

Higher Educational Institutions In Ancient India (An Insight From Review Of Literatures)

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Abstract:

The term "Ancient India" refers to the Indian Subcontinent spanning from prehistoric times until the conclusion of the Gupta Empire around 500 CE. A profound statement by A.S. Altekar likens knowledge to the "third eye" of humanity, offering insights into all matters and guiding actions. In the spiritual realm, knowledge leads to salvation, while in the secular realm, it propels comprehensive advancement and prosperity. Education's illuminating influence dispels illusions, overcomes challenges, and unveils life's authentic values.

The significance of knowledge and education in ancient India is exemplified by the Vedas, where the very essence of the term signifies knowledge. This paper delves into a descriptive exploration of the concept and establishment of Higher Education in Ancient India, organized into three principal categories: Vedic Education, Brahminical Education, and Buddhist Education.

Key Words: Ancient India, Higher Educational Institutions, Vedas, Brahminical and Buddhists Education System.

INTRODUCTION

Takshasila, an esteemed institution of advanced learning, thrived many centuries prior to renowned universities like Alexandria, Athens, and Constantinople. Among the notable centers of higher learning in ancient India were Takshasila, Vikramasila, Valabhi, and Nalanda. While these institutions gained significant renown, numerous others, including "Odantapuri (Bihar), Somapura (Naogaon, Bangladesh), Jagadala (Naogaon, Bangladesh), Puspagiri (Cuttack,

Odisha), Nagarjunkonda (Guntur, Andhra Pradesh)" (Barua), have left elusive traces due to limited available literature. This paper primarily focuses on three of these institutions. The distinguished educational establishments of ancient India, such as Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramshila, and Vallabhi, exemplified the pinnacle of interdisciplinary instruction and research. They attracted scholars and students from diverse backgrounds and countries, fostering a global exchange of knowledge. The present work is a descriptive exploration that seeks to elucidate the fundamental principles of higher education in ancient India.

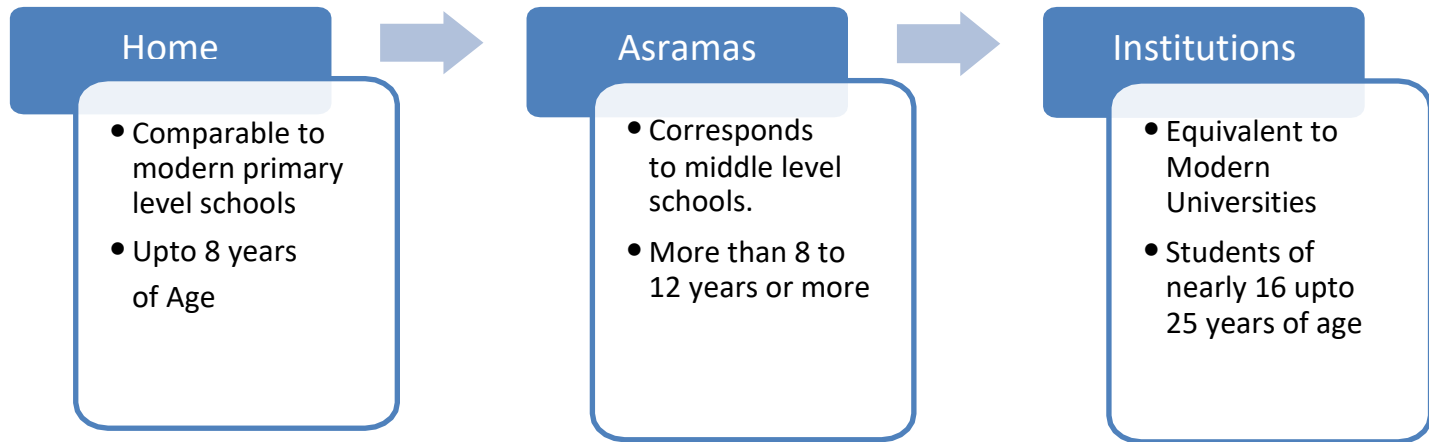
OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The paper has multiple objectives. Firstly, it aims to identify the distinctive characteristics of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Ancient India. Secondly, it endeavors to recognize renowned teachers and scholars associated with these HEIs. Thirdly, it aims to document valuable insights and lessons that contemporary universities can derive from the experiences of HEIs in Ancient India..

