

Nalanda mahavihara



Nalanda Mahavihara was a renowned ancient Indian Buddhist university that flourished from the 5th to the 12th centuries CE. Located in Bihar, India, it was one of the most important centers of Buddhist learning in its time.

Known for its intellectual prowess and architectural grandeur, Nalanda Mahavihara attracted scholars and students from all over Asia, including China, Tibet, Korea, and Japan. The university offered a diverse curriculum, covering subjects such as philosophy, logic, grammar, medicine, and astronomy.

Despite its destruction in the 12th century, Nalanda Mahavihara's legacy continues to inspire and influence Buddhist studies worldwide. Today, its ruins serve as a testament to its historical significance and a symbol of the rich cultural heritage of ancient India.

Location

Nalanda is about 16 kilometres (10 mi) north of the city of Rajgir and about 90 kilometres (56 mi) southeast of Patna, connected via NH 31, 20 and 120 to India's highway network. It is about 80 kilometres (50 mi) northeast of [Bodh Gaya](#) – another important Buddhist site in Bihar. The Nalanda archaeological site is spread over a large area to the northwest of Bargaon (Nalanda) village, and is between the historical manmade lakes Gidhi, Panashokar and Indrapuskarani. On the south bank of the Indrapushkarani lake is the [Nava Nalanda Mahavihara](#) – a university founded in its

memory. Similarly on the south west bank of the Indrapushkarani lake is [Nalanda Open University](#), the state university named after the ancient Nalanda University.

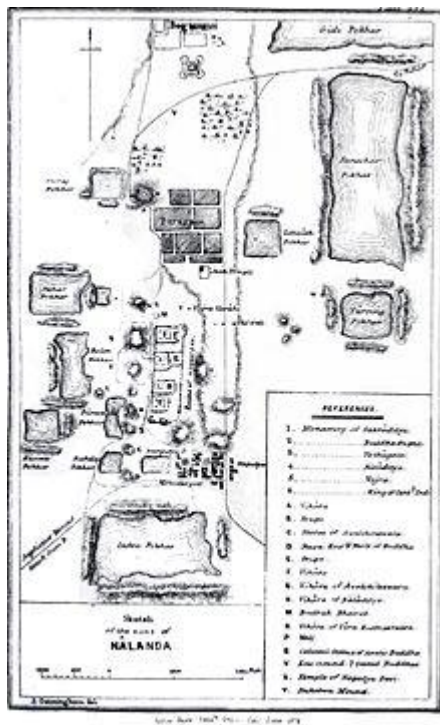
Etymology

Mahavihara (*Mahāvihāra*) is the [Sanskrit](#) and [Pali](#) term for a great [vihāra](#) (centre of learning or Buddhist monastery) and is used to describe a monastic complex of viharas. According to the early 7th-century [Tang dynasty](#) Chinese pilgrim, [Xuanzang](#), the local tradition explains that the name *Nālandā* ([Hindi/Magahi](#): नालन्दा) came from a [nāga](#) (serpent deity in Indian religions) whose name was *Nalanda*. He offers an alternate meaning "charity without intermission", from "na-alam-da"; however, this split does not mean this. [Hiranand Sastri](#), an archaeologist who headed the excavation of the ruins, attributes the name to the abundance of *nālas* (lotus-stalks) in the area and believes that Nalanda would then represent *the giver of lotus-stalks*.

In some Tibetan sources, including the 17th-century work of [Taranatha](#), Nalanda is referred to as *Nalendra*, and is likely synonymous with Nala, Nalaka, Nalakagrama found in Tibetan literature.

History

Early history of the city of Nalanda (1200 BCE–300 CE)



A map of Nalanda and its environs from Alexander Cunningham's 1861–62 ASI report which shows a number of ponds (*pokhar*) around the Mahavihara.

Archaeological excavations at sites near Nalanda, such as the Juafardih site about three kilometres away, have yielded black ware and other items. These have been carbon dated to about 1200 BCE. This suggests that the region around Nalanda in Magadha had a human settlement centuries before the birth of the Mahavira and the Buddha.

Early Buddhist texts state that Buddha visited a town near Rajagriha (modern [Raigir](#) – the capital of [Magadha](#)) called Nalanda on his peregrinations. He delivered lectures in a nearby mango grove named *Pavarika* and one of his two chief disciples, [Shariputra](#), was born in the area and later attained [nirvana](#) there. These Buddhist texts were written down centuries after the death of the Buddha, are not consistent in either the name or the relative locations. For example, texts such as the *Mahasudassana Jataka* states that Nalaka or Nalakagrama is about a yojana (10 miles) from Rajagriha, while texts such as *Mahavastu* call the place Nalanda-gramaka and place it half a [yojana](#) away. A Buddhist text *Nikayasamgraha* does state that emperor Ashoka established a *vihara* (monastery) at Nalanda. However, archaeological excavations so far have not yielded any monuments from Ashoka period or from another 600 years after his death.

