-496 CE) and Baladitya with the king who had to encounter the Huna chief Mihirakula early in the 6th century CE.

The assumption that the monasteries of Nalanda were the creation of the Gupta emperors beginning with Kumar Gupta 1, receives confirmation from the fact that Fa Hien, the Chinese pilgrim of the early 5th century CE, does not mention the monastic establishments of Nalanda. He speaks of the village of Nalo, the place of birth and death of Sariputta and of a stupa existing here, As has been suggested above this place may be identical with Nalanda, but the absence of any other monument except a stupa at the time of Fa-Hien is remarkable.

Under The Rule of King Harshavardhan— Hiuen Tsang saw here an eighty feet high copper image of Buddha raised by Purna Varman, 'the last of the race of Asoka-rajā, belonging to the early sixth century.' And the illustrious Harshavardhan of Kannauj (606-647 CE) no doubt greatly helped the institution by his munificence. He built a monastery of brass, which was under construction when Hiuen Tsang visited the place. The biographer of Hiuen Tsang says that Harsha remitted the revenues of about a hundred villages as an endowment of the convent and two hundred householders in these villages contributed the required amount of rice, butter, and milk. 'Hence', he adds, 'the students here, being so abundantly supplied, do not require to ask for the four requisites. This is the source of the perfection of their studies, to which they have arrived.' This statement makes it clear that the students had not to beg for their daily food.

Harsha highly revered the Nalanda monks and himself their servant, about a thousand monks of Nalanda were present at the royal congregation at Kannauj. Royal patronage was therefore the keynote of the prosperity and efficiency of Nalanda. As Hiuen Tsang says, 'A long succession of kings continued the work of building, using all the skill of the sculptor, till the whole is truly marvelous to behold.'

Accounts of Chinese Pilgrims and Academic Life

Hiuen Tsang— Hiuen Tsang also recounts a few of the monasteries and temples that he saw here, giving the direction in most cases. Thus, the monastery built by Buddha Gupta was to the south of the one built by his father Sakraditya; to the east of Buddha Gupta's monastery was the one of Tathagata Gupta; the one built by Baladitya was to the north-east of the last; while Vajra's a monastery was to the west. After this an unnamed king of Central India is said to have built a great monastery to the north and erected a high wall with one gate round these edifices. Hiuen Tsang also a long list of the other monasteries and stupas that he found. Modern attempts to identify them with the existing ruins have met with scanty success, as the six centuries that separated Hiuen Tsang and the final desertion of the site must have produced many new buildings and modified the existing ones.

Hiuen Tsang was very warmly received at Nalanda and resided here for a long time. The courses of study included the scriptures of the Mahayana and Hinayana schools a Hetuvidya (Logic), Sabdavidya

(Grammar), Chikitsavidya (Medicine) etc. From the accounts of the pilgrim, Nalanda was bustling with literary activities: ‘The priests to the number of several thousands are men of the highest ability and talent. Their distinction is very great at the present time, and there are many hundreds whose fame has rapidly spread through distant regions, their conduct is pure and unblameable. They follow in sincerity the precepts of the moral law. The rules of the convent are severe and all the priests are bound to observe them. The countries of India respect them and follow them. The day is not sufficient for asking and answering profound questions. From morning till night, they engage in discussion; the old and the young mutually help one another. Those who cannot discuss questions out of the Tipitaka are little esteemed and are obliged to hide themselves for shame. Learned men from different cities, on this account, who desire to acquire quickly a renown in discussion, come here in multitudes to settle their doubts and then the streams (of their wisdom) spread far and wide. For this reason, some persons usurp the name (of Nalanda students) and in going to and from receive honor in consequence. If men of other quarters desire to enter and take part in the discussions, the keeper of the gate proposed some hard questions, many are unable to answer and retire. One must have studied deeply both old and new (books) before getting admission. Those students, therefore, who come here as strangers, must show their ability by hard discussion; those who fail compared with those who succeed are seven or eight to ten.

Hiuen Tsang received here the Indian name Moksha Deva and was remembered by the inmates of the Nalanda monastery long after he had left the place, several years after his return to China, Prajna Deva, a monk of Nalanda, sent him a pair of clothes, saying that the worshippers every day went on offering to Hiuen Tsang their bows and salutations.