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Keeping in view the objectives of the study, a descriptive research methodology has been adopted. An attempt has been made to describe the unique features and working of HEIs in Ancient India. Various published literature like books and research paper has been studied. Data Sources like JSTORE, Google Scholar, Science Direct, and Scopus Data Base have been used to find constant.

EDUCATIONAL MODELHEIs IN ANCIENT INDIA



TAKSHASHILA

Takshashila, an ancient seat of learning that emerged around 600-700 BC, holds a remarkable place in history as possibly the oldest university not only in India but also in the broader world context. Situated in the present-day city of Rawalpindi, Pakistan, this venerable institution possessed an extraordinary allure that transcended geographical boundaries. It attracted a diverse array of eager minds from across the vast expanse of the Indian Subcontinent, even reaching as far as China and various other nations. The university's prestige owed much to its distinguished faculty, a group of erudite teachers whose intellectual prowess drew innumerable students year after year.

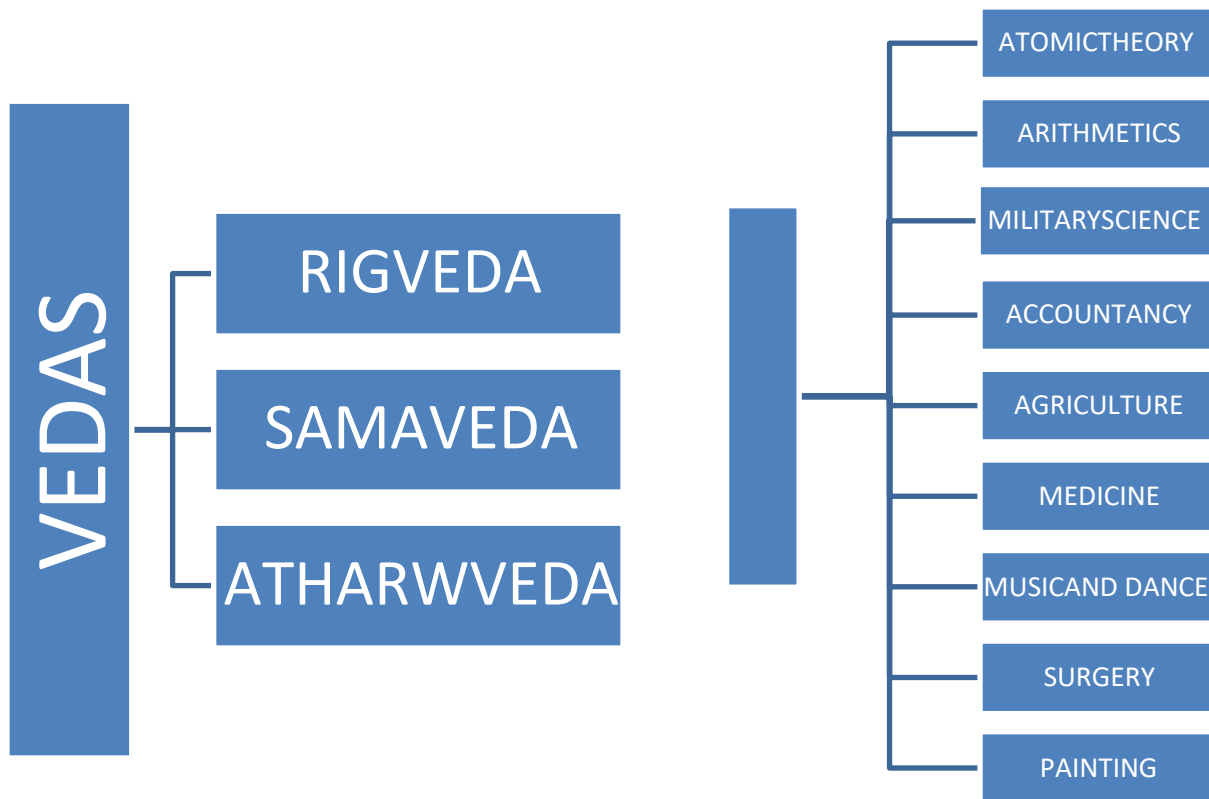
Of profound significance is Takshashila's distinctive autonomy—a fully sovereign entity that operated with remarkable independence, unburdened by external influence from monarchs or local authorities. Within its hallowed halls, each teacher assumed a role of paramount authority. Their decisions carried unequivocal weight, wielding final say not only in matters of curriculum and student selection but also in establishing the daily rhythms of academic life and determining the duration of courses. This structure intriguingly resembles the modern framework of doctoral programs seen in select contemporary universities.

