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ANCIENT INDIAN UNIVERSITIES

Takshashila (Taxila) University

Nalanda University

Vikramshila University

Valabhi University

Somapura Mahavihara

Pushpagiri University

Odantapuri Mahavihara

Sharada Peeth

Jagaddala Mahavihara

Kanchipuram University

Ancient and medieval India, including regions of "Greater India" such as present-day Pakistan and Bangladesh, was home to several prominent centers of learning that significantly shaped intellectual and cultural traditions. Among the most notable were Takshashila, Nalanda, and other significant institutions like Somapura. These universities, supported by archaeological and historical evidence, served as major hubs for scholarship, attracting students and scholars across diverse fields. While exact details, such as founding dates or specific associated figures, may vary due to historical ambiguities, these institutions remain emblematic of the rich educational heritage of the region..

1. Takshashila (Taxila) University

- **Name:** Takshashila (Taxila) University
- **Location:** Taxila, Punjab (present-day Pakistan)
- **Kingdom:** Gandhara, later under Maurya, Indo-Greek, and other empires
- **Time Period:** ~6th century BCE to 5th century CE

Overview: One of the world's earliest known centers of higher learning, Takshashila was a global hub for education, attracting students from across Asia for diverse disciplines.

Brief History: Established around the 6th century BCE, it flourished under the Maurya Empire and later Indo-Greek rule. It was a major center for Buddhist, Jain, and Vedic learning, strategically located on trade routes. It declined after invasions and was destroyed by the Hunas in the 5th century CE.

Unique Features:

- Not a university in the modern sense but a decentralized network of gurukuls (teacher-led schools).
- Open to students from various regions, including China and Persia.
- Emphasis on individualized learning under gurus.
- **Art/Science That Flourished:** Astronomy, mathematics, medicine, political science, warfare, and Vedic studies.

Important Personalities and Works Associated:

- **Chanakya (Kautilya):** Authored Arthashastra, a treatise on statecraft, composed at Taxila.
- **Charaka:** Ayurvedic healer, associated with medical studies.



- **Chandragupta Maurya:** Studied here, later founded the Maurya Empire.
- **Panini:** Grammarian, known for Ashtadhyayi, a foundational Sanskrit grammar text.

Destruction/Present Status: Destroyed by the Hunas in the 5th century CE. The site is now an archaeological ruin, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

- **Recognition:** Recognized globally as one of the earliest universities, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- **Recent Commemoration:** Ongoing archaeological studies and global academic references highlight its historical significance.
- **Recently in News for:** Mentioned in discussions on ancient Indian education systems, often cited for its pioneering role.

2. Nalanda University

- **Name:** Nalanda University
- **Location:** Pilkhi, near Rajgir, Bihar (present-day India)
- **Kingdom:** Gupta Empire, later Pala Empire
- **Time Period:** 5th century CE to 12th century CE

Overview: A world-renowned Buddhist university, Nalanda was a global center of learning, attracting scholars from China, Korea, and Central Asia.

Brief History: Founded by Gupta Emperor Kumaragupta I in the 5th century CE, it flourished under the Pala dynasty. It was a major center for Buddhist philosophy, logic, and sciences until its destruction in 1193 CE by Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji.

Unique Features:

- Massive campus with 300 rooms and a seven-story library (Dharmaganja) housing over 9 million manuscripts.
- Residential facilities for thousands of students and monks.
- Multidisciplinary curriculum with free education.
- **Art/Science That Flourished:** Buddhist philosophy, logic, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and linguistics.



Important Personalities and Works Associated:

- **Aryabhata:** Astronomer and mathematician, possibly associated, known for Aryabhatiya.
- **Nagarjuna:** Philosopher, developed Madhyamaka philosophy.
- **Xuanzang (Hiuen Tsang):** Chinese scholar who studied and documented Nalanda's teachings.
- **Dharmakirti:** Logician, known for works on Buddhist epistemology.

Destruction/Present Status: Destroyed by Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji in 1193 CE, with its library burned over months. The site is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and a modern Nalanda University was revived in 2014 near the original site.

- **Recognition:** UNESCO World Heritage Site; globally celebrated as a pinnacle of ancient education.
- **Recent Commemoration:** The revived Nalanda University was inaugurated in 2014, with ongoing efforts to restore its legacy.
- **Recently in News for:** The modern Nalanda University's progress and its inclusion in discussions on India's ancient educational heritage.

3. Vikramshila University

- **Name:** Vikramshila University
- **Location:** Bhagalpur, Bihar (present-day India)
- **Kingdom:** Pala Empire
- **Time Period:** 9th century CE to 12th century CE

Overview: A major Buddhist learning center, Vikramshila rivaled Nalanda and was known for tantric Buddhism and scholarly debates.

Brief History: Founded by King Dharmapala in the 9th century CE, it was a key institution under the Pala dynasty, attracting scholars from Tibet and Southeast Asia. Destroyed by Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji in the 12th century CE.

Unique Features:

- Specialized in tantric Buddhism and logic.

