

STUDIES IN INDIAN HISTORY OF THE
INDIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE.—Vol. XI.

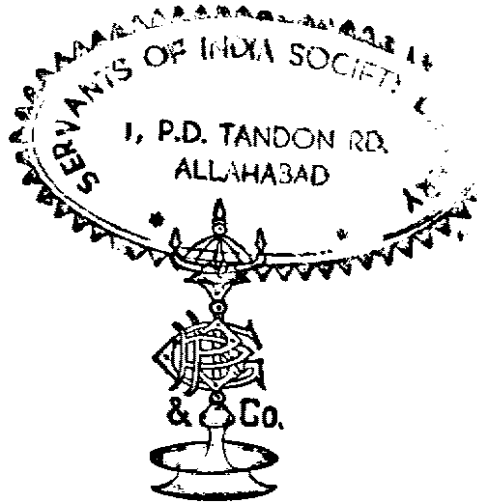
THE UNIVERSITY OF NĀLANDĀ

THE UNIVERSITY OF NĀLANDĀ

BY
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WITH A PREFACE

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MADRAS
B. G. PAUL & CO., PUBLISHERS
12, FRANCIS JOSEPH STREET ,
1954

Thanks are due to the University of Bombay for giving a *substantial grant* for the publication of this work, and to the Department of Archaeological Survey of India for giving permission to reprint the illustrations and the diagrammatic plan of the site of Nālandā excavations.

—The Author. }

RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED
TO
MY FATHER

PREFACE

THE monastic revolution started by Gautama Buddha in the sixth century before the Christian era developed into such an extraordinary institution that, even after its division into the two large branches of *Mahāyāna* and *Hīnayāna*, it produced extraordinary results in knowledge and civilization. During a period that lasts roughly twelve centuries, all the wisdom of Northern India was centred round the Buddhist *vihāras* and *saṅghārāmas*.

Many Buddhist monasteries undoubtedly flourished in India, about which we know practically nothing. Sānehi, Kānheri, Ajanta, Ellora, Sāranāth, and a hundred more are only known through their archæological remains and a few inscriptions found on their walls or pillars. The ancient inhabitants of Āryāvarta were not fond of writing their own deeds. The most interesting information we possess about the Buddhist centres of learning in Northern India comes through the Chinese pilgrims. Mr. H. D. Sankalia in this work has taken two Chinese pilgrims as his main guides in the study of the history of one of those Buddhist institutions of learning, perhaps the greatest we know, the so-called University of Nālandā.

Now, that the Archæological Department of the Government of India has unearthed several monasteries of this institution, where Hiuen Tsiang and I-Tsing lived in the 7th century A.D. Mr. Sankalia considers it opportune to publish the result of his research in the history of Nālandā. The word "history" is rightly understood by the author of this book in its widest meaning. In this book the lover of Oriental learning will find not only a list of historical events, but also an account of the origin and a full explanation of the extraordinary spread of culture throughout the whole of Asia in the great days of Nālandā.

This preface, contributed at the request of Mr. Sankalia, is being written in front of another Buddhist monastery which may also have been in communication with Nālandā. Bāmiyān, in the centre of Afghanistan, was the last outpost of Buddhism towards the West. Hiuen Tsiang passed through it in the first half of the

7th century, and from Bāmiyān he visited India and Nālandā. Bāmiyān was in those days the centre of communications between India and Central Asia. Situated practically midway between Purushapura (Peshawar) and Bactres (Balkh), this valley (which was even then adorned with the beauties of nature that are reflected in the waters descending from the Koh-i-Baba snows) inherited the religion of India and the art of Bactriana. The large Buddhist communities that practised ascetism in this place, have left marks of their devotion to their Master and of their fondness for art, in the sculptures and paintings that still adorn their dwellings; their learning and condition of life is revealed in the scanty fragments of MSS. lately found in one of the caves by the French Archæological Delegation, which have been studied by Monsieur Silvain Lévi.

