

# The Ancient University of Vikramshila (Part-2)

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## Students And Curriculum

Like the other Universities, this University also provided specialized instruction in various subjects.

- ❖ Buddhist textbooks belonging to both branches of Buddhism- *Mahayanism* and *Hinyanism*- were taught.
- ❖ All the important branches of Hindu learning were also taught. Though the course didn't cover all the branches of Hindu Sciences but special stress were laid on grammar, logic, metaphysics and ritualism. A special significance was attached to study of Tantras
- ❖ In order to ensure a high standard of learning students were admitted to the University only if they satisfied the tests

# Students And Curriculum

given by eminent authorities in charge of various subjects at different gate. Ratnakarasanti was placed at the east gate, Vagisvarakirti at the west, Naropa at the north, Prajnakaramati at the south, Ratnavajra at the first central gate and Jnana Srimitra at the second gate

- ❖ For smooth functioning of administration, there were boards in charge of different duties connected with the day-to-day working of the university; one chief abbot worked as the president of these various boards.
- ❖ Complete academic autonomy and the teachers in charge of various departments were responsible for the academic work conducted in their departments.

# Scholars And Teachers

- ❖ Vikramshila University attracted a number of scholars who were well known not only in India but even beyond her frontiers for the depth and the width of their learning. Dharmapala of Bengal, its first patron, had appointed one hundred and fourteen teachers. A number of scholars came from other parts of India as well as from other countries.
- ❖ In the twelfth century there were 3,000 monk scholars studying at this university. *Acharya Buddha Jnanapada* was the founder of the new cult, Vajrayanism, of which Vikramshila was the only centre in those days. He was appointed first as the priest of King Dharmapala(774-806) and later as the Acharya for ordination at Vikramshila.

## Scholars And Teachers

*Vairochara Rakshita, Jetari, Prajnakaramati, Ratnakarasanti, Jnana Sri, Ratnavajara, Vagishvarakirti, Acharya Atisha, Abhyankargupta, Tathagatrakshita, Manjusri and Dharmakirti* were important scholars attached with the Vikramshila University.

# Propagation Of Buddhism

The most outstanding contribution of the Vikramshila University was in the field of the propagations of Buddhism in Tibet. The University had developed literacy and cultural contacts with Tibet. Scholars from Tibet were particularly interested in the Tantras, for the teaching of which special arrangements were made at the University all throughout the four hundred years of its existence. It was Vikramshila scholars who, as the custodians of piety, knowledge and religion have practically built up the culture and civilization of Tibet.

Many of these scholars wrote books on various sciences in Sanskrit and translated quite a few in Tibetan. Scholars in large numbers poured in from Tibet for whom a special arrangement for boarding and lodging was made.

# Propagation Of Buddhism

- ❖ Vairochara Rakshita, Ratnavaja and Dipankara Sri Jnana also known as Acharya Atisha were among those who visited Tibet, translated several books into Tibetan and preached Buddhism there.
- ❖ The tallest among them was Acharya Atisha. Born in a royal family in 980 A.D., he took the sacred vow at nineteen. At thirty-one, he received the highest ordination. He was the master of Hinayana and Mahayana, Vaisheshika and Tantras. After completing his education he sailed to Suvarnadwipa(Pegu) and was further initiated into the mysteries of Buddhism by Acharya Dharmakirti Sri. There he studied for twelve years. On his return to India he defeated many scholars and was appointed head at Vikramshila

# Propagation Of Buddhism

Later he went to Nepal at the invitation of King Lha Chanchub of Guge Kingdom, Ngari in Tibet who was anxious to purge Tibetan Buddhism of its corruptions which were many and gross. There he founded the new religion of Lamaism. He worked in Tibet for thirteen years and died at the age of seventy three. About two hundred works on Vajrayana are ascribed to him. He also translated twenty two Sanskrit works into Tibetan. He was helped by Viryasinha (Tibetan Name: Lotsava-rgya-btson-senge) in translating Sanskrit works into Tibetan.

- ❖ Buddhism was preached in Ceylon also. Ratnakarashanti wrote thirteen works in Sanskrit and preached Buddhism in Ceylon, where he was invited for that work.
- ❖ Dharmakirti was a native of Tibet itself. He learnt Sanskrit at Vikramshila and translated several Sanskrit works into Tibetan.



## Art

From the archaeological excavation of the site of Vikramshila University, we find many examples of art and sculpture. Apart from several Buddha figurines; there are *statues of Lokanatha, Mahakala, Tara* and others. Among Hindu statues, we find *Uma, Ganesha, Kuber and Mahishasuramardini (proto-type of Durga)*. All these statues are carved according to the Pala School of art. Some of them are made of thick basalt with an everlasting shine. Other stuff in display is terracotta motifs, coins, household utensils, some inscriptions, iron arrowheads, ornaments, daggers etc. It was also customary in this university to exhibit on walls the portraits of leading alumni with outstanding merit. In accordance with this custom, *two portraits of Nagarjuna and Atisha were exhibited on walls of the university.*

## Destruction of the University

Vikramshila touched the zenith of its glory during the 12th century under the rule of Ramapala (r. 1072-1126). Later, the rule of Pala dynasty came to an end due to internal conflicts, feudal uprisings and external aggression. Bengal came under the rule of Sena Dynasty. During the reign of Lakshmana Sena (r.1178-1205A.D.), Bengal had to face the Muslim invasions under the leadership of Bakhtiyar Khalji, who occupied Lukhnauti, capital of Senas, in 1202 A.D. In the course of occupation of Bengal by Bakhtiyar Khilji, the tragic end of university came. Vikramshila became just deserted debris. Sadly, it was Bakhtiyar Khilji who had destroyed the Nalanda University also. All the monks residing at the place had their heads shaved, and they were all slain. The glory of Vikramshila got vanished.

## Conclusion

Vikramshila, one of the centres of high learning in India during medieval age. It was unique in its organization and scholarship during those distant times when, elsewhere in world very few had thought of organized education at the university level. It represented the great tradition of knowledge and continued the legacy of Taxila and Nalanda. During this period, it was the lone centre of higher learning in India, which catered to the needs of scholars and students having aspiration of excelling in higher education. It proved to be the formidable centre where new knowledge was created and disseminated far and wide.

## Conclusion

Its special contribution was the propagations of Buddhism in Tibet, Pegu and Ceylon. Particularly in Tibet, Vikramshila is said to have contributed to the foundation of Tibetan culture.

Due to Vikramshila University, India became centre of attraction for her neighbourhood and India remained in touch with the development around her. From the cultural point of view, Vikramshila, apart from education, contributed to the evolution of new sect of Buddhism. It also proved to be an important centre of art, particularly the Pala School of art cantered on the use of basalt. Sadly, the destruction of Vikramshila at the hands of Turks, not only put an end to the bright academic journey of Vikramshila, but also terribly shattered the great Indian tradition of knowledge.

# Ruins Of Vikramshila University



**Source: Wikipedia**(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vikramashila>)