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- Six colleges with a central temple and residential quarters.
- A rigorous admission process with scholarly debates.
- **Art/Science That Flourished:** Tantric Buddhism, logic, philosophy, and Sanskrit studies.

Important Personalities and Works Associated:

- **Atisha Dipankara:** Tibetan Buddhist scholar, spread Buddhism to Tibet.
- **Ratnakarashanti:** Philosopher, known for tantric and logical treatises.

Destruction/Present Status: Destroyed by Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji in the 12th century CE. The site is an archaeological ruin under the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

- **Recognition:** Recognized as a significant Buddhist learning center, though less documented than Nalanda.
- **Recent Commemoration:** Highlighted in discussions on Bihar's educational heritage by figures like the Vice President of India.
- **Recently in News for:** Mentioned for its historical role and destruction, often alongside Nalanda.

4. Valabhi University

- **Name:** Valabhi University
- **Location:** Bhavnagar, Gujarat (present-day India)
- **Kingdom:** Maitraka Dynasty
- **Time Period:** 6th century CE to 12th century CE

Overview: A prominent center for Buddhist and Jain learning, Valabhi was a key educational hub in western India, known for its secular studies.

Brief History: Established under the Maitraka dynasty, it flourished for nearly 400 years, attracting students from across India. It declined after invasions and faded by the 12th century CE.

Unique Features:

- Focused on secular subjects alongside Buddhist and Jain teachings.
- Known for its library and administrative training programs.



- Supported by royal patronage, ensuring financial stability.
- **Art/Science That Flourished:** Law, administration, philosophy, and medicine.

Important Personalities and Works Associated:

- **Xuanzang:** Visited and documented Valabhi's academic rigor.
- **Gunamati:** Buddhist scholar, contributed to philosophical texts.

Destruction/Present Status: Declined due to invasions and loss of patronage by the 12th century. Archaeological remains are minimal, with no active revival.

- **Recognition:** Acknowledged in historical texts but less prominent than Nalanda or Taxila.
- **Recent Commemoration:** Limited modern commemoration, occasionally mentioned in academic studies.
- **Recently in News for:** Rarely in news, but cited about ancient Indian universities.

5. Somapura Mahavihara

- **Name:** Somapura Mahavihara
- **Location:** Naogaon, Bengal (present-day Bangladesh)
- **Kingdom:** Pala Empire
- **Time Period:** 8th century CE to 12th century CE

Overview: A major Buddhist monastic university in Greater India, Somapura was a center for Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism.

Brief History: Built by King Dharmapala in the 8th century CE, it was a prominent institution for Buddhist studies, flourishing for 400 years until its destruction in the 12th century CE by Muslim invaders.

Unique Features:

- Massive quadrangular structure with 177 monastic cells and a central stupa.
- Ornamental terracotta on outer walls, showcasing artistic excellence.
- Hosted international scholars, especially from Tibet.



- **Art/Science That Flourished:** Buddhist philosophy, art, architecture, and astronomy.

Important Personalities and Works Associated:

- **Atisha Dipankara:** Studied and taught here, influencing Tibetan Buddhism.

Destruction/Present Status: Destroyed by invaders in the 12th century CE. Now a UNESCO World Heritage Site with preserved ruins.

- **Recognition:** UNESCO World Heritage Site, recognized for its architectural and cultural significance.
- **Recent Commemoration:** Ongoing archaeological conservation by Bangladesh and UNESCO.
- **Recently in News for:** Referenced in discussions on Greater India's Buddhist heritage.

6. Pushpagiri University

- **Name:** Pushpagiri University
- **Location:** Cuttack, Odisha (present-day India)
- **Kingdom:** Kalinga, later Gajapati Kingdom
- **Time Period:** 3rd century CE to 11th century CE

Overview: A Buddhist learning center in eastern India, Pushpagiri was known for its contributions to Mahayana Buddhism and secular studies.

Brief History: Likely established during the Maurya or post-Maurya period, it flourished under regional kingdoms until its decline in the 11th century due to invasions and loss of patronage.

Unique Features:

- Comprised three campuses: Lalitgiri, Ratnagiri, and Udayagiri.
- Focused on Buddhist philosophy and practical sciences.
- Supported by royal and monastic patronage.
- **Art/Science That Flourished:** Buddhist philosophy, sculpture, and astronomy.

Important Personalities and Works Associated:



- **Xuanzang:** Documented its academic environment.
- No specific works directly tied, but Buddhist texts were produced.

Destruction/Present Status: Declined by the 11th century due to invasions. Archaeological sites at Lalitgiri, Ratnagiri, and Udayagiri are preserved by ASI.

- **Recognition:** Recognized as a significant Buddhist site, with ongoing archaeological interest.
- **Recent Commemoration:** Conservation efforts by ASI and Odisha government.
- **Recently in News for:** Mentioned for lesser-known ancient university.

7. Odantapuri Mahavihara

- **Name:** Odantapuri Mahavihara
- **Location:** Bihar Sharif, Bihar (present-day India)
- **Kingdom:** Pala Empire
- **Time Period:** 8th century CE to 12th century CE

Overview: A Buddhist monastic university, Odantapuri was a smaller but significant center of learning, closely associated with Nalanda.

