



# Educational Models of Ancient Indian Universities: Nalanda, Takshashila, and Vallabhi

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the educational models of three seminal ancient Indian universities—Nalanda, Takshashila, and Vallabhi to illuminate how they forged a distinctive tradition of higher learning that integrated residential life, monastic discipline, and wide-ranging curricula. Drawing on historical narratives and cross-cultural accounts, it traces their emergence under successive dynasties; their evolution from Brahmanical centers to Buddhist Mahaviharas; and their role as cosmopolitan hubs attracting scholars from Asia and beyond. The analysis compares curricular breadth (from logic, grammar, medicine, astronomy, and statecraft to Buddhist philosophy and dialectics), pedagogy (dialogue, debate, memorization, and teacher–disciple mentorship), and institutional governance, highlighting contrasts such as Takshashila’s practical, art- and polity-oriented training versus Nalanda’s encyclopedic scholasticism and Vallabhi’s strengths in philosophy and jurisprudence. Architectural evidence is read alongside educational functions to show how cloisters, lecture halls, scriptoria, and baths structured scholarly life. The paper assesses cultural impact knowledge transmission, elite formation, and transregional networks and then interrogates the multifactorial decline (shifting patronage, sectarian realignments, and invasions) that dismantled these ecosystems between the 7th and 13th centuries. Finally, it argues that their integrated model residential learning, interdisciplinary breadth, rigorous debate culture, and public service orientation offers actionable principles for contemporary university reform: embedding ethics with expertise, aligning research with social needs, fostering global exchange while honoring local knowledge, and designing campuses where architecture enables community and inquiry. By reinterpreting these precedents, the study reframes ancient Indian universities not as relics but as prototypes for resilient, inclusive, and outward-looking higher education fit for twenty-first-century challenges; its purpose is to distill transferable design and governance lessons that modern institutions can adapt to strengthen quality, equity, and international collaboration.

**Keywords:** Nalanda; Takshashila; Vallabhi; Buddhist monastic education; curriculum and pedagogy; residential universities; knowledge networks.

## **Introduction**

Ancient Indian universities represent one of the most compelling chapters in the history of education worldwide. They have left in their wake a fantastic legacy for successive generations to contemplate and draw inspiration from. Since the birth of first political states in early Iron Age India, to the Mauryan Empires that followed, a complex economic, political, social and cultural system emerged and fused several ideas and practices that evolved over centuries into a unique educational system. Ancient India witnessed the rise of three university towns— Takshashila, Nalanda and Vallabhi each creating an enduring scholastic tradition in order to transmit the accumulated knowledge down the generations.

Three of the most renowned educational centres are Nalanda, Takṣaśilā, and Vallabhi. Nalanda is famous for having the widest curriculum and was a model for all the subsequent universities. Takṣasila was a good example of an art-oriented curriculum, while Vallabhi excelled in philosophy. Nalanda, Takṣaśilā, and Vallabhi remain synonymous with excellence in learning. Estimates of the period at which these institutions originated differ, but it is certain they together flourished between the third century BCE and the early thirteenth century of the Christian era. The Umayyad Islamic invasion of Sind in 712 CE caused a long hiatus in the subcontinent's relationship with the West. The opening of trade and cultural links with Europe through the Middle East after the eleventh century indicated the renewal of earlier traditions. The emergence of these three centres, probably not accidental, was closely related to the continuity of link with the West after the fall of the Mauryans. The training in the most perfect and developed version of the Indian culture prepared a class of leaders to whom the subcontinent owed the persistence of its traditions even in periods of foreign occupation following the invasions of the thirteenth century. Moreover, the presence of these institutions throughout this period ensured that the classical Indo-Aryan culture continued to survive even in regions where a foreign culture was the dominant one.