Chapter 2.7 of the Jaina text *Sutrakritanga* states that Nalanda is a "suburb" of capital Rajagriha, has numerous buildings, and this is where [Mahavira](#) (6th/5th century BCE) spent fourteen *varshas* – a term that refers to a traditional retreat during monsoons for the monks in Indian religions. This is corroborated in the *Kalpasutra*, another cherished text in Jainism. However, other than the mention of Nalanda, Jaina texts do not provide further details, nor were they written down for nearly a millennium after Mahavira's death. Like the Buddhist texts, this has raised questions about reliability and whether the current Nalanda is same as the one in Jaina texts. According to Scharfe, though the Buddhist and Jaina texts generate problems with place identification, it is "virtually certain" that the modern Nalanda is near or the site these texts are referring to.

Sariputta, a prominent disciple of the Buddha, was born and died in Nalanda. King [Ashoka](#) is said to have built the Sariputta stupa in Nalanda to honour him, and Sariputta's relics were also enshrined in stupas at Sanchi and Mathura.

Faxian visit (399–412 CE)

When [Faxian](#), a Chinese Buddhist pilgrim monk, visited the city of Nalanda, there probably was no university yet. Faxian had come to India to acquire Buddhist texts, and spent 10 years in India in the early fifth century, visiting major Buddhist pilgrimage sites including the Nalanda area. He also wrote a travelogue, which inspired other Chinese and Korean Buddhists to visit India over the centuries; in it he mentions many Buddhist monasteries and monuments across India. However, he makes no mention of any monastery or university at Nalanda even though he was looking for Sanskrit texts and took a large number of them from other parts of India back to China. Combined with a lack of any archaeological discoveries of pre-400 CE monuments in Nalanda, the silence in Faxian's memoir suggests that Nalanda monastery-university did not exist around 400 CE.

Foundation (5th century)



Nalanda was founded by the Gupta emperors in the early 5th century and then expanded over the next 7 centuries.

Nalanda's dateable history begins in the 5th century. A seal discovered at the site identifies a monarch named [Shakraditya](#) (*Śakrāditya* - r. c. 415–455 CE) as its founder and attributes the foundation of a [sangharama](#) (monastery) at the site to him. This is corroborated by the Chinese pilgrim [Xuanzang](#) travelogue. The tradition of formalised Vedic learning "helped to inspire the formation of large teachings centres," such as Nalanda, Taxila, and [Vikramashila](#).

NĀLANDĀ CLAY SEALS OF KUMĀRAGUPTA III



Nalanda clay seal of [Kumaragupta III](#). The inscription is in Sanskrit, late-Gupta script, the man shown has [Vaishnava](#) mark on his forehead, and seal has Garuda-vahana on upper face.

In the Indian tradition and texts, kings were called by many epithets and names. Scholars such as Andrea Pinkney and Hartmut Scharfe conclude that Shakraditya is same as Kumaragupta I. He was one of the kings in the Hindu dynasty of the [Guptas](#). Further, numismatic evidence discovered at Nalanda corroborate that Kumaragupta I was the founder patron of the Nalanda monastery-university.

His successors, [Budhagupta](#), Tathagatagupta, [Baladitya](#), and Vajra, later extended and expanded the institution by building additional monasteries and temples. Nalanda, thus flourished through the 5th and 6th centuries under the Guptas. These Gupta-era contributions to Nalanda are corroborated by the numerous Buddhist and Hindu seals, artwork, iconography and inscriptions discovered at Nalanda, which are in the Gupta-style and Gupta-era scripts. During this period, the Gupta kings were not the only patrons of Nalanda. They reflect a broad and religiously diverse community of supporters. It is remarkable, states Scharfe, that "many donors were not Buddhists; the emblems on their seals show Lakshmi, Ganesha, Shivalinga and Durga".

Rulers in northeast India bequeathed villages to help fund Nalanda; the king of Sumatra contributed villages for the monastery's endowment. A special fund was also established to support scholars from China.

Post-Gupta dynasty (550–750 CE)



Seal of [Harsha](#) found in Nalanda

After the decline of the Guptas, the most notable patron of the Nalanda Mahavihara was [Harsha](#) (known as Śīlāditya in some Buddhist records). He was a seventh-century emperor with a capital at [Kannauj](#) (Kanyakubja). According to Xuanzang, Harsha was a third generation Hindu king from the [Vaishya](#) caste, who built majestic Buddhist viharas, as well as three temples – Buddha, Surya and Shiva, all of the same size. He states (c. 637 CE), "a long succession of kings" had built up Nalanda till "the whole is truly marvellous to behold".

