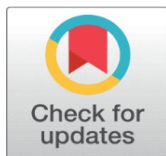
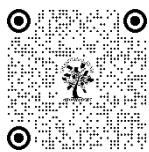


BUDDHIST EDUCATION SYSTEM IN ANCIENT INDIA: AN INTRODUCTION

Dr. Pintu Kumar¹✉

¹ Associate Professor of History, Motilal Nehru College (Eve) Delhi University, India



Corresponding Author

Dr. Pintu Kumar, pintu.jnu@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Education in ancient India touched a high level of development both in the sphere of organised and unorganised sectors and provided water and manure to Indian knowledge traditions. Now ancient education system and culture is not only history but also became a reality through the adoption of its several features in National Education Policy 2020. The present essay will introduce the Buddhist education system and associated institutional culture in detail with its important features. It should be noted with emphasis that the structure of ancient Indian education primarily materialized from religions like Brāhmaṇism, Jainism and Buddhism. Especially in the process of consolidation and expansion religions like Brāhmaṇism and Buddhism played vital roles in creating, preserving and transmitting Indian knowledge through its gurukulas and mahāvihāras. The chapter will focus on Buddhist monasteries, which represent the beginning of the second stage of growth i.e. organised instruction in ancient India. Ancient Indian monasteries like Nālandā, Vikramaśīlā, Valabhī and Odantapuri were both a centre of Buddhism and the world-famous institution of learning. The organised and unorganised stages went on parallel and interacted with each other. Altogether the pre-modern Indian education became the world's pinnacle with creation, preservation and transmission of the latest knowledge in both secular and religious subjects.

Keywords: Gurukulas, Mahāvihāras, Organised, Institutional, Religion, Education, Monastery, Buddhism, Ancient India, Nālandā

Ancient India witnessed a leadership role in the pre-modern world, especially for its highly institutionalised education system. The secular and religious knowledge diffused from the first Indian learning centres showed the right path to both Indians and foreigners. Early Indian instructional organisms still functioned as the base and the source of inspiration for the modern Indian learning apparatus. Some of the features of these developed teaching centres like the friendly relation between student and teacher, the natural environment for study, suitability to the society and the life, and guidance to be perfect human beings are still a dream for recent Indian schooling, which became the focus of National Education Policy 2020 (hereafter NEP). Early Indian education during evolution and decline had come across with almost all qualities that we strive for in the latest education system. Early Indian education fulfilled the needs and requirements of society. Related to this, we can see modifications and changes in ancient Indian knowledge according to development and stability in society, economy, polity and religion.

The *Vedic* literature had been abundant in teaching and learning since the day of the *Rig Veda*, which is the oldest textbook of theology in the world. The earliest sacred scripture had given us the most former education system in the world. A series of religious scriptures since the composition of the *Rig Veda* (knowledge of thanksgiving) throws a flood of light on education in ancient India. Early Indian education started from the guidance of an individual teacher in his home, and its peak point reflected in large educational complexes, which sometimes termed as 'university.' The *Rig Vedic*

Age evidences the beginning of teaching and learning activities in its *guru-śiṣya paramparā* or *gurukula* tradition, which later developed as *Vedic* schools and colleges. The apogee of this education started with the emergence of heterodox sects like Buddhism and Jainism. In the Gupta Age, it contributed a lot to the development of massive education complexes *mahāvihāras*, where almost all the facilities for studying were available. It also symbolises the modest beginning of organised or institutional education, which is visible in the establishments like Nālandā, Vikramaśīlā, Mahabodhi, Odantapurī and Valabhī Mahāvihāra etc. Among these institutions, Nālandā Mahāvihāra was the earliest and largest one developed in Magadha and the coordinator of Indian Mahāvihāra's educational system.