Nalanda had by now acquired a celebrity spread all over the East as a center of Buddhist theology and educational activities. This is evident from the fact that within a short period of thirty years following Hiuen Tsang's departure, no less than eleven Chinese and Korean travelers are known to have visited Nalanda.

I-Tsing — Next in importance to Hiuen Tsang stands I-Tsing reached India in 673 CE and studied at Nalanda for a considerable time. His work records very minute details about the life led by the Nalanda monks, which he regarded as the ideal to be followed by the Buddhists all over the world. He says that the number of monks of the Nalanda monastery exceeded three thousand in number, maintained by more than two hundred villages bestowed by previous kings. He also gives details of the curriculum, which besides the Buddhist Scriptures, included Logic, Metaphysics and a very extensive study of Sanskrit Grammar. He also testifies to the strict rules of discipline that the monks observed their daily life being regulated by a water-clock.

Under the Pala's Kingdom— The Pala emperors held East India from the 8th to the 12th century CE and were noted for their patronage of Mahayana Buddhism, At the same time they established other monasteries at Vikramsila, Sompura, Odantapuri and Jagaddala, which might have created a division in the activities of Buddhist scholars. It is even stated by Taranath that the head of the Vikramsila

monastery had control over Nalanda. Still there are ample epigraphic and literary evidence to show that the Palas continued to be liberal in their munificence to Nalanda.

Some Scholars— Mention may here be made of some famous scholars who by their deep learning and excellence in conduct created and maintained the dignity which Nalanda enjoyed. It has been already stated above that the early Mahayana philosophers, Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Asanga and Vasubandhu were all according to Taranath, the high priests (Pandita) of Nalanda. Next in point of chronology comes Dignaga, the founder of the medieval school of logic; he was a southerner who was invited to Nalanda to defeat in disputation a Brahmanist scholar and received the title Tarka-Pungava, the next famous pandita was Dharmapala, who had retired just before Hiuen Tsang arrived. At the time of the pilgrim the head of the monastery was Shilbhadra, under whom the pilgrim studied and whose scholarship and personal qualities he describes eloquently. Shilbhadra was probably ancesded by Dharmakirti, who is credited by Taranath to have defeated a Brahmanical philosopher Kumarsila.

The next important figure was Santa Rakshit who was invited by King Khari-Aron-Deu-Taan to Tibet, where he lived for many years till his death in 762 CE, About the same time Tibet was visited by Padmasambhav, who acquired great fame as the founder of the institution of Lamaism in Tibet, it was no mean honor for Nalanda that one of its scholars gave to Tibetan religion a form that is continuing to the present day.

Thus, Nalanda succeeded in attracting the best Buddhist scholars whose fame spread to distant countries and persisted through ages. Rightly has it been said that a detailed history of would be a history of Mahayanist Buddhism.

End of Nalanda Mahavihara— It is impossible to give a separate account of the end of Nalanda: it forms only a chapter of the history of the disappearance of Buddhism from India.

It is evident from the account of Hiuen Tsang that Buddhism was slowly decaying when he visited India, Important centers of early Buddhism were deserted and some new centers, such as Nalanda in the east, Valabhi in the west and Kanchi in the south, had sprung up. After some time, Buddhism holds in other provinces and flourished only in Bihar and Bengal, where royal patronage succussed in keeping alive a dying cause. But Buddhism was no longer popular and centered round a few monasteries. The Buddhism that was practiced in these places was no longer of the simple Hinayana type nor oven had much in common with the Mahayana of the after days, but was strongly imbued with Ideas of Tantrism, indicating belief in the efficacy of charms and spells and involving secret practices and rituals, many of which are revolting to the modern sense of morality.

The crusade of the Brahmanical philosophers and preachers such as Kumaril Bhatt and Shankaracharya in the 8th century must have been another potent factor in rendering Buddhism Unpopular. They are reported to have travelled all over India, defeating the Buddhists in arguments and compelling them to submission. The final blow was delivered by the Muhammadan invaders, who according to their own accounts, drove away the monks and destroyed their cloisters. Cut off and

divorced from the support of a laity which had been its greatest strength in early days. Buddhism disappeared from India with this onslaught.