These centres began as Brahmanic educational places under the Mauryans and began to enjoy Imperial patronage during the Sunga dynasty. When the Sungas were overthrown by the Indo-Scythians, the three institutions came under the sway of Indo-Scythian rulers, who protected and enlarged them. Subsequently, Uttarasthana and Guptas and later Maukhari rulers continued their fostering. At the same time, the nature of these institutions also underwent a change. In their later periods, all of the three became seats of learning where Buddhist studies figured prominently, and the general Brahmanic curriculum was supplemented by Buddhist philosophy and theology. Large monastic centres like Nalanda were attached to these universities and the teachers and students lived and studied in the monasteries.

## **Nalanda University**

The ancient period in India saw the emergence of higher educational institutions such as Takshashila, Nalanda, and Vallabhi. Known as Mahāvihāras or Great Monastic Colleges, their primary role was Buddhist theological education, although their curricula encompassed statecraft, economics, philosophy, literature, Ayurveda, medicine, and Vedas. Schooling techniques applied questioning, discussion, contradiction, and praise to develop students' constitutions. These universities attracted students from China, Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Turkey, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia. Nalanda University Founded in the fifth century in place

of an earlier 3rd-century vihar, Nalanda's Mahavihara specialized in theological syllabi: Hinayana, Mahayana, logic, philosophy, metaphysics, grammar, dialectics, and other arts conducive to Buddhist studies. Buddhism underpinned Nalanda's approach to the arts and sciences. Yet its curriculum focused on the arts and sciences was meant only for the intellectual development of the students and their teachers. Other faculty taught the Vedas and other sciences conducive to the development of a man's material and worldly interests. Thus the educational ideals of Nalanda were synthesis and not orthodoxy, and its spiritual outlook both idealistic and practical. It was called Sarama-granta. Kumara Gupta, the emperor of the 7th century, popularized this Sarama-granta philosophy.

**Founding and Development:** Takshashila, meaning the place of cut stone, was the earliest of the three ancient universities established, which marks the beginning of the ancient Indian university system. The University of Nalanda developed in the fifth century CE and stood as the greatest of the centers of learning, though its origins and architecture traced back to earlier periods. Vallabhi was established between 600 and 700 CE. These universities evolved to the cream of higher education in the ancient world. The outward spread of Indian scholars and Buddhism to the far east led to the development of Nalanda and Takshashila as international institutions of higher learning, while Vallabhi remained an important center of learning in western India until the twelfth century CE.

**Curriculum and Subjects Offered:** Ancient Indian universities were instrumental in educating scholars and students in various fields. The centre at Nalanda offered courses in religion, grammar, logic, astronomy, metaphysics, and medicine. Takshashila trained students in Vedic literature, the principles of government, and medicine and surgery. The university at Vallabhi specialized in studies of the three Vedas, the six Vedangas (explanations of a Vedic subject), medicine, philosophy, jurisprudence, and agriculture.

**Faculty and Scholars:** There is no specific information about the teachers and the courses of study at Vallabhi. However, there was undoubtedly a considerable number of professors to manage such a large number of students. The discipline of history was taught, some well-known historians attended it, and a considerable number of inscriptions dealing with this study also exist. The Buddhists' philosophy was taught, and many sacred books on it were written, among which mention may be made of the Mahayana-vijnapti-sastra by Asanga, Mahavairocana Abhidharma-dharma-sastra, Bodhicaryavatara, Vajranabhapala-mulamarga, and Dharmadharmatavyavatti by Kesava.

**Architectural Significance:** Universities have historically evolved alongside cities; few city universitas communities of scholars flourished without a correspondingly significant urban setting, as described by. The architectural character of these educational institutions, from city to city, diverges widely, consistent with historical examples. Occasionally, the building programme fashioned to their needs across a substantial area of land assumes the organisation of a small university in its own right. The architecture of Nalanda University, therefore, invites a comparative enquiry with its medieval counterparts in Europe, which evolves distinctive programmes despite consistent usage. The University in later centuries, and enormously complex, suggest that specific responses to changing circumstances similarly shape the built form at Nalanda.

An understanding of its arrangement may illuminate the interpretation of the third system, as they are probably closely related.