In this way, ancient Indian education broadly comprised two categories such as *gurukulas*/Brāhmaṇical and *mahāvihāra*/Buddhist traditions. The Brāhmaṇical education system symbolises *guru-śiṣya paramparā* related to *Vedic* school teaching. On the other hand, Buddhist education signifies the beginning of university/institutional/organised education within large complexes modestly. The growth and function of Nālandā Mahāvihāra treated as a line of division and link between the Brāhmaṇical and the Buddhist learning apparatus. The first and the largest Nālandā Mahāvihāra was the beginning of the institutional study, which reflected the peak point of both *gurukula* and *mahāvihāra* tradition with assimilation and improvement of their features. It is also essential that these developments are not isolated from each other. The *Vedic* schools and the Buddhist monasteries existed and functioned simultaneously with their rules, regulation and patronages. And it was the *Vedic* schools that provided a base for monastic education through the supply of learned teachers and courses for study. The present chapter will focus on the Buddhist education system budded and flowered within its monasteries in ancient India. It will also trace the origin and growth of Buddhist monastic scholastic organisations in connection with Buddhism. Later, we will also talk about important features and culture of the organised Buddhist teaching-learning system, which made it a unique and invincible part of ancient Indian education. Finally, we will witness the highest stage of Buddhist teaching-training in the form of Nālandā Mahāvihāra.

1. EVOLUTION OF BUDDHIST EDUCATION SYSTEM

We will now see the evolution of the Buddhist education system in its *mahāvihāras*, an important stage of early Indian education. The history of the Buddhist education system is deeply interrelated with the Buddha or Buddhist religion, which helped India to attract international recognition. Gautama, the Buddha revolted against the prevalent Brāhmaṇical religion and education system. The age of *Upaniṣads* witnessed spiritual unrest and revolt against the formalism and exclusiveness of the Brāhmaṇical system leading to the rise of religious leaders like Buddha and Mahavira.ⁱ When the *gurukula* education system reached its pinnacle, it attracted several problems that were related to its consolidation. The early Indian society was changing fast in about 600 B.C. The *Vedic* educational apparatus now did not satisfy the needs and the requirement of this new society and its member. It led to the evolvement of the new Buddhist education system to fulfil the expectations of many scholars and ordinary folks. In this way, it was the weakness of Brāhmaṇical tradition, the changes in Brāhmaṇical society and religion, and the rise of Buddhism and Jainism, which created the environment for the mutation of the Buddhist education.

The *gurukula* system in reality later became an instrument for dominance in contemporary society for the *Brāhmaṇas*. Gradually they became one and only spiritual supervisor of the society and did not leave any place for the other three classes, i.e. the *Kṣatriyas*, the *Vaiśyas* and the *Śūdras*. These classes especially the *Kṣatriyas* also wanted to be a partner in this enlightenment game as they belonged to the ruling class. Later by 600 B.C., the *gurukulas* excluded especially the *Śūdras*, women and other lowest classes from its instructional system. The study of the *Vedas* was forbidden for the *Śūdras* and women and they learnt their professional knowledge of agriculture and animal husbandry, spinning and weaving, fine arts and crafts through the expertise of their own families. These classes also passionately wanted to be educated; as a result, the Buddhist *vihāras* threw their doors open to all. Sanskrit was the medium of instruction in the *gurukulas*, which had by then become a status symbol of high dignity and intellectuality. The local inhabitants moved further away from the contemporary educational setup because they could not read and write in Sanskrit. Both Mahāvīra and Buddha preached in local dialects, but it was Buddhism more than Jainism that posed a threat to Brāhmaṇism. By 600 B.C., the *Vedic* religion dominated by Brahmins had become too ritualistic, dogmatic and elaborate to attract the more straightforward folks.ⁱⁱ Also, it was propagated that *Śūdras* and women will not be able to get salvation. It was Buddha who preached that they could reach salvation and how they can get rid of the misery of this material world. The evolution and development of Buddhist education are simultaneous with the growth in the Buddhist religion. And it was essential for the newly emerging faith to discover any institution, which could be the centre for the creation and propagation of their doctrines. The *vihāras* and *mahāvihāras* fulfilled this need as a residential and religious complex,

which later emerged as educational complexes. Thus, this Buddhist education was not only the best way to spread their ideas but also to educate common folks.