In accordance with the ancient Indian traditions of supporting temples and monasteries, inscriptions found at Nalanda suggest that it received gifts, including grants of villages by kings to support its work. Harsha himself granted 100 villages and directed 200 households from each of these villages to supply the institution's monks with requisite daily supplies such as of rice, butter, and milk. This supported over 1,500 faculty and 10,000 student monks at Nalanda. These numbers, however, may be exaggerated.

They are inconsistent with the much lower numbers (over 3000) given by Yijing, another Chinese pilgrim who visited Nalanda a few decades later. According to Asher, while the excavated Nalanda site is large and the number of viharas so far found are impressive, they simply cannot support 10,000 or more student monks. The total number of known rooms and their small size is such that either the number of monks must have been far less than Xuanzang's claims or the Nalanda site was many times larger than numerous excavations have so far discovered and what Xuanzang describes.

Xuanzang's visit (630–643 CE)

travelled around India between 630 and 643 CE, visiting Nalanda in 637 and 642, spending a total of around two years at the monastery. He was warmly welcomed in Nalanda where he received the Indian name of Mokshadeva and studied under the guidance of [Shilabhadra](#), the venerable head of the institution at the time. He believed that the aim of his arduous overland journey to India had been achieved as in Shilabhadra he had at last found an incomparable teacher to instruct him in [Yogachara](#), a school of thought that had then only partially been transmitted to China. Besides Buddhist studies, the monk also attended courses in grammar, logic, and Sanskrit, and later also lectured at the mahavihar.



A page from Xuanzang's [Great Tang Records on the Western Regions](#) or *Dà Táng Xīyù Jì* in the detailed account of his stay at Nalanda, the pilgrim describes the view out of the window of his quarters thus,

Moreover, the whole establishment is surrounded by a brick wall, which encloses the entire convent from without. One gate opens into the great college, from which are separated eight other halls standing in the middle (*of the Sangharama*). The richly adorned towers, and the fairy-like turrets, like pointed hill-tops are congregated together. The observatories seem to be lost in the vapours (*of the morning*), and the upper rooms tower above the clouds.

Xuanzang returned to China with 657 Sanskrit texts and 150 relics carried by 20 horses in 520 cases. He translated 74 of the texts himself.

Yijing's visit (673–700 CE)

In the thirty years following Xuanzang's return, no fewer than eleven travellers from China and [Korea](#) are known to have visited Nalanda, including the monk [Yijing](#). Unlike Faxian and Xuanzang, Yijing followed the sea route around Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka. He arrived in 673 CE, and stayed in India for fourteen years, ten of which he spent at the Nalanda Mahavihara. When he returned to China in 695, he had with him 400 Sanskrit texts and 300 grains of Buddha relics which were subsequently translated in China.

Unlike Xuanzang, who also described the geography and culture of seventh-century India, Yijing's account primarily concentrates on the practice of Buddhism in India and detailed descriptions of the customs, rules, and regulations of the monks at the monastery. In his chronicle, Yijing notes that revenues from 200 villages (as opposed to 100 in Xuanzang's time) had been assigned toward the maintenance of Nalanda. He described there being eight [vihara](#) with as many as 300 cells. According to him, Nalanda monastery has numerous daily *Nikaya* procedures and rules for the monks. He gives many examples. In one subsection he explains that the monastery has ten great pools. The morning begins with the *ghanta* (bell) being rung. Monks take their bathing sheets and go to one of these pools. They bathe with their underwear on, then get out slowly to avoid disturbing anyone else. They wipe their bodies, then wrap this 5-foot long and 1.5-foot wide sheet around the waist, change their clothes with this wrap in place. Then rinse, wring and dry the sheet. The entire procedure, says Yijing, is explained in the Buddhist *Nikaya* procedures. The day must begin with bathing, but bathing after meals is forbidden. The Nalanda *Nikaya* has many such daily procedures and rituals set out for the monks to follow.

Korean and Tibetan pilgrims



Replica of the seal of Nalanda set in [terracotta](#) on display in the [Archaeological Survey of India](#) Museum in Nalanda

