

A Brief Understanding of Medieval Indian University Education System: A Review

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Abstract

Any Nation's progress and future can be forecasted by taking a glance at their education system. Modern education system is no doubtedly high in technology and methodology, but the morals and ethical importance might be lacking. According to renowned Takshashila University professor Chanakya, a teacher is not your typical individual; they live in a world of constant development and destruction. He attended one of the venerable universities in lovely India as a student and later as a professor. We recognize many profound universities around the world in modern era such as Oxford or Cambridge. These universities have been spreading knowledge for decades. In medieval India the education system included universities such as Takshashila, Nalanda, Vallabhi Vidhyapith. These Institutions attracted scholars, learners, pupils and researchers from all over the world. Indian subcontinent was thriving with rich knowledge, research and information that attracted visitors from far out lands such as Fa Hein and Huan Tsang. These visitors stayed and gathered knowledge regarding Buddhism and Hinduism which they translated in to Tibetic and Mandarin Languages. Irony is that the original manuscript in Brahmī, Pali, Prakrit and Sanskrit are no longer available but their translations from Tibet or Persia are available in parts. The universities have been vandalized or destroyed and the knowledge is lost in the archives of time. To understand the ancient Indic culture we have to be depended on these foreigners who valued Indian education system and documented it. This paper is a modest attempt to provide insight into the development and collapse of the Indian education system in the Middle Ages.

Keywords: Medieval India, Roots of Indian Universities, Nalanda, Takshashila, Indic Education System

INTRODUCTION

Numerous intellectuals have come from Bharat, the land of science, knowledge, and spirituality. Aryabhatta created the zero, while mathematician Budhayana discovered the value of "Pi" and provided an explanation for a right-angle theorem that Pythagoras subsequently clarified. This is where the decimal system was developed and invented. On this territory, algebra, trigonometry, and calculus were also invented and practiced. Bhaskaracharya determined the orbital period of the earth around the sun many millennia ago. The Indian educational system was at its best, and the country's academics and philosophers were educating the next generation. It makes sense that India served as the world's spiritual center [1].

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TAKSHASHILA UNIVERSITY – A HISTORY AND EDUCATION METHODOLOGY

This university was founded between the fifth and sixth centuries BC. One of the oldest Buddhist research and learning centers is Takshashila, according to Jātaka narratives published in Sri Lanka in the fifth century. Here once studied scholars and Buddhist monks. Kautilya or Chanakya has compiled his great work of

economics called “Arthashastra” in Takshashila University during the Maurya Empire time line. Emperor Chandragupta and Acharya Charak studied in Takshashila University. Charak later compiled aurvedic book of work and called it “Charak Samhita” [2].

Students started university studies at the age of sixteen. In addition to studying the arts and military skills like archery and elephant lore, students would also learn Vedas and Upnishadas, rules and legislation, agriculture, and fundamental accounting.

Takshashila has many Buddhist stupas and structures representing Buddhist culture. Takshashila is made of two words that is Taksha and Shila. Taksha was an ancient king in the kingdom of Taksha Khanda, modern day Tashkent, and shila means Stone. Taksha was the son of Bharata (Lord Ram’s brother) and Mandavi from Ramayan time. Who pioneered a state of Taksha Khand.

Takshashila has many exclusive feature points. Legends says that the Disciple of great Vedvyasa known as Vaishampayan had recited the epic Mahabharata in Takshashila [3, 4].

NALANDA UNIVERSITY – A HISTORY AND EDUCATION METHODOLOGY

The name was believed to be given by King Bodhisatva, who donated lot of wealth to the land and created a monastery to the south of Sangharama. This region was known as a religious center long before the arrival of the Christians, between 523 and 477 B.C. This location had witnessed several conversations about Buddhist texts and had been consecrated by the presence of the Buddha and his disciples [5].

This was also the place where Mahavira, the Jain Tirthankara also did Sadhana. King Asoka also built a temple and a Vihara here because it was densely populated area which makes it easy for religious preaching and teaching. World’s very first residential accommodated university was Nalanda, where both students and teachers lived together in harmony and co existence. The campus was as wide as 105 KM by 0.75 KM [6].

The institution was founded by Sakraditya, and Buddhaguptaraja, his son, enlarged it. Donors who identified as Buddhists and Hindus continued to build new temples up until the eleventh century. In his time, renowned scholar Hiuen Tsiang listed six monasteries that comprised the Nalanda establishment. He mentions scholars coming from Mangolia, China, Tibet and Korea to learn and seek knowledge. He also mentions that due to strict admission policy only 20% of them could enter, rest of them would get disappointed. Religious conflict specialists were always ready with difficult problems to assess the intellectual aptitude of aspiring scholars. It is likely that applicants will be at least twenty years old. Additionally, it states that the university ran a department for secondary and primary education where young pupils were freely admitted. The boarding and lodging for the candidates did not cost anything meaning no financial fees were charged. Instead students would do different duties in Ashrama or Vihara.

The major education policy included Buddhism and Mahayana scriptures regarding Buddha philosophy and ethics. Other subjects studied in this University were the Vedas and their six auxiliaries Medicine, Grammar, Sankhya etc. More than 10,000 students and 2000 teachers, Nalanda flourished through the time.

Nalanda, like many different historical institutions, historically remoured for autonomy. The authority turned into totally self reliant. Bhikkhu, leader monk was the main decision maker of the institution. He oversaw all of the academics and teachers inside the educational system.

Everyone performed efficiently and on their own. The democratic system served as the foundation for institution control. Knowledge of philosophy, law, psychology, and other interdisciplinary fields benefited academics and researchers. The themes were chosen from a variety of academic disciplines, including Buddhism and Brahmanicism, sacred and secular texts, philosophy and practical theology,

the sciences, and the arts. Sanskrit grammar, or Sabdavidya, was taught to students since it was necessary for both Buddhists and Hindus to understand the language [7].

HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS FOR HIGHER LEARNING IN ANCIENT INDIA

There have been some excellent spiritual and educational hubs on the Indian subcontinent. Valabhi, Pushpagiri, Vikramashila, Somapura Mahavira, and Odantpuri are among them. Of these in Bangladesh, Somapura Mahavira evolved in the latter part of the eighth century and continued to do so for about 400 years, until the 12th century. It took up 27 acres of space.

The primary complex building occupied 21 to 22 acres out of this total. It was acknowledged as the primary hub for Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu education. Terracotta artworks that show the impact of these three traditions can be found on university walls. Next is Vikramashila, which was similarly founded in the latter half of the eighth century and flourished for almost 400 years until the 12th century. Institution called Pushpagiri, was established by Kalinga Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd Century in the present state of Odisha in India and it expanded till 11th century i.e., for about 800 years. It was spread across Kolkata and Rajasthan districts [8].

Valabhi Vidhyapith was another ancient university, established in 6th century in the present state of Gujarat - Valabhipur and it flourished for 600 years till 12th century. It was famous for the quality education it gave to its pupils. It had at one time more than 6000 students 100 + monasteries [9].

SOME IMPORTANT LESSONS FROM UNIVERSITY EDUCATION SYSTEM FROM MEDIEVAL INDIA

Over the last several centuries, the idea of education is exploring through process of vast interchange. Few newer generations of universities have emerged and we can notice a crystal clear comparison between the historical universities and the newer cutting-edge institutes. Even today as we are looking for new and innovative modes and ideas of developing universities nowadays in the modern era of 21st century, there are lot of lessons that can be optimized from an upfront reading of the records of the historical universities, Regarding their way of thinking, working nature, education scope, process planning, investment, instructor-student relations, institution-community relations and lots of other complex dynamics. Ancient Indian universities were considered as 'noble' institutions as they imparted not just knowledge and science but also taught ways of life and human existence. They were taken into consideration as sacred establishments [10]. They were reputed and valued institutions for their service and contributions, which have affected directly and indirectly to human contributions to the modern India to shape shifting. Universities have been understood as sacred temples and the campus has been implicitly considered as 'public goods'. They provided moral, religious guidance and nicely wide-speeded human values and regularly. They contributed to creation of the prosperous world humanity and citizen mind sets. Search of truth and seeking information, search of knowledge have been the main issues of these past glorious institutions. These glorious universities were not selfish and narrow-minded agencies. Position of the king authority and social classes became essential in the development of these knowledge centres for better future. All institutions obtained royal backing or scholarships and generous grants either in terms of charity, donations which shaped for the financial base of these institutions. Society additionally had an extraordinary admiration for information, According to the scholars and teachers, whose selflessness and devotion to the greatness changed and supported the knowledge network. The Indian community regarded the sacred philosophy of 'Acharya Devobhav': meaning the instructor is as valuable as God. There were zero obligatory expenses have been charged from the pupils and learners; but students at the finishing of the education offered Guru Dakshinas as a sign of patronage and gratitude towards the teachers. Free trainings were given to the students, like free boarding and accommodations. All these universities have been gigantic in shape and size, with huge campuses and infrastructure of massive level. That included high class lecturers, accommodations, class rooms, halls for public lectures, student gymnasiums. Also it includes great number of books filled libraries and museums. All universities had been residential. As the teachers and college students live within the

same campus, and all lead a simple living. Their Co-Existential living pattern of the teachers and scholars were expected to create an example for students. The ancient Indian universities have been truly ‘flourished’ in scope and to acquire knowledge in diverse disciplines and branches that turned into the focus of these institutions. Different ideas of even contradictory stand points of faith were taught. The subjects protected all branches of information. The holistic teachings covered not only very basic religious and spiritual idea and practices but also secular thoughts, basic sciences, common arithmetic, ancient languages, culture and humanities, types of arts, liberal arts, engineering, medicinal drug, political sciences etc. Social and spiritual scholars from everywhere around the world have been found either learning or sharing knowledge inside the ancient Indian universities. Disciples from all kinds of backgrounds, ethnicity, social and economical base joined these world class institution without any baggage. Students from numerous near and a far away nations came to study or to teach in these establishments. They have always been dwelling within the social, equal and residential areas furnished a rich and vibrant knowledge gaining system and enriched environment. All the students were admitted essentially based totally on equal terms and benefits. Students were not discriminated by the authority. The noble establishments had been characterised by using the universal notion and method - Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family). All these universities during the historical time length enjoyed and experienced full autonomy. Student life and skills were not intervened by the social classes and scholars. The heads of the institutions and senior students have been liable for all selections within the universities. Universities had been decentralized and made democratic by inner governance. The education evolved in era to produce more advanced and spiritual generation of students and scholars who built the knowledge full society [11].

CONCLUSION

The medieval Indian education system boasts a remarkable legacy, characterized by renowned centers of learning such as Takshashila, Nalanda, and Vallabhi Vidhyapith. These institutions not only served as hubs of knowledge but also attracted scholars and intellectuals from distant lands, fostering a dynamic exchange of ideas across borders. However, the decline of these prestigious universities led to the tragic loss of invaluable wisdom, leaving behind only fragmented remnants of a once-flourishing intellectual tradition. Despite this setback, the impact of Indian education endures through the translations and accounts preserved by foreign visitors who recognized its importance. Reflecting on this rich history underscores the ongoing significance of preserving and honoring our cultural and educational heritage, ensuring that future generations can draw inspiration from the achievements of the past as they confront the challenges and opportunities of the future.

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