The construction and expansion of ancient Indian Buddhist monasteries started in the sixth century B.C. Buddha institutionalised the retreat during the rainy season.ⁱⁱⁱ We learn from *Chullavagga* that the Buddha allowed the following abodes for resting in the rainy season: *vihāra* (monastery), *aḍḍayoga* (pinnacle house),^{iv} *pāsāda* (storied dwellings), *hammiya* (attics)^v and *guhā* (caves).^{vi} In words of the Buddha: To give *vihāras* to the *Saṅgha* where, in safety and in peace, to do meditation and think at ease, Buddha calls the best of gifts.^{vii} *Mahāvagga* refers that earlier the mendicants went on their travels alike during winter, summer and the rainy season. It is hard to walk in the rain because numerous small animals and insects keep crawling outside. The Buddhist *Saṅgha* signified the cenobite society of residents at the *āvāsa*.^{viii} *Vihāra* is a place of living, stay, and more precisely an abode for a Buddhist mendicant. Sometimes the words 'Ārāma' and 'Vihāra' are synonymous.^{ix} In Pāli, the word 'Ārāma' also generally refers to the residence for monks.^x It was built not far from the town and not too near – convenient for going and for coming – easily accessible for all who wish to visit by day and not too crowded by night, not exposed to too much noise and alarm.^{xi} Some centuries must have elapsed before the *āvāsas* came to be organised and had a distinct existence.

The practice of rain retreat took the shape of a permanent sanctuary institution. Dutt's explains the expansion of *vihāra* into *mahāvihāra* through institutional rules mentioned in the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, which deal with the allotment of seats in *āvāsa*.^{xii} The general rule is that seats are to be retained during the *Vassāvāsa* for the two regular occasions for future allotment of positions, i.e. the commencement of the earlier and the later *Vassāvāsa*. Also, the day after the *Pāvarana* recognised the seats allotted for the next rain retreat in anticipation.^{xiii} The *āvāsa* from being shelters during the rain retreat became places of domicile, and hence seats had to be allotted not only for three or four months of the year but also for the remaining period. The allotment made for the non-*Vassāvāsa* period is said to have been made in advance for the next rain retreat period. As the *vihāras* became a permanent place of residence, the need for monks increased, i.e. security, food, clothes, utensils, furniture etc. Later, the combinations of individual cells of monk, the *vihāra* developed into a large house. Later we find a description of *vihāras* in *Mahāvagga* and *Chullavagga* were like full-fledged houses.^{xiv} In this way, the collection of *vihāras*, i.e. private room for monks called *mahāvihāra*, provided space and other facilities to hundreds of monks. Liberal royal grants as well as public donations helped in the establishment of Buddhist *vihāras* and then expansion into *mahāvihāra* from as early as the sixth century B.C. Afterwards, Buddha allowed the monks to have a fence made of bamboo-sticks, thorns or a ditch as we find in the case of Nālandā Mahāvihāra.^{xv} It showed a marked advancement from the individualistic life to the corporate experience.^{xvi}

The root of the transformation of *mahāvihāras* into learning institutions goes back to the age of wandering homeless religious saints. Before the monastic establishment came into existence, the wandering groups functioned like a roaming educational institution, visiting by turn the chief centres of cultures. These numerous ascetic and philosophising circles roamed in search of opportunities to fight out their differences in public disputations before their adherent, opponents and public. The fact is that in such a system some had to specialise in the discipline viz. *Dhammadhara* and *Vinayadhara*.^{xvii} Then some monks having faith in particular discipline followed and gathered around the specialist, who functioned as a roaming teacher. This *milieu* shaped and conditioned the institution of *mahāvihāra* — settled its ethos and essential character, the foundation upon which its system of *Vinaya* afterwards built. Buddha provided theoretical and practical approval for the beginning and continuation of the teaching and learning process. Buddha^{xviii} declared his last three wishes for his teachings and *Saṅgha*, so that pure teaching may be established and also last long. His three dreams are as follows:

1. They should learn Buddha's teachings (*Dhamma*) thoroughly by heart, but learning by heart alone is not enough.
2. He instructed them to cultivate Buddha's teachings, which means that we must try to know this *Dhamma* in practice again and again.
3. Finally, he instructed them to develop the truths until the attainment of *arahantship*.