In addition to Chinese pilgrims, Buddhist pilgrims from Korea also visited India about the same time as Xuanzang and Yingji. The Chinese travelogues about India became known in the 19th century and have been well published. After mid-20th century, the Korean pilgrim journeys have come to light. For example, monks such as Kyom-ik began visiting Indian monasteries by the mid-6th century. They too carried Indian texts and translated them, producing 72 *chuan* of translated texts. In the mid-7th century, the [Silla](#) (Korean: 신라) monk Hyon-jo visited and stayed at several Indian monasteries,

including three years at Nalanda, his visit corroborated by Yingji. He sent his students Hye-ryun and Hyon-gak to Nalanda for studies, the latter died at Nalanda. They adopted Indian names to interact with the fellow students; for example, Hye-ryun was known as Prajnavarman and it is this name that is found in the records. According to Korean records, monks visited India through the ninth century – despite arduous travel challenges – to study at various monasteries, and Nalanda was the most revered. In and after the 7th century, Tibetan monks such as [Thonmi Sambhota](#) came to Nalanda and other Indian monasteries to study, not only Buddhism, but Sanskrit language, grammar and other subjects. Sambhota is credited with applying the principles of Sanskrit and its grammar to remodel Tibetan language and its script. It was after Sambhota's first return from Nalanda that the Tibetan king adopted Buddhism and committed to making it the religion of his people. Tibetan monks lived closer to Nepal, Sikkim and eastern India, with simpler travel itineraries than the Koreans and others. Tibetans continued to visit Magadha during the Pala era, and beyond through the 14th century, thereby participated in the crucible of ideas at Nalanda and other monasteries in Bihar and Bengal. However, after the 8th century, it was the esoteric mandala and deities-driven Vajrayana Buddhism that increasingly dominated the exchange.

Pala dynasty (750–1200 CE)



Avalokiteshvara in Khasarpana Lokeshvara form from Nalanda, 9th-century.

The [Palas](#) established themselves in eastern regions of India in mid-8th century and reigned until the last quarter of the 12th century, they were a Buddhist dynasty. However, under the Palas, the traditional Mahayana Buddhism of Nalanda that inspired East Asian pilgrims such as Xuanzang was superseded by the then newly emerging [Vajrayana](#) tradition, a [Tantra](#)-imbued, eros- and deity-inclusive esoteric version of Buddhism. Nalanda continued to get support from the Palas, but they subscribed to Vajrayana Buddhism and they were prolific builders of new monasteries on Vajrayana mandala ideas such as those at [Jagaddala](#), [Odantapura](#), [Somapura](#), and [Vikramashila](#). Odantapura was founded by [Gopala](#), the progenitor of the royal line, only 9.7 kilometres

(6 mi) from Nalanda. These competing monasteries, some just a few kilometres away from Nalanda likely drew away a number of learned monks from Nalanda. Inscriptions, literary evidence, seals, and ruined artwork excavated at the Nalanda site suggest that Nalanda remained active and continued to thrive under the Palas. Kings [Dharmapala](#) and [Devapala](#) were active patrons. A number of 9th-century metallic statues containing references to Devapala have been found in its ruins as well as two notable inscriptions. The first, a [copper plate inscription](#) unearthed at Nalanda, details an endowment by the [Shailendra](#) King, [Balaputradeva](#) of *Suvarnadvipa* ([Sumatra](#) in modern-day [Indonesia](#)). This [Srivijayan](#) king, "attracted by the manifold excellences of Nalanda" had built a monastery there and had requested Devapala to grant the revenue of five villages for its upkeep, a request which was granted. The [Ghosrawan](#) inscription is the other inscription from Devapala's time and it mentions that he received and patronised a bhikṣu named Viradeva, who had studied all the Vedas in his youth, and who was later elected the head of Nalanda.

Inscriptions issued between the 9th and 12th centuries attest gifts and support to Nalanda for the upkeep of the monastery, maintenance of the monks, copying of palm leaf manuscripts (necessary for preservation given the Indian tropical climate). One inscription also mentions the destruction of a Nalanda library of manuscripts by fire, and support for its restoration. Another 10th-century inscription quotes Bhadracari of the Sautrantikas tradition, attesting the activity of diverse schools of Buddhism at Nalanda. Another Nalanda inscription from the 11th century mentions a gift of "revolving bookcase".

While the Palas continued to patronise Nalanda liberally, the fame and influence of Nalanda helped the Palas. The Srivijaya kingdom of southeast Asia maintained a direct contact with Nalanda and the Palas, thus influencing the 9th to 12th century art in Sumatra, Java, southern Thailand and regions that actively traded with the Srivijaya kingdom. The influence extended to the Indonesian Shailendra dynasty. The Indonesian bronzes and votive tablets from this period show the creativity of its people, yet the iconographic themes overlap with those found at Nalanda and nearby region. Monks from Indonesia, Myanmar and other parts of southeast Asia came to Nalanda during the Pala rule.