The University of Nalanda occupies and elaborately develops a synopsis of an ideal Buddhist monastery. The cell arrangements, with ritual courtyards and massive groups of bath rooms, find closest parallels in the monastery-guest-quarters at Samye, constructed on Ajanta principles. Early datasets provide a clearer demonstration of the process whereby the formal consistencies of the original programme are broken into several spaces by varying the central pavement and the façade elements. The formulary development enabled at Takshashila is the more complex pattern of organisation. This very possibility in the formulation underlines the sophistication and difficulty of every undergraduate challenge.

**Cultural Impact:** Ancient Indian universities have defined the way higher education in India is today. Study of Nalanda University concentrates more on Buddhism. Nalanda University is one of the oldest Universities of the world. It was founded by Kumaragupta-I during early half of the fifth century A.D. It is popularly known as Nalanda Mahāvihāra. The splendour of the university has been described by a Chinese traveller Xuan Zang in his book “Memoirs of the Kingdoms of the Great Tang.” However, the fame of Nalanda does not rest on building or architecture alone, but on the teaching and advancement of knowledge through lectures given by teachers, discussions held by the students, reading of literary works, and writing of commentaries by the scholars who lived in the university, under Kumaragupta, the number of resident students reached more than 10,000.

Takshashila was the most ancient university of India and the world. Education in ancient Indian universities was based on the model of Gurukula. As per educational structure Guru was the center of knowledge, and students (shishya) of diverse origin were accepted. The stationery was minimal. Students used to carry palm leaves, a special pot for water, and a birch stick for writing. There were no specific rooms for having food. The students took their food anywhere in the boundaries of the university as was convenient at that time. Residential facilities were made available for students from outside the city. Students from Takshila went to fulfil various jobs like King’s adviser, Yavana Vinodhak, and many other positions of importance through their higher knowledge. Vallabhi University ranked as the second major university during the 7th and 8th centuries A.D. An ox-cart served as the classroom for the students. In the beginning Vallabhi University concentrated on studies related to Buddhism, later taken up studies of arts. The university had a well-regulated administration.

### **Takshashila University**

The famous Buddhist university of Takshashila (Taxila) was established in the 6th century BC, possibly by King Pasenadi of Kosala. Situated at a strategic position near the borders of Bharat and culturally close to the Gandharan region, it attracted students not only from India but also from Iran, Arabia, and Kashgar. The University of Takshashila excelled in the same fields that made Nalanda emit a widely influential reputation centuries later a synthesis of Buddhist and Hindu philosophy and the arts and sciences and it employed similar, innovative pedagogical approaches. Despite the multicultural influx, students at the university of Takshashila were fiercely dedicated to studying Buddhist philosophy.

Teaching at Takshashila adopted the gurukula methodology the master gave individual attention to each student by bringing them under his supervision and guidance. The subjects taught at Takshashila were extremely diverse. Amid the serious study of Buddhist philosophy, students were also schooled in other branches of knowledge, such as the arts and sciences. The range of subjects at Takshashila was quite wide and included four Vedas, six systems of philosophy, logical practice, the story of Prahlad, Mimamsa Shastra (explaining the deeper meanings behind the Vedas), Ashvini science (horse-riding), training in music or instrumental sound, training in the knowledge of weapons, training for a groom in the riding of elephants, archery, astronomy, and the art of surgery. It is evident that a student was groomed not only to become a spiritual leader but also a self-dependent individual.