These are the duties of all Buddhists. If one does not follow them, then one is a Buddhist in name only. If one follows these three instructions thoroughly, then one is a real Buddhist. The teaching-learning activity is in the heart of Buddhism practiced by all followers as a sacred duty focused on the Buddhist canon, its interpretation and proper understanding. The Buddhist monasteries adopted learning-training methods and structures of the ongoing *gurukulas* in the form of *nissāya* attested by the *Theravāda* canon.^{xix} The Buddhist monasteries served the contemporary societies by providing happiness, morality, knowledge, salvation and religious services to all. For the perfect or accomplished monk — one who has mastered the doctrine is also able to spread it abroad and refute the principles of other faiths.^{xx} It demanded the knowledge of other religions. Now monastic learning came out of purely Buddhist religion and became more liberal for

the sake of knowledge, debate and disputations with Brahmins. It led to the growth of monasteries as centres of academic learning and scholarship from the fifth century onwards. Education was not confined to monks but was made available to all. The doors of the Buddhist monasteries, which earlier opened only for renouncers, were now thrown open to all, who after education chose to leave the monastery and embrace the family life. It was a new development in monastic life and turned monasteries into an institution of learning. Some of the Buddhist monasteries like Nālandā developed into large-scale establishments for education and academic culture.

2. BUDDHIST EDUCATION SYSTEM

Early monastic education seems to have focused upon instructions on the Buddhist doctrines, on the rules of discipline and the accounts of the previous lives of the Buddha. Before the invention of writing, all teachings were imparted orally without the use of books including discourse (illustration, stories and parable), dialogue, inquiry and so forth. Students had to learn by heart *Dhamma* and *Vinaya*. During the course, there was unrestricted freedom to argue, to dispute, and to debate with an expectation to think, logic, and conclude for oneself in all matters of *Vinaya* and *Dhamma*. The Buddhist monasteries expanded and institutionalised the tradition of an oral method with its functional department of learning and monk teachers which organised more than fifty lectures at a time within the vicinity. After the beginning of writing in the time of Asoka, monasteries focused on writing, codifying and translating religious scriptures as a pious duty. The Buddhist education system adopted different methodological approaches of teaching and learning for monks and nuns as a Gradual Approach, Illustrative Approach, Analytical Approach and Experimental Approach. Gradually, as the monastic institutions grew in size and complexity, the pattern of education also expanded. Buddhist monasteries developed into seats of culture and learning and remained so till Muslim invasions.

The Buddhist monasteries incorporated secular learning in addition to mere religious teaching. The monastery was now no more the only shelter for meditation on the teachings of Buddha, but it was also to pursue all sorts of knowledge. Under such learning, the monastic students became able to oppose the heretics, as they would drive beasts and explain away disputations as boiling water melts the frost.^{xxi} The broadened outlook brought monastic learning into a broader framework. The study of a student in the Buddhist monastery no longer confined only to the *Navaṅga* (Nine Parts) but included other *Śāstras* and *Vidyās*,^{xxii} which comprised the four *Vedas*, Six *Āngas*, Ten *Granthas*, fourteenth *Vidyās*, Eighteen *Śilpas* and Sixty-four *Kalās*.^{xxiii} The monasteries became educational seminaries and opened doors not only to monks also but to the laity irrespective of their caste, creed and colour. The account of Chinese pilgrims also confirms this. The *Vinaya* texts claim that the comfortable life within the order drew many to it to solve their problems of survival since all facilities were free of cost. The maximum participation of the society became possible through the inclusion of *Śūdras*, *Vaiśyas*, untouchables and later women as well into its fold.^{xxiv} The Buddhist education system also became popular due to its teaching, learning and training activities in Pāli or Prākṛt and other popular languages. In this way, Buddhism institutionalised, universalised and popularised education not only through the inclusion of all *varṇas* but also through instruction in local dialects.^{xxv}