Destruction during Turko-Afghan conquest (c. 1200 CE)

Archeological excavations in the site during 1920-1921 discovered a thick layer of ashes on the uppermost strata, across many buildings separated by some distance; this suggests that Nalanda was subject to a catastrophic fire. Traditionally, this is held to be arson, blamed upon the troops of [Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji](#) who had plundered the region c. 1200 CE, and cited to be the leading cause of Nalanda's demise – a passage from [Minhaj-i-Siraj](#)'s [Tabaqat-i Nasiri](#) which actually describes the destruction of Odantapura Vihar (var. Bihar Sharif), a monastery just a few miles from Nalanda, is offered in support. While such a reading is misplaced, it is true that the Nalanda was raided by Khalji.

The Tibetan records are the second source of the events at Nalanda in the late 12th century and much of the 13th century. These were the decades of widespread systematic destruction of monasteries in this region, and historical records in Tibet

affirm that monks from Nalanda and nearby monasteries such as the Vikramashila monastery who "survived the slaughter, fled to Tibet", according to Scharfe. Among the Tibetan records, the most useful is the biography of the Tibetan monk-pilgrim, [Dharmasvamin](#) discovered in 1936 and in *bsdus-yig* style, Tibetan script. It is useful because Dharmasvamin met the fleeing monks and famous scholars during his studies from about mid 1200s to 1226, he had learnt Indian languages and Sanskrit, he walked to and stayed in Nepal starting in 1226 and visited Bihar about 1234, including spending one monsoon season in Nalanda. He described the condition in the decades after the sack of Nalanda and other Buddhist monasteries in Magadha-region of India. His account states that the destruction of Nalanda was not an accident or misunderstanding but a part of the widespread destruction of Buddhist monasteries and monuments including a destruction of Bodhgaya. The vast manuscript libraries of Magadha had been mostly lost. Other Tibetan monks and he had shifted to Nepal, as the place to study, copy and move manuscripts to Tibet. According to his account, the Turushka-Qarluq (Turk) conquest extended from about 1193 to 1205, the destruction was systematic with "Turushka soldiers razing a monastery to the ground and throwing the stones into Ganges river", states Roerich. The fear of persecution was strong in the 1230s, and his colleagues dissuaded him from going to Magadha. According to George Roerich, "his [Chag lo-tsa-ba Chos-rje-dpal, Dharmasvamin] account conveys something of the anxiety of [the Buddhist community of] those days." Chapter 10 of Dharmasvamin's biography describes Nalanda in c. 1235 CE. Dharmasvamin found it "largely damaged and deserted". Despite the perils, some had re-gathered and resumed the scholastic activities in Nalanda, but at a vastly smaller scale and with donations from a wealthy Brahmin layperson named Jayadeva. The monks were patronised by a local dynasty known as the [Pithipatis of Bodh Gaya](#) of which the King, Buddhasena, belonged to. His account states:

There resided a venerable and learned monk who was more than ninety years old, the Guru and Mahapandita Rahulasribhadra. [Raja Buddhasena of Magadha](#) honored this Guru and four other Panditas, and about seventy venerable ones (monks).

—Dharmasvamin (Translator: George Roerich)

While he stayed there for six months under the tutelage of Rahula Shribhadra, Dharmasvamin makes no mention of the legendary library of Nalanda which possibly did not survive the initial wave of Turko-Afghan attacks. He also states that some structures had survived, with "eighty small viharas, built of bricks and many left undamaged" but "there was absolutely no one to look after them". He recites the arrest of their patron and lay-supporter Jayadeva by Muslim soldiers who threaten to kill him for honouring (supporting) the monks of Nalanda. Jayadeva sends them a message that the Turushka soldiers are sure to kill "Guru [Rahulasribhadra] and his disciples" and they should "flee!".

Dharmasvamin also provides an eyewitness account of an attack on the derelict Mahavihara by the Muslim soldiers stationed at nearby [Odantapura](#) (now [Bihar Sharif](#)) which had been turned into a military headquarters. Only the Tibetan and his nonagenarian instructor stayed behind and hid themselves while the rest of the monks fled. Another Tibetan source is that of Lama Taranatha, but this is from the late 16th century, and it is unclear what its sources were. The Taranatha account about

Buddhism in India repeats the legendary accounts of Nalanda from the Buddha and Ashoka periods found in Xuanzang and other sources, then shifts to centuries of the 2nd-millennium. It describes Islamic raids in 12th-century India, states that whole of Magadha fell to the Turushka (Turks, a common term for Muslims in historic Indic and Tibetan texts). Their armies, asserts Taranatha, destroyed Odantapuri as well as Vikramashila. Given the hundreds of years of gap between the events and Taranatha's account, and no clear chain of sources within the Tibetan tradition of record keeping, its reliability is questionable.

The Buddhist monk, [Dhyānabhadra](#) who was born in 1289 A.D., is recorded as attending Nalanda from the age of eight indicating the continued operation of the university into the late thirteenth century.