The Muslim historian Minhaj describes how Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khilji fell upon and destroyed a city in Western Bihar, which they called Bihar (Sanskrit Vihara) and which was found to be a place of study. It is not unlikely that Nalanda being referred to here. Taranath said that the Turks conquered the whole of Magadha and destroyed many monasteries; at Nalanda they did much damage and The Monks fled abroad.

Another Tibetan authority The Pag-Sam Jon Zang, however adds that after the raid of the Turks the temples and chaityas were repaired by a sage, Mudita Bhadra. Soon after this Kukutasiddha, minister of the king of Magadha, created a temple at Nalanda and while a religious sermon was being delivered there. Two very indignant Tirthika (Brahmanical) mendicants appeared. Some naughty young novice-monks in disdain threw washing-water on them, this made them very angry. After propitiating the sun for twelve years, they performed a yajna, fire-sacrifice and threw living embers and ashes from the sacrificial pit into the Buddhist Temples, etc. This produced a great conflagration which consumed Ratnodadhi, one of the libraries of Nalanda.

The first European account of the village Bargaon containing the ruins of Nalanda was given by Buchanon-Hamilton, who visited the place in the first quarter of the 19th century and found here some Brahmanical and Buddhist images. But it was only in the sixties of that century that Cunningham identified the place with the Ancient Nalanda based on the distances and directions given by the Chinese pilgrims and of some image inscriptions that he found here, in his Report he gives a thorough description of the ruins as he found them and of the antiquities that he collected. He also tried to identify the Temples and Monasteries mentioned by Hiuen Tsang with the existing ruins. In fact, it was he who drew the attention of the scholastic world to the importance of this site. After a few years, Broadley carried out some unsystematic excavations in Chaitya Site No. 12 and published a monograph on the place.

From 1915-16 the Archaeological Survey of India has been regularly excavating the site, at first with a grant from the Royal Asiatic Society of London and later out of its own resources. The activities of the Department in the direction of excavation, protection of the monuments from further ruin and collection of antiquities have resulted in making Nalanda a place which no Archaeological Pilgrim should leave unseen.

Discussion: Academic Rigor and Global Impact

One of the attractions of Nalanda as well as of other Schools of India to foreign scholars was its collection of sacred works and relics. Hiuen Tsang brought home from India as many as 657 MSS together with “images of the Buddha and his saints in gold and silver and crystal and sandalwood,

many curious pictures, 150 true relics of The Buddha,” which had to be “borne on 20 horses.” I-Tsing’s acquisition comprised some 400 Sanskrit texts containing 500,000 slokas, and 300 relics.

Students from Korea: Some of the realistic and refreshing details of education at Nalanda may be briefly mentioned. Two students from Korea achieved great distinction by their study at Nalanda. The first was named Arya Varma who came to Nalanda in CE. 630 and died here at 70. The second Korean scholar is named Hwui Yieh who also died at Nalanda at the age of 60. I-Tsing found the following line written on a Chinese MS. at Nalanda the Korean priest Hwui Yieh wrote this record.” We know these names, because I-Tsing happened to notice them. Many were the foreign scholars at Nalanda whose names were not thus noted. I-Tsing states that in the interval of about 40 years, before and after Hiuen Tsang as many as 56 scholars visited India from such foreign countries as China, Japan, and Korea, most of whom came to Nalanda for study by traveling by land via Khotan, Tibet, and Nepal, while some came by way of the sea via Tamralipti. Fortunately, I-Tsing has mentioned the names of some of these foreign scholars who were his contemporaries at Nalanda. Some of these are mentioned below:

- (1) Sramatja Hiuen-Tchao (Prakamati). He studied at Nalanda for 3 years (CE. 660) under his teacher, Jina Prabha, the Madhya-Mika Sastra and later, Yoga under Ratnasiri.
- (2) Tao-hi (Ri-deva) who dwelt for years at Nalanda as a student of Mahayana.
- (3) Fo-touo-ta-mouo (Buddha Dharma), a native of Tokharistan, whom I-Tsing met at Nalanda.
- (4) I-Tao-Cheng (Chandradev) (CE. 649) who won royal Cantrip by his eminence in learning.
- (5) Ta-Cheng-Teng (Mahayana-Pradipa) who first learnt Sanskrit by 12 years study at Tamralipti and then came to Nalanda in the company of I-Tsing.
- (6) Tao-Iin (Mala Prabha) who resided at Nalanda for many years as a student of Mahayana, coming to India by sea-route.
- (7) Ling-Yun (Prajadeva) who was a student of fine art at Nalanda painted the Maitreya and the Bodhidharma.
- (8) Tche-Hong who came from a Chinese aristocratic family, being the nephew of Ambassador Wang-Hiuen-Tse and became a student of Mahayana at Nalanda.
- (9) Ou-Hing (a second Prajadeva) who studied at Nalanda Yoga, the Kosas and Rules of Discipline and practiced Yoga and Meditation (Vipagyana) [p. 192 of Nilakantha Sastri's Article on Nalanda in Madras University Journal XIII, 2]. As regards I-Tsing himself, he first stayed for a year at Nalanda studying shabdavidya and Mahayana and later came back, and lived for 10 years at Nalanda, studying the lives of the Monks.

I-Tsing was followed by several other Chinese scholars like Ou-Kong who lived at Nalanda for 3 years (CE. 765-768); and Ki-ye, who came to India about 970 CE. and visited Nalanda.

Difficulties of Travelling. Glimpses of some of the difficulties encountered by these foreign scholars on their way to India are also given. Fa-Hien who travelled in India between CE. 399-414 states that he passed through about 30 countries where at places 'Death seemed inevitable' [Legge's Fa-Hien, p,

117]. Yuan Chang says that “alone he had crossed trackless Wastes, and bravely climbed mountains high beyond conjecture, even chilled by icy wind, and cold with eternal snow” [p. 12 of Watters]. The difficulties due to man were sometimes greater, such as detention and arrest in hostile territory, once a royal host grew too fond of him till, he had to resort to hunger-strike to obtain release from his clutches.

Difficulty of Admission. What led students from these distant countries, through centuries, to face the risks of such journeys to India? It was their zeal for the learning and culture of India. It no mere elementary education they were seeking. They were out of the higher knowledge of which Nalanda was the most famous center in the East. Admission to Nalanda as an Academy Advanced study and research was, accordingly, not very easy. It was in the hands of a Board of Specialist who held a difficult test for it. As stated by Hiuen Tsang [Watters, II. 165], “only two or three out of ten” could pass that entrance test. “The majority, beaten by the difficulties of the problems, withdraw, even of those from abroad.” This means that only 20% passed at the Entrance examination of Nalanda, and 80% failed. The severity of the examination was necessary to maintain the standard of its learning for which the University was so far-famed. Hiuen Tsang points out that “foreign students came to Nalanda to put an end to their doubts and then to become celebrated”. They came to complete at Nalanda the investigations upon which they had been engaged at home. This should be the aim of all students seeking further education in foreign countries. The highest academic honour of the times was a Fellowship of Nalanda, the stamp of its studentship. Hiuen Tsang says: “Those who stole the name of Nalanda brother (or student) was all treated with respect wherever they went”. No wonder that this coveted imprimatur of Nalanda lent itself to the practice of fraud for its acquisition.

I-Tsing [p. 177 of Takakusu] also records the same facts. At Nalanda, “there assemble eminent and accomplished men in crowds, discuss possible and impossible doctrines and after having been assured of the excellence of their opinions by wise men, became far-famed for their wisdom. “Thus, the students of Nalanda were already eminent and accomplished” in learning, and looked to the “Wise men” of Nalanda, its teachers, to complete their learning. Learning by Discussion, the method of learning pursued at Nalanda. its pedagogic principles and practices were shaped by the contents and character of that learning. Learning was by discussion and interrogation. As noted by Hiuen Tsang [Life^ p. 112]: “Learning and discussing, they found the day too short; day and night they admonished each other, juniors and seniors, mutually helping to perfection.”

Number of Teachers and Taught. The most striking and singular feature of Nalanda was that, although 'that was a post-graduate Institute for higher study and research.