Both the Brāhmaṇical and Buddhist system of education agreed that the student had to leave his home and reside with the teacher. There is a gradation of teachers existed in Buddhist monasteries such as *upājjhāya* and *ācārya*.^{xxvi} The newly joined residents in training required *ācārya* (teacher of deeds, possibly because he was concerned with conduct and discipline) on whose guidance he depended.^{xxvii} A monk could accept only one novice for training or as many as he could handle.^{xxviii} The *upājjhāya* seems to rank higher than the *ācārya* since he alone could confer ordination as a monk after twenty years of training.^{xxix} An *ācārya* as well as a *upājjhāya* needed to be a monk for at least ten years and be considered competent by the monastic community. Both students and teachers received essential utilities and facilities for a comfortable living, learning and teaching free of cost from the management of the monasteries according to their rank. The Buddhist didactic institutions not only followed but also expanded upon and institutionalised the ways of *guru-śiṣya paramparā* of the Brāhmaṇical *gurukulas*.^{xxx} The cordial and personal relationship between the teacher and students were as close as like a father and son in Buddhist monasteries.^{xxxi} Teachers were highly respected and venerated. Teachers provided supervision with all day and night and instruct them on the values of Buddhism. Apart from studies and religious duties, students served as personal attendants to their teachers such as rise early to bring his teacher tooth-cleanser and mouth water, preparing his seat, giving his rice milk then washing the cup, making his garments before the bath and the begging round etc.^{xxxii} Teachers and students both served each other in times of distress and ailment.^{xxxiii} One of the Chinese students of Nālandā, Yijing mentioned his personal experience that he used to chat with his teachers so closely and received valuable instructions personally.^{xxxiv} The students could contact the teachers at any time for

personal instruction and solutions to their doubts. The relationship between the disciple and his teacher did not transcend the order as a whole, to which they both owed a common allegiance as members.^{xxxv}

The attainment of salvation and freedom from the miseries of life was the ultimate goal of the Buddhist system of teaching.^{xxxvi} It was suitable for the religious atmosphere and setting of monasteries. Learned monks residing in Buddhist monasteries with ordinary students focused on achieving salvation by deeply studying the Buddhist texts and devoting the life for the Buddha. Indian masters always focused on inculcating the spirit of activities among the disciples and tried to sharpen the dull wits.^{xxxvii} Simultaneously, Buddhist education laid much emphasis on the physical, mental and spiritual development of all admitted in monasteries, which was essential for the achievement of salvation. The complete development of self, sharpening of intellect and formation of character aimed to achieve social cohesiveness. *Dharma* played a central role in Indian life and as an educational goal, so these objectives were achieved by teaching and training on *dharma* in every aspect of the curriculum. An educated Buddhist not only led a happy, spiritual and moral life but also worked for social harmony. Overall, the Buddhist learning system worked for the four pillars of life mentioned in religious texts i.e. *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*. The making of a complete Buddhist man was a continuous process and artistic event that took place in Buddhist monasteries.

BUDDHIST EDUCATION AND BUDDHIST CULTURE IN MONASTERIES

Buddhist education system budded and flowered within their monasteries in a religious environment and setting. Both teachers and students led disciplines, pure, devoted and simple life within monasteries. The simple *brahmacāri* life and culture practised throughout the study following the rules and regulations prescribed by the Vinaya Pitaka. Surprisingly, the Buddhist monastic culture reflected a deep combination of study and veneration to develop a Buddhist self through carefully designed architecture.^{xxxviii} The architecture of the whole monastery promoted meditation and veneration with the study as a compulsory part of training. The act of worship became deeply embedded in the learning process and simultaneously the act of studying was a pious act rooted in the process of adoration. Both were intermingled in a way that it was difficult to recognize the two distinctly. The aura generated through consciously constructed architecture plan concerning front-facing temples and monasteries resulted in not only theoretical studies in Buddhism but also live experience of living with it. Also, it was planned in a way to keep monks in the centre of the complex with places of worship around. The exact position of *stūpas* with images in front of the residence of all monks constantly reminded their religious duty. Monks used to see temples and images in each movement on the campus. They used to perform rites, prayers, and *parikrama* whenever and wherever they want. The temples are visible from the hostel's rooms, so they can also pray day and night from the room itself. The spiritual orientation became apparent by the availability of the small *stūpas* and sacred bricks on the passage.

Yijing indicated the disciplined daily of the residents of monasteries.^{xxxix} They used to start their daily life with the rising of the sun which continued until the evening. The practice of chanting scriptures, religious rituals and worship of images, *stūpas*, and *caityas* took place in the morning, afternoon and evening twilight with studies.^{xl} A resident and student at the monastery of Nālandā, Yijing writes, "every morning a *ghanti* is sounded to remind of the bathing hour. Every day after the bath, one of the monks was assigned duty for *caityavandanā* (the worship of *stūpas*)."^{xli} Gradually, the worship of images became popular in monasteries. In the later period of Buddhism, Buddha's images were placed all over in the monastery and worshipped as if he were in the world with bathing, incense and flowers.^{xlii} Victory in debate, installation of a new image, appointment of a new preceptor, construction of a new monastery, an ordination of monks, image procession, a formal reception of a reputed monk, granting titles to teachers and students and some other events celebrated as a festival in the campus followed by several rituals.^{xliii}