Legendary accounts

Tibetan texts such as the 18th-century work named *Pag sam jon zang* and 16th/17th-century Taranatha's account include fictional Tibetan legends. These include stories such as a king Cingalaraja had brought "all Hindus and Turuskas [Muslims]" up to Delhi under his control, and converted from Hinduism to Buddhism under the influence of his queen, and him restoring the monasteries.

Others state that a southern king built thousands of monasteries and temples again, Muslim robbers murdered this king, thereafter Nalanda was repaired by Mudita Bhadra and a minister named Kukutasiddha erected a temple there.

However, there is no evidence for the existence of such a king (or sultan), minister, Muslim robbers, thousands of Buddhist monuments built in India between the 13th and 19th century, or of any significant Nalanda repairs in or after the 13th century.

Under the East India Company and British Empire (1800–1947)



A statue of [Gautama Buddha](#) at Nalanda in 1895.

After its decline, Nalanda was largely forgotten until [Francis Buchanan-Hamilton](#) surveyed the site in 1811–1812 after locals in the vicinity drew his attention to some Buddhist and Hindu images and ruins in the area. He, however, did not associate the mounds of earth and debris with famed Nalanda. That link was established by Major Markham Kittoe in 1847. [Alexander Cunningham](#) and the newly formed [Archaeological Survey of India](#) conducted an official survey in 1861–1862. Systematic excavation of the ruins by the ASI did not begin until 1915 and ended in 1937. The first four excavations

were led by Spooner between 1915 and 1919. The next two were led by Sastri in 1920 and 1921. The next seven seasons of archaeological excavations through 1928 were led by Page. These efforts were not merely digging, observation and cataloguing of discoveries, they included conservation, restoration and changes to the site such as drainage to prevent damage to unearthed floors. After 1928, Kuraishi led two seasons of excavations, Chandra led the next four. The last season was led by Ghosh, but the excavations were abbreviated in 1937 for financial reasons and budget cuts. Chandra and final ASI team leaders noted that the "long row of monasteries extend further into the modern village of Bargaon" and the "extent of entire monastic establishment can only be determined by future excavations".

Post-independence (Post-1947)



Rear view of the ruins of the Baladitya Temple in 1872.

Post independence, the second round of excavation and restoration took place between 1974 and 1982. In 1951, the [Nava Nalanda Mahavihara](#) (*New Nalanda Mahavihara*), a modern centre for [Pali](#) and [Buddhism](#) in the spirit of the ancient institution, was founded by the [Government of Bihar](#) near Nalanda's ruins at the suggestion of [Rajendra Prasad](#), India's first president. It was [deemed to be a university](#) in 2006.

1 September 2014 saw the commencement of the first academic year of a modern [Nalanda University](#), with 15 students, in nearby [Rajgir](#). Nalanda University (also known as Nalanda International University) is an international and research-intensive university located in the historical city of [Rajgir](#) in [Bihar, India](#). It was established by an Act of Parliament to emulate the famous ancient university of Nalanda, which functioned between the 5th and 13th centuries. The idea to resurrect Nalanda University was endorsed in 2007 at the [East Asia Summit](#), represented mostly by Asian countries including [China](#), [Singapore](#), [Japan](#), [Malaysia](#) and [Vietnam](#), apart from [Australia](#) and [New Zealand](#), and as such, the university is seen as one of the flagship projects of the Government of India. It has been designated as an "[Institution of National Importance](#)" by the Parliament, and began its first academic session on 1 September 2014. Initially set up with temporary facilities in Rajgir, a modern campus spanning over 160 hectares (400 acres) is expected to be finished by 2020. This campus, upon completion, will be the largest of its kind in India, and one of the largest in Asia.

The Mahavihara

While its excavated ruins today only occupy an area of around 488 by 244 metres (1,600 by 800 ft) or roughly 12 hectares, Nalanda Mahavihara occupied a far greater area in medieval times. The subjects taught at Nalanda covered every field of learning, and it attracted pupils and scholars from Korea, Japan, China, Tibet, [Indonesia](#), [Persia](#) and [Turkey](#).

The university

At its peak the school attracted scholars and students from near and far, with some travelling from [Tibet](#), [China](#), [Korea](#), and [Central Asia](#). The highly formalised methods of [Shramanic](#) studies helped the establishment of large teaching institutions such as [Taxila](#), Nalanda, and [Vikramashila](#), which are often characterised as India's early universities. Archaeological evidence also notes contact with the [Shailendra dynasty](#) of Indonesia, one of whose kings built a monastery in the complex. Nalanda flourished under the patronage of the [Gupta Empire](#) in the 5th and 6th centuries, and later under [Harsha](#), the emperor of [Kannauj](#). The liberal cultural traditions inherited from the Gupta age resulted in a period of growth and prosperity until the ninth century CE. The subsequent centuries were a time of gradual decline, a period during which the [tantric](#) developments of Buddhism became most pronounced in eastern India under the [Pala Empire](#).

