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नव नालन्दा महाविहार, नालन्दा  
( समविश्वविद्यालय )

संस्कृति मंत्रालय, भारत सरकार

**Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, Nalanda**

(Deemed to be University)  
Ministry of Culture, Government of India

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# 1

## A Brief Profile of the Nava Nalanda Mahavihara

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### Introduction

Nalanda has been a seat of profound knowledge and wisdom. It is interesting to note that the steatite and stone statues of the Buddhist, Hindu and Jaina deities have been found at Nalanda and in its surroundings. Nalanda and the ruins of the Ancient Mahavihara are almost synonymous which has been the great center of Buddhist learning for nearly 700 years. Nalanda is considered as an Ancient centre of Advanced Studies in, Art, Architecture, Iconography, Literature, Philosophy and Religious- Treatises, mainly in Buddhist discipline that attracted the foreign students like Fa-Hien, Xuan Zang and Itsing.

In order to develop a centre of Higher Studies in Pali and Buddhist Studies on the line of Ancient Nalanda Mahavihara, Nava Nalanda Mahavihara was established by Government of Bihar in the year 1951. Department of Culture, MHRD, Government of India took over the Mahavihara under its administrative control as an autonomous institution in 1994 and consequently the UGC accorded the status of Deemed to be University to Nava Nalanda Mahavihara on November 13, 2006. At present the NNM is a Deemed to be University fully funded and administered by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India.

### Background

It seems appropriate here to throw some light on historicity of Nalanda and ancient Mahavihara. Nalanda traces its origin to the hallowed presence of the Buddha himself who gave his early teachings in Rajagrha, the capital of the then



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Magadha empire which was just 11 km from Nalanda. Nalanda as a monastic institution, at the time of the Buddha, emerged into the greatest academic and spiritual center of Asia during the early medieval period. It occupies a prominent place in the annals of Buddhism.

The story of the foundation of the Nalanda Mahavihara has been vividly described by the famous Chinese monk-scholar Ven. Xuan Zang. According to him the name of Sakraditya (415-455 AD) who is identified with Kumaragupta, one of the Gupta kings, is considered as the founder of Nalanda Monastery. A few other monasteries were also built afterwards by other kings. For example, Buddhagupta, Tathagatagupta, Baladitya and Vajra built four Sangharamas or monasteries at Nalanda after Sakraditya. A central Indian king also built a marvelous monastery here. Later, the different monasteries were brought into aggregation constructing round the edifices a high wall with one gate. Thus the whole area was transformed into a Great Monastery (Mahavihara) – a unitary establishment having the shape of a university from about 450 AD as its official seal showed bearing the inscription : **Nalanda mahavihariyarya bhiksu-sanghasya** (of the venerable Monk community of Nalanda Mahavihara).

The atmosphere within the Nalanda Mahavihara was very cohesive and self monitoring. Students mentored each other in perfecting their skills by coaxing debates, admonishing each other and by talking about the sastras. Students from foreign countries came to the establishment for a deeper understanding of the sutras and to put an end to their doubts and as they learned and practiced, they then became celebrated. Although it was a centre of Mahāyana, students also studied teachings of 18 other sects, *vedas*, medicine, logic, astrology and astronomy among many other subjects. Every day within the campus they arranged preachings of 100 pupils and all students attended these discourses without fail. Hierarchy of the monks depended on how many collections of sutras they could



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explain. At Xuan Zang's time there were 1000 monks who could explain 20 collections, 500 monks who could explain 30 collections. Master Shilabhadra, Xuan Zang's teacher and the chief abbot of the Mahavihara alone could explain 50 collections. Hwui Lun (7<sup>th</sup> CE) and It-Sing(7<sup>th</sup> CE) have mentioned about 3500 monk students staying in the Nalanda Mahavihara. Buddhism in general was taught and practiced at Nalanda Mahavihara following the age old Buddhist concept of Pariyatti (theory), Patipatti (practice) and Pativeda (experience) thereby, acquiring knowledge both mundane and supra-mundane.

The contribution of the Mahavihara to the development of Buddhist learning, particularly to its idealistic philosophy was well recognized. Silabhadra, who is reported to have been the only one having mastery over the Sutras, instructed Xuan Zang in the intricacies of idealistic philosophy and the latter in turn founded a new school of it after his return to China. Nalanda was also a centre of Buddhist logic. Dingnag, the father of Buddhist logic, was an acarya here. He was followed by Dharmakriti who further developed logic, Prajnakaramitra of the Pala period was another luminary in this field.

However, in course of time Nalanda Mahavihara was deserted due to Muslim invasion and eventually forgotten. The site ultimately turned into mounds. Francis Buchanan was the first person who initiated a spot survey of the place on January 8, 1812. But it was Sir Alexander Cunningham who first and finally identified the complex of ruins of Mahavihara in 1861-62. A. M. broadly excavated in 1870, some portions of this important site. But a systematic excavation work started under Spooner in 1916. The work continued for 20 years under several excavators and finally Shri Hirananda Shastri completed the major part of the excavation work. The findings are now preserved at the ruins site at Nalanda and the antiquities in the form of inscriptions, icons, terracotta, seals, etc., discovered are preserved in the Archaeological Museum just opposite the 'ruins' site at Nalanda. The importance of Nalanda Mahavihara has been recognized as a Centre