3. THE PINNACLE OF BUDDHIST EDUCATION: ŚRĪ NĀLANDĀ MAHĀVIHĀRA

A long time back Fergusson rightly mentioned that what clergy and clairvoyants were to France in the Middle Ages, Nālandā was to Central India, the depository of all learning and foundation from which it spread over all the Buddhist land.^{xliv} The first and the largest Buddhist monastery of ancient India, Nālandā Mahāvihāra, an anchor of learning is also popularly known as the Oxford of Buddhist India.^{xlv} The purpose of education at Nālandā was the all-around development of its residents and their instincts, patent or latent. The uplifting of residents' and monks' inborn moral, spiritual, and intellectual fervour was the solitary motive of Nālandā teaching. It gave Nālandā Mahāvihāra a rare character of its own. In the words of Yijing, Nālandā was the magnificent Temple of Learning in Jambudvīpa.^{xlvi} The admission to the monastery of Nālandā was a prestigious matter and by no means an easy task so occasionally wicked men fraudulently claimed graduation here and got respect wherever they went.^{xlvii} Xuanzang, a student of Nālandā observed that only two

or three out of ten students' well versed in both old and new books used to secure admission after interview by the gatekeepers.^{xlviii} About the method of study at Śrī Nālandā, old Brāhmaṇical *gurukula* practice of reciting, the texts and understanding their meaning was still in practice.^{xlix} The oral method of teaching at Nālandā seems to have been both tutorial and discussion-based, besides lecturing. Teachers arranged about one hundred pulpits every day for preaching and the students attended these discourses without fail, even for a minute.¹ It was a regular practice to open learnt subjects for share, test, review and discussion for all scholars in the form of modern academic workshops and seminars, which sometimes goes for several days.^{li} Learning through dialogue institutionalised and legalised debate or logic not only helped in solving intellectual disputes but also continuously improved Buddhist knowledge, religion and philosophy.^{lii} The old and silent feature of Indian tradition became instrumental in the rise of doctrine and philosophy systematically, which Johannes Bronkhorst^{liii} referred to as rational debate but Bruno Lo Turco^{liv} replaced the term rational with theoretical.

The original study at Śrī Nālandā Mahāvihāra comprised five subjects until twenty-one years of age: *Śabdavidyā* (grammar and lexicography), *Śilpasthanavidyā* (arts), *Cikitsāvidyā* (medicine), *Hetuvidyā* (logic) and *Adhyātamvidyā* (philosophy).^{lv} Elements of both non-religious and religious knowledge, of philosophical and practical subjects, entered into the composition of education at Nālandā. The early training of Buddhist novices focused not only on Buddhist texts but also on behaviour according to the Buddhist way and practices. There were some subjects mandatory for all students such as grammar, logic and philosophy besides several optional subjects. We can easily observe changes in the curriculum of Nālandā according to the transformations in Buddhism. Sometimes even Nālandā became the progenitor of the process of development and represented the new schools of Buddhism through its focused curriculum and practice such as Tantrayāna.^{lvi} Śrī Nālandā started with the stress on the Buddha's words turned into a Mahāyāna scholastic and finally became an abode of Tantrayāna.