There are many points of contact between Nālandā and Bāmiyān which have been communicated to us by Huien-Tsiang. He tells us that in Bāmiyān there are ten convents and about one thousand priests. The number of caves found and examined hitherto ascend to the respectable figure of 2,000, which is a striking confirmation of the information given by the Chinese pilgrim. He mentions "a mountain, on the declivity of which is placed a stone figure of Buddha erect, in height 140 or 150 feet. Its golden hues," he continues, "sparkle on every side and its precious ornaments dazzle the eyes by their brightness." He also speaks of another convent "which was built by a former king of the country," who seems to be Kānishka. "To the east of the convent," he adds, "there is a standing figure of Sākya Buddha, made of metallic stone, in height, 100 feet." As I write, I have only to turn my head to see the two colossal figures spoken of by the Chinese pilgrim.

In his book Mr. Sankalia enables the reader to visualise the wonders of Nālandā which were first described by the devout Chinese. Writing from Bāmiyān, I wish every success to this book on Nālandā.

Bāmiyān, Afghanistan, } H. HERAS, S. J.
8th September, 1934. }

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the name of Nālandā was brought to the notice of scholars by General Cunningham, antiquarians have attempted to shed more light on it from different angles, through the medium of journals and short manuals. In the following pages I have endeavoured not only to gather all that research has done in this direction, but to give a connected idea of the rise, the period of glory and fall of an institution that was the wonder of the Mediaeval and post-Mediaeval India. Many gaps, therefore, have been filled in.

I have approached the subject from the viewpoint that there existed a University at Nālandā, and it has been my constant aim to hold it up before the reader..

In order that this idea may be clearly comprehended, I had to touch upon some points which were perhaps outside my sphere. Thus, in Chapter II, I have tried to show that the University of Nālandā came into existence at a time, when a strong literary fervour, growing from age to age, had reached its zenith, that something like a University was but its natural outcome; further, that this University came to be established in the Buddhist *Saṅghārāmas* because the latter, ever since their foundation, were continually undergoing transformation, so much so that by the 5th century A.D., they had completely turned themselves into veritable Houses of Learning.

But mere literary fervour would not be strong enough to bring forth a University. There must be peace and prosperity, order and good government in the country so that new ideas may take root and develop.

After the Bhāraśivas and the Vākātakas, the redeemers of Āryāvarta from the Kushan scourge,¹ the

(1) Vide Jayaswal, *History of India*, p. 48.

Guptas, under Samudragupta, had ensured peace, prosperity and orderly government not only in Magadha but throughout the greater part of India. They brought back, besides these, all the great virtues—Holiness, Nobility and Toleration. It was, however, left to the successors of Samudragupta to utilise this heritage. To a man, they practised these virtues with an impartiality that was unimpeachable. They encouraged and patronised artists, poets and philosophers irrespective of caste and creed, with the result that the country rang with the exploits of these savants in the fields of art, literature and philosophy. Thus it was that Nālandā, though primarily a Buddhist institution, came to be founded by King Śakrāditya (Kumāragupta I), who himself was a devout Hindu.

Why the Guptas bestowed all their wealth and generosity upon Nālandā, of all the places in Magadha, I have explained in Chapter III. Nālandā, even in the days of Buddha and Mahāvīra, was considered a fit place for spending the *cāturmāsa* (rain-retreat). And imbued with the holy memories of these Great Teachers, it gradually became a centre of learning and pilgrimage. Nālandā, therefore, was not such “an obscure and unimportant place” as Dr. Altekar has tried to make out in his recently published volume *Education in Ancient India* and much less, a place that was “not in any way connected with the life of Buddha, and therefore of any particular sanctity to the Buddhist world.” But centuries before the Guptas turned their eyes to Nālandā, it had become famous in the Buddhistic world.

A mere reference to Tāntrism in Chapter IV as a subject taught at Nālandā could hardly have been understood but by a few scholars had I not traced its growth and explained its nature in detail. Scholars interested in Tāntrism may be referred to the recent publications of the Oriental Institute, Baroda, under the able guidance of Dr. Benoytosh Bhattacharyya. He was

particularly helpful to me in solving the Tāntric problems in the course of this thesis.

The chapter on "Ritualism of Nālandā Buddhism" deals, first, with the religious rites and ceremonies that were performed at Nālandā; secondly, it describes the various images found at Nālandā from the point of view of their iconography.