The duration of specialized courses, spanning approximately eight years, underscores the profound dedication to education within the Takshashila system. This extended timeframe allowed for comprehensive exploration of

subjects, fostering a deep and nuanced understanding of the chosen field of study.

One of the most intriguing departures from modern educational practices was Takshashila's deliberate omission of formal examinations and degrees. In contrast to today's emphasis on assessment and certification, Takshashila valued knowledge itself as the ultimate reward. This approach epitomized the pure pursuit of understanding and insight, reinforcing the idea that the accumulation of knowledge was a transformative and invaluable journey in its own right.

In essence, Takshashila stands as a beacon of ancient wisdom, offering insights into a unique and remarkably independent approach to higher education. Its legacy challenges contemporary notions of formal assessment and underscores the intrinsic worth of learning for its own sake, casting a thought-provoking light on the evolution of educational paradigms over time.



COURSES TAUGHT AT TAKSHASHILA

NALANDA

During the seventh century AD, a significant cultural exchange took place between India and China, exemplified by the visits of two esteemed Chinese scholars to the Indian subcontinent. These interactions serve as compelling evidence of the enduring appeal and reputation of Indian centers of learning during that era.

One of these scholars, Hiuen Tsang, embarked on a remarkable journey to India in 629 AD, a voyage that would span 16 years until 645 AD. He undertook a comprehensive study of Indian culture, religion, and philosophy during his stay. A noteworthy chapter of his experience was his immersion in the academic environment of the University of Nalanda. Tsang's dedication to scholarship led him to become a resident student at Nalanda for a substantial portion of his visit—10 years to be precise. This extended period enabled him to engage deeply with the academic curriculum, exchange ideas with fellow scholars, and immerse himself in the rich intellectual tapestry of the

university.

Following in Tsang's footsteps, another Chinese scholar, I-Tsing, made his way to Nalanda University a few years later. Arriving in India around 675 AD, I-Tsing spent a decade studying at Nalanda, continuing the tradition of cross-cultural academic exploration. His presence at the university from 675 to 685 AD, as documented by Mookerji, underscores Nalanda's enduring prominence as a hub of higher learning that attracted scholars from distant lands. The fact that both Hiuen Tsang and I-Tsing dedicated a significant portion of their lives to studying at Nalanda University is a testament to the institution's unparalleled reputation and the quality of education it offered. These scholars' experiences highlight the magnetic appeal of Nalanda as a center of intellectual curiosity and exchange, fostering a unique blend of diverse cultures and knowledge that flourished within its storied walls. Their journeys underscore the profound impact of ancient Indian education on the global stage and shed light on the enduring legacy of Nalanda as a beacon of learning.

There were five standardized subjects as compulsory papers to be essentially studied by every student of Nalanda. These were as follows.