Much of our knowledge of Nalanda comes from the writings of pilgrim monks from Asia, such as [Xuanzang](#) and [Yijing](#), who travelled to the Mahavihara in the 7th century CE. [Vincent Smith](#) remarked that "a detailed history of Nalanda would be a history of Mahayanist Buddhism." Many of the names listed by Xuanzang in his travelogue as alumni of Nalanda are the names of those who developed the overall philosophy of Mahayana. All students at Nalanda studied [Mahayana](#), as well as the texts of the eighteen ([Hinayana](#)) sects of Buddhism. Their curriculum also included other subjects, such as the [Vedas](#), logic, Sanskrit grammar, medicine, and [Samkhya](#). Nalanda was destroyed three times but was rebuilt only twice. It was ransacked and destroyed by an army of the [Mamluk dynasty](#) of the [Delhi Sultanate](#) under [Bakhtiyar Khalji](#) in c. 1202 CE. While some sources note that the Mahavihara continued to function in a makeshift fashion after this attack, it was eventually abandoned altogether and forgotten until the 19th century, when the site was surveyed and preliminary excavations were conducted by the [Archaeological Survey of India](#). Systematic excavations commenced in 1915, which unearthed eleven monasteries and six brick temples neatly arranged on grounds 12 hectares (30 acres) in area. A trove of sculptures, coins, seals, and inscriptions have also been discovered in the ruins, many of which are on display in the Nalanda Archaeological Museum, situated nearby. Nalanda is now a notable tourist destination, and a part of the Buddhist tourism circuit. On 25 November 2010, the Indian government, through an Act of Parliament, 'resurrected' the ancient university through the Nalanda University Bill, with which they chose to create a new and unrelated [Nalanda University](#) relatively nearby. It has been designated as an "International University of National Importance," and has accordingly been subject to intense government oversight, with both of its past chancellors explicitly

citing Government actions for them leaving their post and courses being shut down due to members of the ruling party disapproving of them.

The library



Prajnaparamita and Scenes from the Buddha's Life (top), Maitreya and Scenes from the Buddha's Life (bottom), Folios from a Dharanisamgraha, manuscript from Nalanda, circa 1075



[Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva](#). Ashtasahasrika [Prajnyaparamita](#) Sutra manuscript from Nalanda's [Pala period](#).

It is evident from the large numbers of texts that Yijing carried back with him after his 10-year residence at Nalanda, that the Mahavihara must have featured a well-equipped library. Traditional Tibetan sources mention the existence of a great library at Nalanda named *Dharmaganja* (*Piety Mart*) which comprised three large multi-storeyed buildings, the *Ratnasagara* (*Ocean of Jewels*), the *Ratnodadhi* (*Sea of Jewels*), and the *Ratnaranjaka* (*Jewel-adorned*). Ratnodadhi was nine storeys high and housed the most sacred manuscripts including the [Prajnyaparamita](#) Sutra and the

The exact number of volumes in the Nalanda library is not known, but it is estimated to have been in the hundreds of thousands. When a Buddhist scholar at Nalanda died, his manuscripts were added to the library collection. The library not only collected religious manuscripts but also had texts on such subjects as [grammar](#), logic, literature, [astrology](#), [astronomy](#), and medicine. The Nalanda library must have had a classification scheme which was possibly based on a text classification scheme developed by the Sanskrit linguist, [Panini](#). Buddhist texts were most likely divided into three classes based on the [Tripitaka](#)'s three main divisions: the [Vinaya](#), [Sutra](#), and the [Abhidhamma](#).

Curriculum

In his biography of Xuanzang, Hwui-Li states that all the students of Nalanda studied the [Great Vehicle](#) (Mahayana) as well as the works of the eighteen [Nikaya](#) traditions of

Buddhism. In addition to these, they studied other subjects such as the [Vedas](#), *Hetuvīdyā* (Logic), *Shabdavidyā* (Grammar and Philology), *Chikitsavidyā* (Medicine), the works on magic (the [Atharvaveda](#)), and [Samkhya](#). According to Frazier, the Vedic studies included [Vedic texts](#) and ritual, but also the different theoretical disciplines associated with the [limbs](#) or the sciences of the Vedas, which included disciplines such as linguistics, law, astronomy and reasoning.