**Origins and Timeline:** Situated in the eastern region of present-day India, the ancient university of Nalanda was a renowned centre for logic, grammar, medicine, metaphysics, science, and philosophy. Established during the Gupta dynasty (bc. 350), it flourished particularly in the 7th or 8th centuries CE (Bala, 2016). By the 5th century CE, Nalanda attracted students from various countries due to the eminence of its curriculum and faculty. The site included a vast monastic complex of 40 hectares featuring seven-storied brick structures where lectures were conducted. English-language sources commonly cite a founding date of 427 CE by Kumaragupta I, a figure corroborated by Inscriptions. Takshashila was a prominent centre of higher learning in “higher education institutions and centres of scientific excellence and culture”. The tradition describes Takshashila’s establishment during the 6th century BCE; however, the Mahabharata places the Triparṇīya-Jaimiṇa sangha a formulation fond of the city during the 8th century BCE. When Aristotle visited Megasthenes at his court in the 3rd century BCE, Alexander of Pella invaded only the surface-level country. The invasion followed the earlier one of King Porus before the queen was captured in 326 BCE. Alexander’s army returned to the country led by General Seleucus, who formed the Mauryan Empire. The Mauryan Brahman Parshva is reputed to have established the first university at Nalanda. The Nalanda site includes four universities, and several in the Valley of the Ganges, Pandu and Mundah, today called the University of Kolkata.

**Teaching Methodologies:** An ancient description of Takshashila University states that the main subjects taught were Vedas, grammar, phonetics, etymology, prose, poetry, drama, medicine, archery, music, politics and accounting. Students used the five-storied building of the upper school for lodging. Teachers could be easily recognized by their distinctive marks. In one version of the Buddhist text Milinda-Panha the king of Indo-Greek kingdom Menander I (Milinda) poses philosophical questions about the nature of the soul and rebirth to the elder Nagasena at the Buddhist University of Takshashila.

Bamboo viels were hung between a teacher and each student so that they could not see each other. All the boys were made to wear the mother-turban and the master made to wear the father-turban. When the master snapped his fingers, all the boys turned their turbans. When the questions came from those who sat on the right of the master, the boys turned the shows of their mother-turban, which resembled a peacock's tail, towards the questioner seated on their right. Similarly, when the question came from those who sat on left of the master, the boys turned the tails on the left and then replied to the question.

**Notable Alumni:** The university's international fame may be credited to its notable alumni, including the victors of the Battle of Hydaspes on the Jhelum River against King Porus in 326 BC. The Greek commander of Alexander the Great, the celebrated General-Strategist Chandragupta Maurya, was a student of Chanakya at Takshashila. The famous Chinese traveler Hiuen Tsang was a student of Nagarjuna at Nalanda University. Theses of Kautilya and Panini also remain major modern sources of information on the ancient world.

According to Hiuen Tsang, there were more than 10,500 students, teachers, and officials at the university. Nalanda had residents from more than ten countries and towns. Pilgrims and scholars traveled to it from as far as Tibet, China, Greece, and Persia. The monuments at Nalanda were ordered to be built by emperor Ashoka. Noted Hiuen Tsang, "Its religious buildings, schools and hostels...are adorned with gold and silver. Its walls and corridors are ornamented with precious stones, painting and fine woodwork."

**Influence on Later Education:** The profound influence of ancient Indian universities is mirrored by their enduring presence in the global educational landscape. As exemplars of missionary enthusiasm and cross-cultural cooperation, Nalanda and similar institutions stand as towering monuments of intellectual collaboration. Their contributions transcend temporal bounds and geographic confines, illuminating pathways for generations engaged in diverse academic investigations.

## **Vallabhi University**

Vallabhi University, founded by Maitraka rulers, rose to prominence during the 6th and 7th centuries CE. The Maitrakas, who had overthrown the Kshatriyas to establish their rule, were great patrons of learning and established Vallabhi as a major Buddhist educational centre. At its peak, the Maitrakas ruled far beyond Satrapadwip in Gujarat, from Surat in the south to Punjab in the North, and from Malwa in the east to Kathiawar in the west. Noble citizens of the empire remained largely adherent to the Buddhist faith, and the religion's principles deeply influenced their political and economic policies. Idealism and the philosophy of non-violence were clearly enshrined in everyday life. From the prosperity and freedoms followed a high culture, a striving after knowledge, and the arts and sciences flourished.