- a) Sabda-Vidya or Vyakarana (Grammar or lexicography)
- b) Silpasthana-Vidya (Knowledge of arts & crafts through manual training)
- c) Chikitsa-Vidya (Science of Medicine)
- d) Hetu-vidya (logic)
- e) Adhyatma-vidya (Science of Universal soul or philosophy)

University was financially independent and has its source of revenue (200 villages, the biggest landlord so fits locality).

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

The head of the Federation was a Bhikhu having Good Moral Character, Scholarship, and Seniority. He was elected by various Sanghas.

Control through councils not individually.

Council One: For Administrative Affairs

This council was responsible for following the affairs of the University

- a) Financial Aspects
- b) Construction & Repair of Buildings
- c) Securing and supply of food to residents
- d) Arrangements of clothes and medicines
- e) Allotment of residential facilities/rooms according to individuals' standing
- f) Distribution of work among residents
- g) Distribution of lands among farmers

Council Two: For Academic Affairs

This council was responsible for following the affairs of the University

- a) Admitting students to the university
- b) Regulating courses in various subjects
- c) Holding of examination at proper intervals
- d) Looking after, securing & maintaining of manuscripts
- e) Copying of manuscripts which were in great demand
- f) Distribution of work among teachers

Faculty at Nalanda

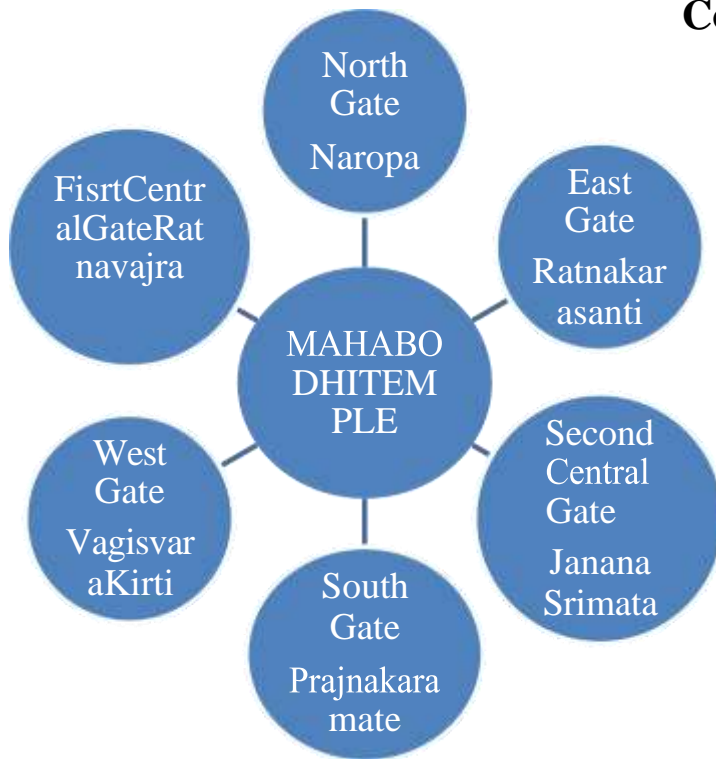
- 1) Aryadeva 2) Asanga 3) Nagarjuna 4) Vasubandhu 5) Sthiramati 6) Dharmapala 7) Shilabhadra 8) Santideva**
- 9) Santarakshita 10) Padmasambhava 11) Kamasila 12) Candrogoming 13) Buddhakirti**

VIKRAMASILA

Established in the eighth century AD, specifically between 775 and 800, Vikramshila University was the visionary creation of King Dharmapala. Its intellectual light shone brightly until the tragic culmination of its existence in 1203, brought about by the invading forces of Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khilji. Situated in close proximity to Nalanda,

another eminent seat of learning, Vikramshila held its own as a center of profound scholarship and erudition. While the precise location of the university's Vihara remains elusive, it is widely believed to have graced the landscape of Silao Village in the Bhagalpur District. Vikramshila stood as a symbol of the rich tapestry of knowledge that the region cultivated.