Nālandā is still known in the Buddhist rational world for its highly qualified teachers and famed students from all over the world. Xuanzang says that in his time as many as 1510 teachers and ten thousand students were at Nālandā.^{lvii} There are three grades of teachers i.e. *Pandit*, *upājjhāya* and *ācārya* at Nālandā Mahāvihāra, which received the facilities accordingly from monastic management. It appears that *Pandit* was a distinctive title bestowed upon the head of *mahāvihāra*.^{lviii} It is also significant that the title of *Mokṣa-deva* or *Mokṣa-ācārya* was applied to Buddhist monks of distinction as Jnanaprabha called this to Xuanzang in his letter.^{lix} We can name a few famous and expert *upājjhāya* or professors of Buddhist religion and philosophy associated with Nālandā: Nāgārjuna,^{lx} Asaṅga, Dharmapāla,^{lxi} Śīlabhadra, Candrakīrti, Candranātha, Dignāga,^{lxii} Dharmakīrti,^{lxiii} Kamalaśīla,^{lxiv} Āryadeva,^{lxv} Śāntarakṣita,^{lxvi} Vasubandhu,^{lxvii} Candragomī, Rahulaśrībhadra, and so on. Nālandā's reputed teachers went outside of India, upon invitation to other countries such as Tibet, Nepal, Sri Lanka, China, Central Asia, Java and Sumatra, where they propagated Buddhism as a sacred duty. The highly developed, famed and organised education of Nālandā attracted students not only from all over India but also from outside such as China, Tibet, Mongolia,^{lxviii} and Korea.^{lxix} We learn from Yijing that before and after Xuanzang's visit, in forty years as many as fifty-six student scholars visited India from China, Japan, Tibet and Korea and thirteen foreign scholars were his contemporaries at Nālandā.^{lxx} Several disciples surpassed their teachers in knowledge and became the head of Nālandā Mahāvihāra, such as Śīlabhadra, who was the pupil of Dharmapāla, who was himself a disciple of logician Dignāga, who was trained by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. The writing, copying and translating of manuscripts were an important part of the studies at Śrī Nālandā. In this way, Nālandā continuously produced a large number of texts and positioned them in its libraries. We know from Tāranātha that Nālandā's libraries situated in a special place known by the poetical name of Dhamagaṇja and comprised three nine-story buildings called Ratnasāgara, Ratnadadhī and Ratnaraṇjaka.^{lxxi}

4. SUMMING UP

The development of the Buddhist education system started the institutionalisation of learning in India. The parallel old traditions of Brāhmaṇical *gurukulas* continued, expanded and institutionalised within the Buddhist monasteries like Nālandā, Vikramaśīlā, Odantapurī and Valabhī. For example, the highly developed Buddhist instruction system at the monastery of Nālandā marked the beginning of the age of organised or institutional instruction in the pre-modern world. Unlike its contemporary and parallel Brāhmaṇical *Vedic* schools, the Buddhist learning system centred on the monasteries that functioned as permanent establishments for teaching-training Buddhists and common folks and for imparting and propagating Buddhist knowledge and philosophy. Nālandā as the largest autonomous and residential monastic organization provided free systematic learning, infrastructural and academic facilities to thousands of its residents such as hostels, mess, food, garments, lecture halls, apartment with beds, libraries, books, pen, paper, wells,

temples and so forth. Unlike the domestic system of *gurukulas*, Buddhist monasteries not only function as a campus with a defined code of conduct but also the management of teachers and students were responsible for sound education. These monasteries attracted the maximum number of residents from the downtrodden classes of the society most probably for a comfortable life and education free of cost. The Buddhist education system will be always known in history for its ultimate combination of education and veneration, deeply connected relationship between teachers and students and universalisation of education.

It should be noted with emphasis that the structure of ancient Indian education primarily materialized from religions like Brāhmaṇism and Buddhism. Especially in the process of consolidation and expansion religions like Brāhmaṇism and Buddhism played vital roles in creating, preserving and transmitting Indian knowledge through its *gurukulas* and *mahāvihāras*. Occasionally scholars neglect the highly developed ancient Indian education system due to its association with religion. It seems not right to demean pre-modern Indian education simply by saying it is religious instruction. Surprisingly, a combination of education and religion played an overarching role in influencing the larger framework of the pre-modern individual, social and cultural life. Also, the same effective education became deeply connected with ancient Indian society and culture. We are missing this feature in the ongoing English education system and are lacking much behind in moral and basic education. The NEP will promote moral and value education to provide equitable and qualitative development opportunities to all learners. We have to keep in mind that religion in ancient India was not like the present days; it was a way of life that not only generated new changes but also actually decided the spheres of life that could be affected by those changes.

Now ancient education system and culture including both Brāhmaṇical and Buddhist is not only history but also became a reality through the adoption of its several features in NEP 2020. The NEP ultimately aims to introduce an education connected and relevant for the contemporary citizens, society and culture, which Indians did well in the pre-modern times. It also focuses on not only the increase in knowledge but also the complete development of students suitable for the society and nation like the ancient Indian education system.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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