A comprehensive educational concept underpinned the establishment of Vallabhi University. Buddhism was accepted as the basis, yet provided the freedom for other religions and viewpoints, such as the Brahmanic system. Through profound interpretation of analytical philosophy, Kauṭīliya's Arthashastra as well as the oldest law code in the world (code of Manu), a desire evolved to educate and imbue a wider circle of people. Within the framework of Buddhist spirit and idealism, especially the pursuit of knowledge, and a special stress on non-violence, education was extended to other religious schools through freedom of thought – this in the Christian sense, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free". Alicorn law, known as 'Mitākṣarā', was a further achievement founded on Kauṭīliya's Arthashastra and other texts of economy.

**Establishment and Growth:** The earliest universities of the Indian subcontinent were established in Takshashila (now in Pakistan) and Vallabhi (now in India). Nalanda, the oldest of existing universities, was established by Kumara Gupta I, the first Gupta ruler of India. The renowned kingdom of Magadha established a Vihara at Nalanda which gradually developed into a large monastery and hosted several other philosophical

schools for tutelage. Nalanda played an important role in the development of Buddhism and attracted monks and students from as far as Greece and China.

Vallabhi grew rapidly during the Maitraka dynasty of Saurashtra (465–790 A. D.) and became a major centre of Buddhist learning producing several Buddhist propounders. Both Nalanda and Vallabhi taught a curriculum which included elementary subjects such as grammar, medicine, philosophy and logic along with higher education such as political science, economics and metaphysics. Princeton University, the first university established in the Western world, was modeled on Nalanda structure and curriculum. The ancient Indian system had two more salient features; one was the development of Antharagni and the other was Niyoga which involved continuing family lineage to a relative's widowed wife. The university was open to all races and creeds; women could visit to study too. Several Chinese and Persian visitors came to Nalanda and wrote records of the excellent system of education which flourished there at the time.

Such flourishing government support to Buddhist education ceased with the fall of the Gupta Empire and slowly the universities declined. Eventually, invasions of the Turkic armies of the tenth century laid the foundations for a complete decay of historic education in India. The mystical works of the Puranas and Dharamshastras, flamboyantly reiterated at great cultural centers like Banaras and Nadiyad, briefly fattened on dwindling patronage before decaying themselves. It is likely that the populations of the northern half of the subcontinent became largely illiterate outside the very few classes of scribes under feudal regimes.

**Educational Practices:** Education at Takshashila was distinct from that at Nalanda. In Nalanda, students rarely returned to their homes during the course of study. Conversely, at Takshashila, students took vacations during which they recited their lessons at home to their parents and others. The education at Takshashila extended beyond academic pursuits to address the formation of the whole person; other people were involved in the student's education from the outset. Intense man-making and nation-building activities were carried out through the educational programmes (Shilpa Shastra) of these institutions.

The methods of study at Takshashila University, dating back to the 2nd century BCE, are eloquently discussed in the Milinda Panha, a record of a dialogue between King Milinda and his Preceptor Nāgasena. Philosophers, students, and various other groups visited the university, indicating its high reputation. Students developed the ability to distinguish between sound and sophistry, to differentiate the true individual from the unreal aggregate, and to grasp the different types of unconditioned states, pouring lightning on their questions when silence would have seemed the better part of wisdom.

**Contributions to Philosophy:** The ancient Indian universities of Nalanda, Takshashila, and Vallabhi were significant centers of philosophical innovation, engaging deeply with competing systems such as Nyaya, Vaisesika, Samkhya, and early Buddhist thought. The institutions cultivated interpretation and criticism, balancing rejection and accommodation to shape an educational model later echoed throughout Asia. The nascent Buddhist philosophy at these universities established a positive, persuasive language that gained global currency within intellectual, cultural, and religious systems.

Nalanda combined rudimentary elements from various philosophies to create an integrated, fourfold educational system emphasizing discipline leading to happiness. Despite the power and influence of the

Brahmanical tradition, Buddhism's refined scholarly support sustained its spread, with monastic universities like Nalanda taking on an international character. Takshashila, employing a unique manual and practical learning approach, attracted a diverse student body and preserved early Mahayana traditions, furthering doctrinal development including the emergence of Prajnaparamita literature.