The university's curriculum was a melting pot of diverse intellectual traditions. Embracing the breadth of Buddhist thought, both Mahayana and Hinayana branches of Buddhism found a home within its hallowed halls. This comprehensive approach ensured a holistic exploration of Buddhist philosophy and teachings. In a remarkable fusion of educational streams, Vikramshila also provided a platform for the study of Brahminical texts, reflecting the interplay of various intellectual currents that flowed through its academic endeavors. Vikramshila's legacy stands as a testament to the pluralistic and inclusive nature of education that thrived within its walls. As an institution that encapsulated the essence of Indian scholarship, it fostered an environment where diverse philosophies coexisted and intermingled, enriching the intellectual landscape of ancient India. They believed in the inherent differences in intelligence and other capacities of students and did not prescribe any definite uniform length of time for learning various courses.



Courses at Vikramasila Vihara

1. Buddhism-Mahayanism
2. Buddhism-Hinyanism
3. Grammar
4. Logic
5. Metaphysics, and
6. Study of Tantras
7. Ritualism

Like other Higher Institutions of that time there also was no system of giving written degrees. Knowledge was treated as its reward. University's authority confers the title of Pandita to those scholars who had finished courses at the University. Annual Functions were presided over by Patron King.

There was a system of 'Alumni Association' names & portraits of famous alumni were exhibited on walls of buildings. Some famous students'/scholars' names are given below.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| a. Acharya Buddha Jnanapada | i. Dipankara Sri Jnana |
| b. Vairochana Rakshita | j. Viryasinha |
| c. Jetari | k. Abhayakaragupta |
| d. Prajnakaramati | l. Tathagupta Rakshita |
| e. Ratnakaramati | m. Manjusri |
| f. Jnanasri | n. Dharmakirti |
| g. Ratnavajra | o. Sakyasuribhadra, and |

h. Vagisvarakirti

p.Many morewerethere

There was Complete Academic Autonomy and teachers in charge of the department were responsible for the Academic work conducted in the irrespective Departments.

VALABHI

Valabhi University, nestled in the heart of Saurashtra, Gujarat, emerges as a beacon of intellectual prowess that rivaled even the famed Nalanda University. Its reputation as an academic powerhouse was particularly pronounced in the realm of Hinayana Buddhism, where it stood as a stalwart bastion of knowledge. However, Valabhi's educational scope extended far beyond the boundaries of Buddhism, encompassing the vast tapestry of Brahmanical Sciences.

Within its hallowed halls, an eclectic array of courses flourished, each offering insights into different facets of life and thought. Niti Sastra, the study of Political Science, delved into the intricacies of governance and statecraft. Artha Avaem Lekha, focused on Economics and Accountancy, equipped students with the tools to navigate the complexities of commerce and finance. Varta, a discipline embracing Business and Agriculture, nurtured a generation of entrepreneurs and agriculturalists poised to contribute to the socio-economic fabric of their society. Theology and Law added a spiritual and legal dimension, enriching the intellectual landscape.

Despite the shadows cast by time, a few names stand out as testament to the intellectual vibrancy of Valabhi University. Gunawati and Sthiramati, though enigmatic figures now, were undoubtedly among the bright minds that graced its corridors, leaving an indelible mark on its legacy.

In the 7th century, Valabhi's fame attracted the attention of distinguished visitors from afar. Xuanzang and Yijing, intrepid Chinese pilgrims on their quest for knowledge, journeyed to this seat of learning. Yijing, notably, drew a remarkable parallel between Valabhi and the revered Nalanda University, highlighting the exceptional quality of education and erudition fostered within its precincts.

The vitality of Valabhi University owed much to the support it garnered from the community it served. Citizens of Vallabhi, recognizing the institution's pivotal role in shaping minds and futures, contributed to its financial sustenance. Moreover, the Maitraka Kings, through their royal patronage, provided essential resources that propelled the university's mission of enlightenment and education.