The chapter on "Nālandā To-day" sets out the nature of excavations and arrangement of buildings at Nālandā. Therein an attempt is made to identify the buildings so far excavated, with those of the kings mentioned by Hīnen Tsiang. This identification, though perhaps uninteresting, is not a conjecture, but based on all the available evidence. Personal inspection of the site was necessary before writing this chapter. I was very fortunate in obtaining the help of the Rev. H. Heras, Director, Indian Historical Research Institute, St. Xavier's College, Bombay, who not only guided me during the whole course of my work, but also undertook the journey with me to the ruins and enlightened me on some archæological peculiarities of Nālandā.

The chapter on "Art and Architecture of Nālandā" is written to acquaint the reader with the importance of Nālandā finds; it must find a place in the book, for it presupposes, as I have said in that chapter, the existence of a school of art and crafts there.

Some of the conclusions that are deduced as regards Nālandā, for instance, conclusions with regard to the date of the foundation of the University, its patrons etc., must, however, remain provisional, till not only the site at Nālandā but many others in Magadha are completely excavated; for at any moment, a coin, an image or an inscription may be discovered, which may, if not completely upset the findings, necessitate a revision thereof.

The history of Nālandā, based entirely on the Chinese and Tibetan sources and on the inscriptions of the Pālas, may be deemed one-sided as long as a confirmatory

opinion is not available from the contemporary Hindu sources. The silence of Bāṇa, the famous contemporary historian of the Court of King Harṣa, with regard to Nālandā, is not a little surprising. If the *Harṣa Carita* were written after Harṣa built *Saṅghārāmas* at Nālandā, Bāṇa might have referred to it. It is possible that Bāṇa wrote the *Harṣa Carita* before Harṣa patronised Nālandā; but it is more probable that he passed over Nālandā as it was a Buddhist institution. However, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, I have thought it expedient to rely upon the Chinese and Tibetan documents.

BOMBAY,
5th September, 1934. }

H. D. SANKALIA.

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- Indian Antiquary.*
- Indian Historical Quarterly.*
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- Journal, Royal Asiatic Society.*
- Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society.*
- Journal of the Department of Letters, University of Calcutta.*
- Journal of the Buddhist Text Society.*
- Modern Review.*

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations of the titles of works of reference have been used in this book :

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|----|---|
| <i>A. S. I.</i> | .. | Archaeological Survey of India Reports. |
| <i>A. S. I. A. R.</i> | .. | Archaeological Survey of India Annual Reports. |
| <i>E. I. or Ep. Ind.</i> | .. | Epigraphia Indica. |
| <i>Ind. Ant.</i> | .. | Indian Antiquary. |
| <i>J. A. S. B.</i> | .. | Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. |
| <i>J. B. T. S.</i> | .. | Journal of the Buddhist Text Society. |
| <i>I. H. Q.</i> | .. | Indian Historical Quarterly. |
| <i>J. R. A. S.</i> | .. | Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society. |
| <i>J. B. O. R. S.</i> | .. | Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society. |
| <i>A. B. O. R. S.</i> | .. | Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute. |
| <i>S. B. E.</i> | .. | Sacred Books of the East. |
| <i>His. Ind. Indo. Art.</i> | .. | History of Indian and Indonesian Art. |
| <i>A. M. S. J. Vols.</i> | .. | Asutosh Mookerjee Silver Jubilee Volumes. |
| <i>T. L. A.</i> | .. | Indian Logic and Atomism. |
| <i>H. I. L.</i> | .. | History of Indian Logic. |
| <i>H. L.</i> | .. | Hindu Logic as preserved in China and Japan. |
| <i>Bronzes of Nālandā</i> | .. | The Bronzes of Nālandā and Hindu Javanese Art. |
| <i>G. O. S.</i> | .. | Gaekwad Oriental Series. |



THE SEAL OF DEVAPALADEVA
with Dharmachakra and two gazelles on each side.
Probably adopted by the University of Nalanda as its official seal
(*cf.* HIRANANDA SASTRI, *Ep. Ind.*, XXI, p. 73)

APPENDIX A

THE THEORY OF DHYĀNI BUDDHAS

The theory of Dhyāni Buddhas together with their different Śaktis, the various Yaugic and other means of worshipping them with a view to attain Buddhahood, constitute the kernel of Tāntrism or Vajrayāna.