Xuanzang himself studied a number of these subjects at Nalanda under Shīlabhadra and others. Besides theology and philosophy, frequent debates and discussions necessitated competence in Logic. A student at the Mahavihara had to be well-versed in the systems of Logic associated with all the different schools of thought of the time as he was expected to defend Buddhist systems against the others. Other subjects believed to have been taught at Nalanda include law, astronomy, and city-planning. Tibetan tradition holds that there were "four [doxographies](#)" ([Standard Tibetan](#): *grub mtha'*) which were taught at Nalanda:

1. [Sarvastivada Vaibhashika](#)
2. Sarvastivada [Sautrantika](#)
3. [Madhyamaka](#), the Mahayana philosophy of [Nagarjuna](#)
4. [Chittamatra](#), the Mahayana philosophy of [Asanga](#) and [Vasubandhu](#)

In the 7th century, [Xuanzang](#) recorded the number of teachers at Nalanda as being around 1510. Of these, approximately 1000 were able to explain 20 collections of sutras and shastras, 500 were able to explain 30 collections, and only 10 teachers were able to explain 50 collections. Xuanzang was among the few who were able to explain 50 collections or more. At this time, only the abbot [Shīlabhadra](#) had studied all the major collections of sutras and shastras at Nalanda.

Administration

The Chinese monk [Yijing](#) wrote that matters of discussion and administration at Nalanda would require assembly and consensus on decisions by all those at the assembly, as well as resident monks:

If the monks had some business, they would assemble to discuss the matter. Then they ordered the officer, Vihārapāla, to circulate and report the matter to the resident monks one by one with folded hands. With the objection of a single monk, it would not pass. There was no use of beating or thumping to announce his case. In case a monk did something without consent of all the residents, he would be forced to leave the monastery. If there was a difference of opinion on a certain issue, they would give reason to convince (the other group). No force or coercion was used to convince.

Xuanzang also noted:

The lives of all these virtuous men were naturally governed by habits of the most solemn and strictest kind. Thus in the seven hundred years of the monastery's existence no man has ever contravened the rules of the discipline. The king showers it with the signs of his respect and veneration and has assigned the revenue from a hundred cities to pay for the maintenance of the religious.

Influence on Buddhism

A vast amount of what came to comprise [Tibetan Buddhism](#), both its [Mahayana](#) and [Vajrayana](#) traditions, stems from the teachers and traditions at Nalanda.

[Shantarakshita](#), who pioneered the propagation of Buddhism in Tibet in the 8th century was a scholar of Nalanda. He was invited by the Tibetan king, [Khri-sron-deu-tsan](#), and established the monastery at [Samye](#), serving as its first abbot. He and his disciple [Kamalashila](#) (who was also of Nalanda) essentially taught Tibetans how to do philosophy. [Padmasambhava](#), who was also invited from Nalanda Mahavihara by the king in 747 CE, is credited as a founder of Tibetan Buddhism.

The scholar [Dharmakirti](#) (c. 7th century), one of the Buddhist founders of Indian [philosophical logic](#), as well as one of the primary theorists of [Buddhist atomism](#), taught at Nalanda.

Other forms of Buddhism, such as the Mahayana Buddhism followed in Vietnam, China, [Korea](#) and Japan, flourished within the walls of the ancient school. A number of scholars have associated some Mahayana texts such as the [Shurangama Sutra](#), an important sutra in East Asian Buddhism, with the Buddhist tradition at Nalanda. Ron Epstein also notes that the general doctrinal position of the sutra does indeed correspond to what is known about the Buddhist teachings at Nalanda toward the end of the Gupta period when it was translated.

Several Buddhist institutions overseas have chosen to call themselves Nalanda to acknowledge Nalanda's influence. These include Nalanda Buddhist Society in Malaysia and [Nalanda College, Colombo](#), Sri Lanka, Nalanda Buddhist Education Foundation, Indonesia, Nalanda Buddhist Institute, Bhutan

World Heritage Sites Recognition

The Nalanda Mahavihara is recognised as a [World Heritage Site](#) by the [UNESCO](#) in 2016.

Nalanda Mahavira, one of the most renowned ancient centers of learning, met its decline and destruction primarily due to repeated invasions and changing political landscapes. Established in the 5th century CE in modern-day Bihar, India, it flourished for nearly 700 years as a major hub for Buddhist studies, drawing scholars from across Asia.

The final blow came in the late 12th century when the university was ransacked by Turkic invader Bakhtiyar Khilji around 1193 CE. The library was set on fire, and many monks were killed, while others fled. This marked the end of Nalanda's prominence as a center of education.

Although Nalanda Mahavira's decline was tragic, its legacy as a symbol of ancient wisdom, scholarship, and cross-cultural learning remains influential. In recent years, efforts have been made to revive its spirit through initiatives like the Nalanda University, re-established in

Some key information about nalonda mohabihar:

Location	Nalonda, Bihar, india
Region	Magadha
Type	Centre of learning, mahavihara
Length	240 m (800 ft)
Width	490 m (1,600 ft)
Area	12 ha (30 acres)