Vallabhi, an important yet understudied university, trained thousands of scholars and produced figures like Bodhisena. While well documented before Nalanda, its decline in the 12th century led to the loss of much knowledge. Nevertheless, its contributions to academic disciplines and intellectual culture greatly influenced subsequent institutions, complementing insights into the educational landscape alongside the more extensively chronicled Nalanda and Takshashila.

**Decline and Legacy:** Ancient Indian universities declined between the 7th and 13th centuries CE. The destruction of Vallabhi University, following the conquest of Vallabhipura by Muslim invaders in the 8th century, marks the beginning of this decline. Subsequently, the universities of Nalanda and Takshashila also became derelict. The specific circumstances of the closures remain obscure, but the decline deprived the Buddhist world of its principal centers of scholasticism and missionary activities.

### **Comparative Analysis of the Three Universities**

Nalanda, Takshashila, and Vallabhi were among the foremost sanda or residential universities of the first millennium CE. Despite sharing a similar system of education, they retained distinct philosophies and approaches to learning. In the early centuries of the first millennium CE, the idea of a residential university emerged, addressing the growing need for formal higher education institutions. Nalanda operated under the guidelines of the Amarakosha, an ancient Sanskrit thesaurus, allowing students to cultivate vocabulary and comprehend semantic relationships. By contrast, the curriculum at Takshashila stemmed directly from the Sāma Veda and was largely military-oriented. Vallabhi's teachings were grounded in the philosophies of the Mimamsa and the systematized Nyaya. The unifying purpose of these universities was to educate individuals who could function effectively within the socioreligious framework of India's ancient civilization. A distinctive feature of Takshashila was its emphasis on the practical application of theoretical studies. Above all, these ancient Indian universities contributed a system of education that strongly influenced the development of educational institutions across the Asian subcontinent.

**Similarities in Educational Philosophy:** The universities of Nalanda, Takshashila, and Vallabhi commonly emphasized a preparatory course of study. Graduates of this foundational curriculum either proceeded to a general course of study or specialized in a particular branch of knowledge, indicating a pedagogical framework that balanced breadth and depth. This triadic educational structure, apparently of indigenous origin, reflected an Indian conception of comprehensive intellectual development. The three universities are similarly recognized as representing the final phase in the long history of medieval Indian universities.

**Differences in Curriculum:** The curriculum at these universities had its own essential characteristics. The Mahayana Buddhist philosophy, which was concerned with Bodhisattvas and their perfections and which advocated universal sympathy and kindness for all living beings and the connection of life with the rest of

nature, was cherished by Nalanda. A dialectical and logical heliocentric view of the universe was set forth by a cosmology professor, Shilabhadra. Political science and the economic circumstances of states were discussed by teachers and scholars. The Buddhists of Nalanda believed that a ruler must have four principal qualifications of his own control of his own senses, sense of justice and righteousness, universal sympathy and kindness, and safekeeping of his subjects.

Unlike Takshashila, which taught in the vernacular, Nalanda taught in a language accessible to the monks and intellectuals of the Buddhist world Sanskrit. To protect and preserve the sacred knowledge immortalised in the Buddhist texts, the international Buddhists gathered at Vallabhi University. Established in the fifth century CE in Gujarat, India, it played a prominent role in spreading Buddhist education to Tibet and the Orient. There were formal Buddhist chaityas and the Bodhi tree. Unlike Nalanda's vast campus, the monastery and college occupied a much smaller area. Vallabhi ceased to exist as an educational centre during the early eighth century, when attacks by the Hunas brought the university to an end.

**Impact on Society and Culture:** The Indian universities created by Buddhism had a prominent place not only in the history of India, but also in the history of the world. Nalanda University had an impact on education in almost all the Asian countries. The culture of India was at its height during the 6th and 7th centuries. Buddhism, which influenced the culture of India, was the main promotive factor in relation to education. The universities of Nalanda, Takshashila, and Vallabhi presented a ready-made type to the learners of different parts of the world.

