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2014 - 2015



नव नालन्दा महाविहार, नालन्दा
(सम विश्वविद्यालय)

संस्कृति मंत्रालय, भारत सरकार

Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, Nalanda

(Deemed to be University)

Ministry of Culture, Government of India

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A Brief Profile of the Nava Nalanda Mahavihara

Introduction : Nalanda has been a seat of profound knowledge and wisdom. It is interesting to note that statues and sculptures of the Buddhist, Hindu and Jain deities have been found at Nalanda and in its surroundings. Historically Nalanda developed from a place of pilgrimage of Buddhists and Jains to a renowned Nalanda university for Indian as well as foreign monk students. Nalanda and the ruins of the Ancient Mahavihara are almost synonymous which has been the great Centre of Buddhist learning for nearly 700 year, since its inception in the 5 AD till its extinction in the 12 AD. Nalanda is considered as an Ancient International Centre of Higher Studies in History, Art, Architecture, Iconography, Literature, Education, Philosophy and Religious Treatises, mainly in Buddhist discipline that attracted the foreign students like Xuan Zang, I-Tsing etc.

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 November 20, 1951. Department of Culture, MHRD, Government of India took over the Mahavihara under its administrative control as an autonomous institution in 1994 and the UGC accorded the Nava Nalanda Mahavihara the status of Deemed to be University on November 13, 2006.

Background : Nalanda traces its origin to the hallowed presence of the Buddha himself who delivered important discourses in Rajgir, the capital of the then Magadha Empire which was just 11 km from Nalanda. Nalanda as a monastic



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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, Sakraditya (415-455 AD), identified as one of the Gupta kings- Kumaragupta, is considered as the founder of Nalanda Monastery. A few other monasteries were also built afterwards by other kings, namely, Buddhagupta, Tathagatagupta, Baladitya and Vajra who built four monasteries (Samgharama) at Nalanda after Sakraditya. Later, these monasteries were brought into aggregation, constructing round the edifice a high wall with one gate. Thus the whole area was transformed into a Centre of Higher Learning (Mahavihara) – a unitary establishment having the shape of a university since 450 AD, as its official seal contained the inscription: '**Nalanda mahavihariyarya bhiksu-sanghasya**' i.e. (of the venerable Monk community of Nalanda Mahavihara).

The atmosphere within the Nalanda Mahavihara was very cohesive and self-monitoring. Students mentored each other for perfection in their skills by coaxing debate among them. Students came from far off foreign countries for a deeper understanding of the sutras and to remove their doubts before being celebrated. Although it was a Centre of Mahayana Buddhism, students also studied here Teachings of eighteen other Sects, *Vedas*, Medicine, Logic, Astrology, Astronomy and many other subjects. Hierarchy of the monks depended on how many collections of sutras they could explain. During the time of Xuan Zang, there were 1000 monks who could explain 20 collections and 500 monks who could explain 30 collections. It is only Master Shilabhadra, Xuan Zang's teacher and the chief abbot of the Mahavihara who could explain 50 collections. Xuan Zang and I-Tsing of 7 AD



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mentioned about 3500 monk students staying in the Nalanda Mahavihara and Buddhism was taught and practiced here following the age old Buddhist methodology of *Pariyatti* (theory), *Patipatti* (practice) and *Pativeda* (experience) for getting both mundane as well as supra-mundane knowledge.

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 in China after his return from India. Nalanda was also Centre of Buddhist logic. Dinnaga, the father of Buddhist logic, was an acharya here. He was followed by Dharmakriti who further developed logic. Prajnaparamitra 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 identified the complex of ruins of Mahavihara in 1861-62. **Alexander Meyrick Broadley** excavated some portions of this important site in 1871-72. However a systematic excavation work, started under D B Spooner in 1916, was continued for 20 years under several excavators and it was Shri Hirananda Shastri who completed the major part of the excavation work in 1939. The findings are now preserved at the ruins-site of Nalanda and the antiquities, discovered in the form of inscriptions, icons, terracotta, seals, etc., are preserved in the Archaeological Museum just opposite the ruins-site. The importance of Nalanda Mahavihara has been recognized as a Centre of Higher Learning and evolved as the most ancient monastic university of the world at that time.