Nalanda— 'The stupa type of architecture began as an earthen burial mound and was revered by the local population. The cult of stupa was taken up by Buddhism and Asoka raised stupas all over India. They are large hemispherical domes, containing a central chamber, in which the relics of Buddha were placed in a small casket, often beautifully carved in crystal. The core of the stupa was of

unburnt brick and the outer face of burnt brick, covered with a thick layer of plaster. The stupa was crowned by an umbrella of wood or stone, and was surrounded by a wooden fence enclosing a path for the ceremonial clockwise circumambulation (pradakshina), which was the chief form of reverence paid to the relics within it. In the period between the Maurya's and the Guptas much wealth and energy were spent on Buddhist architecture and the older stupas were greatly enlarged and beautified. Of later stupas, the one most famous is that of Nalanda. In its present ruined state, it gives the impression of a brick pyramid with steps leading up to its terraces. It was originally a tall stupa raised on a high base, with a smaller stupa at each corner, but the monument appears to have undergone many alterations in Gupta and Pala times. The groups of monastic buildings are often surrounded by fortress-like walls. Originally the limewashed or plastered stupa shone brilliantly in the tropical sun-light, its pinnacle, now generally broken, rising like a golden spear from the ceremonial stone umbrella on top of the domes. The genius of the Indian builders found expression in the production of the immense monastic establishments which, in the first millennium, gradually rose up on several sites, consecrated to the Buddha in Bihar and the neighboring country, e.g.-, the University of Nalanda.

The excavations at Nalanda have disclosed a long sequence of buildings erected and re-erected on the same site after intervals of ruin and desertion, the entire period ranging from approximately the 6th to the 12th century.

Cave Temples —The Chief Architectural remains of the Pre-Gupta period other than the stupas and their surrounding gateways and railings are artificial caves, excavated for religious purposes. In Patna district the only piece of such architecture is to be found in Swarnabhandar at Rajgir. It is a plain rectangular hall with a rough interior.

After the sack of Nalanda at the close of the 12th century at the hands of the Muslim invaders, the valuable library containing Buddhist literature was burnt to ashes and the monks were done to death. However, some who could make their escape with the manuscripts in their hands went to Tibet which became the repository of Buddhist literature. In 1930s Tripitkacharya Rahul Sankrityayan so journeyed in Lhasa (Tibet) and brought copies of Chinese and Tibetan versions of the Pali texts and certain Sanskrit texts.

During the period of his stay in India, Hiuen Tsang, who was a learned Mahayanist monk, studied Indian philosophy, Buddhist at several monasteries, singly or under Indian teachers of contemporary renown. He makes special mention of two educational establishments that were pre-eminent in India, Nalanda and Valabhi, in eastern and western India respectively. The latter, which was a centre of Hinayana Buddhism, does not seem to have attracted Mahayanist scholars much, but of Nalanda he has left a detailed description which is supplemented with further details by his disciple and biographer, Hwui-Li. At Nalanda, Hiuen Tsang studied the Yoga philosophy under the head of that institution, Silabhadra, for five years or more. With its full complement of schools of studies, lecture halls, libraries, regulations for admission and attendance at lectures, conduct and discipline (with

prescribed penalties for a breach of these), and a complete system of academic administration, it was a full-fledged monastic university of immense size. Its magnitude can be judged from Hiuen Tsang's report that the number of teachers was 1,500 and of learners 10,000 though the figure seems to have come down later, in I-Tsing's time, to a little over 3,000.

It is said that as many as one hundred chairs or pulpits were daily arranged for the lectures and discussions. The range of studies covered all subjects of Buddhist learning, both sacred and secular and the learners had to make their choice among them. Hiuen Tsang's life by Hwui-Li gives us an idea of the subjects studied at Nalanda. He says (p. 112): "The priests belonging to the convent (of Nalanda) or strangers (residing therein) always number 10,000 and all study the Great Vehicle, as well as the works belonging to the eighteen sects, and not only so, but even ordinary works such as the other books, the Hetuvidya, the Sabdavidya, the Cikitsavidya, the works on magic; besides, they thoroughly investigate the 'miscellaneous' works. There are 1,000 men who can explain 20 collections of sutras and sastras; 500 who can explain 30 collections and perhaps ten men, including the Master of the Law who can explain fifty collections. Silabhadra alone has studied and understood the whole number."