The conduct and system of education at these universities was lucid and scientific. Teachers were efficient and well-trained. Children were educated in peace and quietness and with sense of security. All the subjects were studied by the teachers and students of the institution in an integrated manner, where the logic of one subject was utilized in the development of art, grammar, mathematics, history, literature, poetics, and prosody. Conclusion was inferred with the help of logic and evidence so that the path of further conquest of new planes of knowledge became clear. Having been founded, Nalanda attained the highest height of glory. It became an internationally renowned centre of advanced learning catering to students coming from all over India and other countries, including China, Tibet, Korea, Sri Lanka, Myamar, and Central Asia.

### **Integration of Arts and Sciences in Ancient Education**

The curriculum of three of the ancient Indian universities—Nalanda, Takshashila, and Vallabhi illustrates a concrete pedagogical conception. They not only display the nature and extent of different branches of learning but also show the accepted method of teaching and the principles found useful and necessary in the conduct of human life. The three universities were well organised centres of learning, governed by a central authority, and providing education in almost all remedial and constructive branches of arts and sciences.

The art of Communication was considered essential; not only literature in Sanskrit, the language of culture, but also the languages of the common people, such as Prakrit and other vernaculars, were taught. A knowledge of grammar and rhetoric was thought indispensable to round off a student's personality and to enable him to convey clearly and lucidly whatever he desired. In the description of the curriculum and the method of teaching Takshashila University, these activities are clearly reflected. Both prose and poetry and

various forms of language its figural usage and application as mode of thought received due attention. Practical syntax was inquired into, painstakingly, the parts of speech were classified, and methods of correct expression were taught. Special attention was paid to the more tangible features of grammar, the practical functions enabling a man to understand and express. Both the principles of the art of writing and the principles of metre and rhythm enchained the student's mind and focused his thoughts. They, in turn, acted as assisting co-factors in the shaping and forming of the soul and in the development of the character of the student.

## **The Decline of Ancient Indian Universities**

Ancient Indian universities, such as Nalanda, Takshashila, and Vallabhi, enjoyed patronage from successive kingdoms. Their decline, precipitated by invaders, disrupted Indian society and retarded cultural progress for centuries. Religious persecutions, mainly rage-driven, were among the main causes that brought these prominent universities to decline or closure. Invasions caused the severance of links with the outside world, diminishing the authenticity and diversity of educational thought. The decline was accelerated by the gradual weakening of Buddhism and rising opposition to its doctrine. Some of these ancient universities have never been revived in their entirety.

**Factors Leading to Decline:** Since Sanskrit was the common language for both religious and secular subjects, students from Central Asia and China used to come to Nalanda. The Buddhist philosophy sympathized with all living beings, and separate courses of study centered around the welfare of women and children were taught. The autonomy given to students promoted their creative energy. Tibetan pilgrims at Nalanda used to be treated with special attention, and a universal pattern of brotherhood was inculcated in the students. The Wakcha (circular dome-like adobe roof) method of teaching was used at Takshashila. The purpose was not only to teach the students, but also to give the subject a new direction. Tolstoy has praised the teaching methods at the university. It was a custom that every student was to start his day by bowing his head before the Guru or teacher and express his proud feelings.

These institutions did not receive means of support by the State, but still flourished because the public hankered for knowledge. Teachers were selected on the basis of experience and education. Even married learned men used to teach at Takshashila. Separate rooms were allotted to different teachers according to their educational level. The age of the student was also taken into account while allotting a teacher. The Student-Teacher relationship was treated with a great deal of solemnity. Abhaya, the king of Guhpratihtha (Gujarat), was a frequent visitor to Vallabhi University (Gujarat). Both Hatsatsana (535–548) and Xuanzang have mentioned the existence of a university at Vallabhi. It taught both secular and religious subjects. The institution was estimated to be flourishing in the fifth and sixth centuries C.E. according to the records of Xuanzang. The municipal administration of the time was used to grant money for the maintenance of the university. Takshashila University received money from the king and from the public. By 645 C.E. when the Chinese pilgrim Huien Tsang visited Vallabhi, it was at the height of its glory. Even women were encouraged to seek education at the university. The Buddhist school of Mulasarvastavada branched out from Nalanda in the west and gradually became dominant in Kashmir and the areas around the Amu Darya. The school was perhaps responsible for the decline of Nalanda and the rise of the university at Vallabhi. The Seljuk Turks (1038–

1157) were against the intellectual embassies and they were interested actually in the looting of wealth. Vallabhi was destroyed by the Muhammadan rulers between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries C.E.