Brief History: Founded by King Gopala I in the 8th century CE, it was a key center for Buddhist studies until its destruction by Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji in the 12th century CE.

Unique Features:

- Smaller scale compared to Nalanda, with a focus on tantric Buddhism.
- Served as a model for Tibetan monastic universities like Samye.
- **Art/Science That Flourished:** Tantric Buddhism, philosophy, and linguistics.

Important Personalities and Works Associated:

- **Atisha Dipankara:** Possibly associated, influenced Tibetan Buddhism.

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Destruction/Present Status: Destroyed by Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji in the 12th century CE. Minimal archaeological remains, overshadowed by Nalanda.

- **Recognition:** Acknowledged in historical records, less prominent than Nalanda.
- **Recent Commemoration:** Highlighted in discussions on Bihar's educational heritage.
- **Recently in News for:** Cited alongside Nalanda and Vikramshila for its historical role.

8. Sharada Peeth

- **Name:** Sharada Peeth
- **Location:** Neelum Valley, Kashmir (present-day Pakistan-administered Kashmir)
- **Kingdom:** Kashmir Kingdom
- **Time Period:** 6th century CE to 12th century CE

Overview: A major center for Vedic and Hindu learning, Sharada Peeth was revered as a seat of Sanskrit scholarship in northern India.

Brief History: Established around the 6th century CE, it was a prominent center for Hindu philosophy and literature until its decline in the 12th century due to invasions.

Unique Features:

- Housed the Sharada script, a significant writing system.
- A major pilgrimage and learning center for Hindu scholars.
- Architectural blend of Kashmiri and Gandhara styles.

Art/Science That Flourished: Sanskrit literature, philosophy, and astronomy.

Important Personalities and Works Associated:

- **Adi Shankaracharya:** Visited and debated here, associated with Advaita Vedanta.
- **Kalhana:** Author of Rajatarangini, possibly linked to Sharada Peeth's scholarly tradition.



Destruction/Present Status: Damaged during invasions in the 12th century; further decline under later rule. Now a contested site in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, with ruins preserved.

- **Recognition:** Revered in Hindu tradition, recognized for its cultural significance.
- **Recent Commemoration:** Occasional calls for restoration by Indian scholars and groups.
- **Recently in News for:** Mentioned for its historical and cultural importance, often in debates over Kashmir's heritage.

9. Jagaddala Mahavihara

- **Name:** Jagaddala Mahavihara
- **Location:** Naogaon, Bengal (present-day Bangladesh)
- **Kingdom:** Pala Empire
- **Time Period:** 11th century CE to 12th century CE

Overview: A late Buddhist university, Jagaddala was a center for Vajrayana Buddhism and scholarly exchange.

Brief History: Founded in the 11th century CE by King Ramapala, it was a smaller institution that flourished briefly before its destruction in the 12th century CE by Muslim invaders.

Unique Features:

- Focused on late Buddhist tantric traditions.
- Supported translation of texts into Tibetan.
- Smaller campus with monastic facilities.
- **Art/Science That Flourished:** Vajrayana Buddhism, literature, and translation studies.

Important Personalities and Works Associated:

- **Vibhuti Chandra:** Scholar, contributed to Buddhist texts.

Destruction/Present Status: Destroyed in the 12th century CE. Archaeological remains are minimal, with ongoing studies in Bangladesh.

- **Recognition:** Lesser-known but acknowledged in Buddhist historical records.
- **Recent Commemoration:** Limited, primarily in academic discussions.



- **Recently in News for:** Cited as part of Greater India's Buddhist heritage.

10. Kanchipuram University

- **Name:** Kanchipuram University
- **Location:** Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu (present-day India)
- **Kingdom:** Pallava, later Chola Dynasty
- **Time Period:** 4th century CE to 13th century CE

Overview: A major center for Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain learning in South India, Kanchipuram was known for its temple-based education system.

Brief History: Established under the Pallava dynasty, it thrived under Chola patronage, serving as a hub for religious and secular studies until its decline in the medieval period due to invasions and shifting patronage.

Unique Features:

- Temple-centric education system integrated with religious practices.
- Supported by South Indian dynasties, ensuring longevity.
- Multifaith curriculum (Hindu, Buddhist, Jain).
- **Art/Science That Flourished:** Philosophy, literature, mathematics, and temple architecture.

Important Personalities and Works Associated:

- **Ramanujacharya:** Vaishnava philosopher, associated with theological debates.
- **Dandin:** Author of Kavyadarsha, a treatise on poetics.

Destruction/Present Status: Gradually declined by the 13th century due to invasions and reduced patronage. No distinct university ruins; Kanchipuram remains a cultural and religious hub.

- **Recognition:** Recognized as a historical center of learning in South Indian tradition.
- **Recent Commemoration:** Celebrated in Tamil Nadu's cultural festivals and academic studies.
- **Recently in News for:** Referenced for its role in South Indian intellectual history.

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