In Chapter XXXIV of his Record of the Buddhist Religion, I-Tsing also gives us information about the method of learning followed in Indian educational establishments. Sanskrit grammar was always one of the basic studies of a scholar. I-Tsing says: "The old translators (of Sanskrit into Chinese) seldom tell us the rules of Sanskrit language... I trust that now a thorough study of Sanskrit grammar may clear up many difficulties we encounter whilst engaged in translation." He goes on to describe the systematic way in which the study of grammar was conducted. It is clear from commentaries such as those of Yashomitra that Panini's grammar formed a part of the basic training of a young scholar. I-Tsing mentions the grammatical works a scholar was required to study. These include the following: Panini's sutras, Dhatupatha, Astadhatu, Gunadi-sutras, Kausikortti, Curni (perhaps the same as Patanjali's Mahabhasya), Bhartrhari's Sastra, Vakyapadiya and Pei-na or Bedavrtti. He further adds that young scholars "devote themselves to logic (Hetuvidya) and Metaphysics (Abhidharma-kosa). In learning the Nyaya-dvara-tarka-sastra, they rightly draw inferences (anumana); and by studying the Jataka Mala their powers of comprehension increase."

1. He goes on to say: "The priests learn besides all the Vinaya works and investigate the sutras and shastras as well. They oppose the heretics as they would drive beasts (deer) in the middle of a plain and explain away disputes as boiling water melts frost."

2. He also adds, "In India, there are two traditional ways in which one can attain great intellectual power. Firstly, by repeatedly committing to memory, the intellect is developed; secondly, the alphabet fixes one's ideas. In this way, after a practice of ten days, a scholar feels his thoughts rise like a fountain and can commit to memory whatever he has once heard (not requiring to be told twice). This is far from being a myth for I have met such men."

3. At the conclusion of the curriculum, academic degrees were granted according to the supplicant's status and qualifications. The daily time-table was regulated by means of a clepsydra (water clock), a contraption consisting of a large bowl of water with a smaller perforated one floating in it, each immersion of the smaller bowl indicating a quarter of an hour which was announced by one stroke on a drum. A working day for teachers and students was eight hours. Nalanda became famous for its 'Schools of Discussion': indeed, they harked back to a more ancient and established tradition of monastic education to the Kathas, an institution of primitive monasteries as we have seen. The schools attracted learners not only from all over India, but also from the Far East and later from Tibet. "Learning and discussing," says Hiuen Tsang, "they find the day too short." The uninhibited scope and freedom of these discussions at Nalanda and at all other Monastic Universities must be counted as a great contributory factor in that process of fusion of Brahmanical and Buddhist thought and culture which makes it so intriguing a feature of the final period of the history of Ancient Indian Culture. Traditional legends of the vast manuscript wealth of Nalanda's libraries come from Tibetan sources, from Lama Taranath and other Tibetan writers on the history of Buddhism belonging to the 17th and 18th century. A whole area of the campus was, according to the Tibetan writers, set apart for the libraries and was covered with huge, many-storeyed library buildings, three of which had the fancy names of Ratnodadhi (Sea of Jewels), Ratnasagar (Ocean of Jewels) and Ratna Ranjak (Jewel-adorned), the first-named edifice being nine story. The Tibetan legend is that these great libraries were reduced to ashes by the deliberate act of an infuriated incendiary, a Turuska (Turk). Nalanda, founded as a monastery centuries before, must have touched its peak of fame as a university sometime in the 6th century, between the time of Fa-Hien and that of Hiuen Tsang and continued to function, though dimmed perhaps by the rising glory of the University of Vikramasila, situated within a measurable distance of Nalanda, for about three centuries after.

Architecturally, Nalanda was probably the grandest and most magnificent of all monastic establishments in the 7th century CE. in India. We have not only Hiuen Tsang's testimony for it, but also a descriptive reference in an inscription of King Yasovarman of the following century which mentions Nalanda's 'rows of monasteries with their series of turrets, licking the clouds.' Hwui-Li and Hiuen Tsang provide more details. "All outside courts, in which the priests' chambers are located are of four stages. Each stage has dragon-like projections and coloured eaves pearl (jewel?)-red pillars carved and ornamented, richly adorned balustrades etc. While the roofs are covered with tiles that reflect the light in a thousand shades. These things add to the beauty of the scene. The Sangharama's (monastic establishments) of India are counted by myriads, but this is the most remarkable for grandeur and height."