While time may have shrouded Valabhi University in some degree of mystery, its legacy endures as a testament to the power of knowledge, community support, and enlightened governance. It stands as a historical testament to the pursuit of wisdom and the advancement of human understanding in the vibrant tapestry of ancient academia.

INSIGHTS FOR MODERN UNIVERSITIES FROM THESE INSTITUTIONS

1. **Enhanced Academic Autonomy:** Empower individual professors and department heads with greater autonomy in admission policies, course content design, and awarding credit marks to students. This fosters innovation and flexibility in teaching methods.
2. **Decentralized Administrative Structure:** Implement a federal approach to university administration where decisions are made collectively, involving consultation with autonomous/affiliated colleges before formulating policies. This promotes inclusivity and shared governance.
3. **Diversified Revenue Sources:** Establish diverse revenue streams to ensure financial viability and sustainability for universities, reducing reliance on a single source of funding.
4. **Non-Intrusive Royal Patronage:** Offer royal or prominent patronage without interfering in academic matters. This support can contribute to the enrichment of resources without compromising the integrity of education.
5. **Mandatory Vocational Knowledge:** Introduce mandatory vocational knowledge (silpasgyan) for every student, bridging the gap between theoretical learning and practical skills required in real-world contexts.
6. **Flexible Degree Completion Timeframe:** Recognize that students possess varying levels of aptitude and

learning pace. Provide flexibility in the tenure for completing degrees to accommodate individual differences and circumstances.

7. **Openness to Foreign Influence:** Embrace the notion of learning from universities with diverse influences, akin to the Greek influence at Taxila and the Brahminical influence at Nalanda. This openness enriches perspectives and widens horizons.
8. **Outward-Focused Learning and Service:** Place a strong emphasis on outward-focused learning that extends beyond campus boundaries and emphasizes service to the community and the world. This instills a sense of social responsibility.
9. **Diverse Scholar Recruitment:** Attract scholars from diverse backgrounds—geographically, culturally, and educationally. This fosters a rich exchange of ideas and experiences, promoting a more inclusive and globally aware environment.
10. **Flexible Assessment Methods:** Minimize reliance on terminal examinations and adopt flexible assessment methods that reflect real-world skills and application of knowledge. This encourages a more comprehensive evaluation of students' abilities.

Drawing inspiration from the practices and principles of institutions like Valabhi and Nalanda, modern universities can create an environment that is not only academically rigorous but also adaptable, inclusive, and globally engaged. These insights offer a roadmap to cultivate well-rounded individuals equipped to tackle the complex challenges of the contemporary world.

CONCLUSION

This study has effectively illuminated the distinctive attributes, administrative frameworks, celebrated alumni and scholars, and the array of courses offered within these ancient centers of higher learning in India. These insights, gleaned from the past, hold remarkable potential for enriching the contemporary university system. A comprehensive analysis of the literature underscores the growing relevance of this topic in recent times. Undoubtedly, this research has deepened our comprehension of the overarching vision and mission of

higher education, a pivotal component for fostering holistic societal advancement.

The ramifications extend beyond academia, reaching not only individuals associated with universities and colleges but also resonating with the wider public who take pride in their heritage, history, and cultural identity. The themes of religious tolerance, cultural diversity, multidisciplinary curriculum, outward-facing educational objectives, provision of essential needs such as food and lodging, and the nurturing influence of royal patronage all find resonance in these ancient institutions.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations inherent in this study. Constraints such as lack of funding, time restrictions, the authors' educational background, and the unavailability of original Pali/Buddhist or Sanskrit texts for direct examination have shaped the scope of this investigation. The reliance on translated versions and secondary literature, while valuable, introduces a level of indirect interpretation that warrants consideration.

In sum, while this study acknowledges its constraints, it nonetheless illuminates a path towards enriching modern educational paradigms through the wisdom and practices of these venerable institutions. The lessons learned offer a blueprint for nurturing a more inclusive, enlightened, and forward-looking educational landscape that is not only academically rigorous but also socially transformative.

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