Now this theory and the various Tāntric practices are for the first time given in their complete form in the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*¹, though there are earlier works, *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, for instance, which make some stray references to this theory. The *Guhyasamāja* is assigned to the 3rd century A.D.² So the theory of Dhyāni Buddhas dates back at least to that period.

The origin of the Dhyāni Buddhas and their Śaktis is given by the *Guhyasamāja* thus:—

Once Buddha was sitting in an assembly, consisting of Bodhisattvas and others. He was requested by the assembly to reveal the *Guhyasamāja*. Thereupon, he sat in different *Samādhis* (meditations) and uttered different kinds of Mantras and transformed himself in different forms of *Tathāgatas*, called *Dhyāni Buddhas*, their Śaktis or female counterparts and the four guardians of gates.

Thus he first created the five Dhyāni Buddhas, Akṣobhaya, Vairocana, Ratna Ketu, the Lord of the Lokeśvara Mahāvidyā or Amitabha and Amoghavajra, respectively.

Then he brought out their female counterparts, Devasarati, Moharati, Irṣyārati, Rāgarati and Vajrarati respectively.

Finally he created the four guardians of the four gates, Yamāntaka, Prajñāntaka, Padmāntaka and Vighnāntaka.

The Maṇḍala of the five Dhyāni Buddhas was now complete.

(1) Or *Tathāgataguhyaka*, G.O.S., No. LIII.

(2) Bhattacharyya, *Ibid.*, Intro., p. xxxvii.

“It may be seen from the above,” writes Bhattacharyya, “that the Maṇḍala is not an external object but the manifestation of one Lord in the different forms. The magic arch is nothing but a detailed mental exercise on the part of the Lord, for the instruction of the Tathāgatas and the Bodhisattvas assembled near him. The five Dhyāni Buddhas, as we know from other references in the Buddhist Tāntric literature, represent the five *Skandhas* or elements of which the whole creation is composed.¹ The Dhyāni Buddhas are again associated with their Śaktis which, on the one hand, show that the *Skandhas* develop power only when associated with their Śaktis, and, on the other hand, show that the Tāntrics who want to develop power should always be associated with their Śaktis or female counterparts.”²

After thus describing the Maṇḍala of the Dhyāni Buddhas, *Guhyasamāja* deals with the different kinds of *Siddhis*, and revolting and disgusting means—such as eating of flesh, use of wine, women, etc.—to achieve them.

Besides these Dhyāni Buddhas and their Śaktis, *Guhyasamāja* mentions other deities: Mañjuśrī, Aparājitā, Jambhala and others.³

Guhyasamāja, thus, seems to be the formulator of the Dhyāni Buddha theory and the unique Tantrayāna Pantheon.

“This knowledge of the Tathāgatas,” as Jñānasiddhi says, “is what is known as Vajrayāna and one who is initiated in its mysteries is said to be invested with Vajrayāna.”⁴ Further, this knowledge is characterized as one that is not burnt by fire, or inundated by fire, or pierced by the sharpest instruments. It is unsupported like space, it pervades the universe and is devoid of all characteristics and is called the highest truth. It is known as *Mahāmudrā* (great woman), *Samantabhadra* (thoroughly auspicious), and the *Dharmakāya* (the spiritual body).⁵

(1) *Jñānasiddhi, Two Vajrayāna Works*, G.O.S., No. XLIV, p. 41.

(2) Bhattacharyya, *Guhyasamāja*, Intro., p. xix.

(3) *See Ibid.*, pp. xxv-xxviii.

(4) Bhattacharyya, *Two Vajrayāna Works*, Intro., p. xix.

(5) *Ibid.*, *Jñānasiddhi*, verses 46-50.

APPENDIX B

TĀNTRISM AND PROVINCIAL VERNACULARS

We said on p. 177 that Tāntrism encouraged the development of provincial vernaculars. Now Mahāpandita Rahula Sāṅkṛityāyana has recovered personal biographies of Siddhas who flourished in Magadha, and from a study of their lives he has shown that many of the vernacular works were written at Nālandā. His article on these Siddhas is being published in the *Journal Asiatique*.¹

(1) Jayaswal, *Address, Seventh Indian Oriental Conference*
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