**Historical Consequences:** The significant Indian universities, including Nalanda, Takshashila, and Vallabhi, which had not only a strong hold in the Indian subcontinent but also outside, would have further boosted the country's educational system. The system of education, which was providing higher education in India had failed to revive and the exodus of young minds that are seen today would have been accordingly averted. The destruction of Nalanda is seen as a great loss to the country's heritage, and the university was supposed to represent the nation's greatness for many years during its heyday. The famous Nalanda university in Bihar was considered to be the greatest university of the world till the time of its decline. The greatness of the university made it adorn a place in the electronic flag of Bihar. The invaders and destruction that forced Nalanda, Takshashila, and Vallabhi to shut down would have decreased the country's glory in their respective individualities.

### **Revival and Modern Implications**

The ancient Indian universities of Nalanda, Takshashila, and Vallabhi continue to inspire modern educational institutions worldwide. The absence of a uniform education system in contemporary universities parallels certain ancient practices that warrant reconsideration and adaptation. Scholars like Sam Nicholas have called for the revival of emporia akin to Takshashila and Nalanda that once promoted free educational exchange and produced knowledgeable diplomats capable of serving the nation broadly. The reclamation and recognition of these sites, including the establishment of the Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies at Takshashila, exemplify ongoing efforts to preserve and honor this cultural heritage.

Ancient Indian universities offer significant insights into the evolving relationship between learners and knowledge. To best meet the needs of contemporary education, it is crucial to appreciate fundamental values within the Indian system. These ancient institutions continue to provide valuable lessons in uniting global perspectives, a theme central to the present discourse. The ancient model fulfills the human aspirations for knowledge dissemination by enabling concentrated scholarly study, thus inspiring contemporary society to draw from its rich heritage.

There is a large-scale demand for restoration and preservation of Nalanda and other ancient universities, not only because they are great centres of knowledge but also because the remains are credit to the culture and glory of Ancient Bharat. It was a Buddhist University and experts are therefore of opinion that it should be developed as a centre for Buddhist studies. The monument is under the Archaeological Survey of India and the JSACS has now become its co-sponsor. It is important to remember that Indian education was greatly influenced by Buddhist philosophy. The Indian education system was therefore described as comprehensive in its approach, aiming for the development of physical, mental, and moral powers, just as the Buddhist philosophy aimed at the all-round development of human personality. Consequently, courses in literature and arts, fiction, music, draughts, dancing, acting, and painting were included in its academic curriculums. The institutions imparting education in these varied spiritual and material disciplines and multi-

faceted spheres of life were the ancient universities of Takshashila, Nalanda, Vallabhi, and Vikramshila, established between the fifth century B.C., and 11th Century A.D.

## Conclusion

An analysis of the universities of Nalanda, Takshashila, and Vallabhi in ancient India suggests that these represent an early model of a residential university system. The entire residential complex including hostels for the students even resembles a modern style university campus. Nalanda was a great centre of intellectual thinkers and of intellectual debates based on Buddhist philosophy and against it, a process that strengthened the deeper thinking of various educated minds on social and political issues. The university was actually a residential 'university town' where students and teachers on an average lived for 20 years, the English-speaking learned writers in the 18th and 19th century A.D. have said that Nalanda could almost represent a complete British University. Its curriculum covered a very broad area from the humanities and social sciences, to the natural sciences and formal sciences, to the fine arts. The rival system of Takshashila, about which special mention was made by Kautilya in his Arthashastra, was non-sectarian in regard to the religion he taught.

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