(Hwui-Li). "In this establishment, the work of successive kings, the sculpture is perfect and beautiful."

(Hiuen Tsang) The natural surroundings in which this grand masterpiece of architecture was situated made a perfect setting. The grounds were variegated with ponds with a great profusion of blue lotuses, and to their exquisite blue the kanaka flowers springing up everywhere joined their deep red, while the

mango-groves checkered the landscape with their grateful shade. Of all this natural and man-made beauty of Nalanda nothing remains now but moldering mounds, scattered debris, and broken stone images here and there. The archaeologists have been busy with spade and shovel over them.

The village of Bargaon, a few miles from Rajgrha (Rajgir in Bihar State), is the site of Nalanda, it has been excavated by archaeologists and the finds are housed in a museum on the site. Among these finds is the official seal of the University, engraved on stone, with the wheel of Dhamma, flanked with a gazelle on either side, bearing the inscription: 'Venerable Community of Monks of the Nalanda Mahavihara.' The seal proves the University to have been a unitary organization comprising several Viharas (Monasteries), built as we know from Hiuen Tsang's account, in different centuries - such an organization being known as a Mahavihara (Great Monastic Establishment).

The other pre-eminent Mahavihara, spoken of by both Hiuen Tsang and I-Tsing was at Valabhi in western India. I-Tsing reports Nalanda and Valabhi to be the two places in India where it was usual for scholars to reside for two or three years to complete their education. Valabhi seems to have been in that century the largest Hinayana's establishment in India, as Nalanda was the largest Mahayanist.

Conclusion

The educational institutions at Nalanda, though not the product of the combined influence of the East and the West?

Wonderfully upheld the ideals of the Vihara of the Buddhistic India, at the same time discharging the functions of a seat of universal learning, known as a University in the West.

Nalanda was primarily a Buddhist institution (Vihara) established solely with a view to propagate the preachings of the Enlightened Sakya Prince. In this capacity, it sheltered thousands of Bhikkhus, who studied the Dhamma of Buddha day and night. To the Buddhists, Nalanda was nothing short of a Temple of God. But Nalanda outgrew the limits of a mere Vihara of Buddhistic learning. The Vihara, in course of time, taught the tenets and principles not only of Buddhism but also of many other faiths, besides all the secular sciences. Unlike the University of Paris of Mediaeval Europe, it could boast of a faculty of medicine. Nalanda was something more than a mere seat of universal learning. Students flocked to its portals, not only from all the corners of India, but also from the whole of the then civilized world, save perhaps from Greece and Rome. It was a university also in the sense that it attracted students from all parts of the world.

What Newman, however, values most, more than the universal aspect of the curriculum of an educational institution, more than its international representation from all over the world, is a residential University. And Nalanda was nothing if not a residential University par excellence. At Nalanda a multitude of young men, keen, open-hearted, sympathetic, and observant came together, freely mixing with and learning from one another, even if there were none to teach them. The conversation of all was a lecture to each. Thus, the students: 'Saw the ' world on a small field with

little trouble. And further by eliminating and adjusting the widely different notions, by acting according to the conventional rules of the institution, the whole assemblage was molded together and gained one tone and one character.

Nalanda, in this way, performed one of the most important functions, namely, of enabling the students to form each other of learning the greatest art of living in helping to form an intelligent society. If Nalanda could thus fulfil the highest requisites of a true University, it also claimed a method of teaching which has been always regarded as ideal. Besides lectures, students spent a greater portion of their time in mutual discussions with their teachers.

Nalanda, with the pursuit of Theology, the Science of God as its cardinal aim, with all the advantages that a residential University has, imparted to its students not merely knowledge, but culture that would make its recipients perfect gentlemen. The students not only gained knowledge but a sense of reverence was also inculcated in them. They were true to the idea of the poet who sang, let knowledge grow from more to more;

But more of reference in us dwell.

Looked at from all points of view we find that Nalanda fulfils Newman's conception of a university. How far this University equipped the students to face the stern realities of life, to earn their livelihood, is a question which cannot easily be answered. But in this connection, it must be remembered that it is only of late that this function of a University is looked upon with some importance, it is only in this age of struggle for existence with all the grim realities connoted by the phrase that our commercialized ideas have come to look upon the University as a job-providing institution. Students went to Nalanda to seek and imbibe culture, not to qualify themselves for posts. The end in view was spiritual and not secular. Men's wants were fewer, and fewer men went in for higher knowledge. Consequently, there was no overcrowding in any walk of life. Moreover, the whole environment in which the University worked was fundamentally different. Prescribed trades and professions, corresponding to the fourfold division of society, practically limited the aspirations for superior occupations only to a small number. Nalanda, hence, had not to answer the charge levelled against modern Universities, that they do not equip the students with the qualification to face the problems of practical life as it had not to cater to men's practical and mundane needs. This had a very salutary effect. The University was free to develop the cultural side of knowledge imparted to its students, whereby it could envisage a mighty spiritual horizon. Thus, in the words of I-Tsing, Nalanda could claim to be the most magnificent Temple of Learning in Jambudweep, or to use a modern nomenclature the premier and pioneer National or International University of India.

References

1. Annual Report. 1916-1921. Archaeological Survey of India- Eastern Circle

2. Acharya, Baldev Upadhyay. 2017. *Bauddh Darshan Mimansa-Varanasi*: Chaukhamba Vidyabhawan Prakashan, 374
3. Bapat, Purushottam Vishvanaath. 2012. *2500 Years of Buddhism*- Publications Division Gov. of India, 55-56,64,80,107,148,155-159,161-162,190-193,205,214,227-228,239-240
4. Beal, Samuel. 1884. *Buddhist Records of The Western World*- London: Kegan Paul Trench Trubner & Co.
5. Beal, Samuel 1914. *The Life of Hiuen Tsang*- Kegan Paul Trench Trubner & Co. London
6. Bose, Phanindranath. 1923. *Indian Teachers of Buddhist Universities*- Madras: Theosophical Publishing House Adyar, 25,29,31,36,86,97-98,105-142
7. Chatterji, Sri Gaurishankar. 1938. *Harshvardhan*- Allahabad: Hindustani Academy Uttar Pradesh, 19,21,35-36,46,94,112,119,129-130,144,146-147,219-220,223,230,232-238,244,250-251,254, 256,262
8. Ghosh, Amalnanda. 1939. *A Guide to Nalanda*- New Delhi: ASI, 39-48
9. Kumar, N. 1971. *Image of Patna*- District Gazetteer of Patna, 12-14
10. Laha, Bimal Charan. 1972. *Historical Geography of Ancient India*- Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Hindi Granth Academy, 385,402-409,421
11. Lama, Taranath. 1970. *History of Buddhism in India*- Delhi: Motilal Banarasi Das
12. Legge, James. 1886. *Travels of Fa-xian*- London: Oxford University Press
13. Mookerjee, Radha Kumud. 1944. *The University of Nalanda*- The Journal of The Bihar Research Society, 126-159
14. *Nava Nalanda Mahavihara. (An Overview)*- nnm.ac.in
15. Rongxi, Li. 1996. *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of Western Regions*- America: BDK, 126,212,248,265
16. Sankrityayan, Mahapandit Rahul. 1956. *Mahamanav Buddha (4th Edition)*- Lucknow: Bharatiy Bauddh Samiti, 21,33-34,36,127,171,175
17. Sankalia, Hasmukh D. 1934. *The University of Nalanda*- Madras
18. Sastri. 1930. 'Nalanda in Ancient literature' in *Proceedings of the Fifth Oriental Conference, (Vol-1)*
19. Sastri, Hirananda. 1942. *Nalanda and its Epigraphic Material*- New Delhi: ASI
20. Singh, Dr Priyansu. 1993. *Bharat Ke Pramukh Bauddh Tirthsthal*- Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 93-98
21. Takakasu. 1896. *A Record of the Buddhist Religion (by I-Tsing)*- London: Oxford University Press
22. Samaddar. 1927. *Diaries of Magadha*- Patna
23. Sharma, V. (2022). *The practice of Pedagogy in Buddhist Mahaviharas of Ancient India. Bodhi Path, 23(2), 100-109.*

24. Singh, R. (2021). IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE LIVELIHOOD DEPENDENT ON BUDDHIST TOURISM IN NALANDA REGION. *Bodhi Path*, 21(2), 3-8.