

## EDITORIAL

*Nalanda* is an academic meme. We are enamored with the revival of Nalanda University in Bihar. For the government of India, this is a pilot project to project India's soft power to the Buddhist nations in Asia. The university will take time to attain critical institutionalization. But, the current mentors of the university are not clear in their vision at all. Without understanding Nalanda Tradition, Nalanda University cannot be revived.

Dalai Lama is the living master of Nalanda tradition. I heard him speak on Nalanda Tradition of Buddhism in Asia in a huge congregation at Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA) on 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2013. He mentioned in clear terms that Nalanda is not the building, but the knowledge tradition. Though, Nalanda University is in ruins, the knowledge tradition of Nalanda continues to thrive. But, what is the root philosophy of this tradition? Dalai Lama explained—the science of mind. Nalanda tradition is the study of mind, perceptions and what knowledge itself is. Nalanda masters were eager to find a cure for mental illness. Illness cannot be cured until the mind itself is investigated. This investigation itself was being done with an open mind.

In Buddhism and Jainism, there is no concept of Creator. Salvation has to come through self-effort. The predicament is self-centric in contrast with Semitic religions where a Prophet brings hope to people, a kind of other-centric predicament. The only way to salvation in Nalanda tradition is through end of ignorance, since the suffering is caused by illusions of all kinds. The ignorance can be removed through light of knowledge. Therefore, knowing the right knowledge itself is necessary before proceeding to investigate the site of knowledge viz. Mind. In fact, Nalanda masters investigated Buddha's own words and accepted only after logically validating the same. This tradition of scientifically investigating inner world must be preserved and promoted along with the modern scientific path of investigating physical world.

Nalanda stands for the art of harnessing critical wisdom. But, it is disheartening to see the current charioteers of Nalanda University sacrificing critical wisdom and cocooning the whole project under the garb of secrecy. In fact, critical wisdom is what is also disappearing among the followers of Nalanda Tradition themselves.

Last year, I participated in a programme organized by Project 84000, a wishful project on translating Buddha's words. Wisdom masters like Prof. Samdhong Rinpoche (Chancellor, Sanchi University), Kapila Vatsyayan, Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche and Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche spoke on the theme of Buddha's words. The speakers placed before august audience minute details about the number of pages translated, the percentage of total and so on. Prof. Samdhong delivered the keynote address and explained how Buddha's teachings are still preserved in authenticity only in the Tibetan language due to the efforts of the Translation Committees before Langdarma's reign. The speeches were highly informative. The team is hopeful to translate 84000 teachings originating from Buddha's mouth himself, to attain true peace and freedom from suffering.

But, how are the scholars certain that Buddha gave 84,000 teachings only, nothing more and nothing less? Just like hagiographies of many saints full of fables and legends, the story of 84000 teachings narrated by Buddha is pure and simple ingenious invention. Ashoka is said to have built 84000 stupas. It is virtually impossible for a king to build so many stupas in single lifetime and that too when his own conversion came at a later stage of life. There are 84000 affective emotions in Buddhist philosophy and there are 84000 ways to counter their ill-effects. In Buddhist cosmogony, the Mount Meru is said to be 84000 yojana high. We also find how there are 84 Mahasiddhas in Buddhist tradition and their hagiographies are full of ridiculous stories. Now, the scholars of Nalanda Tradition are claiming scientific approach as well as this mythical thinking of structuring under the garb of Project 84000.

How can Tibetan scholars vehemently claim that Buddha's words preserved in Tibetan language in *Kangyur* and *Tangyur* is authentic words of Buddha? Prof. Samdhong responded with claims that since all the words were memorized by the Arahats, there is no chance of any aberration. He compares arahats with digital

computer, and their memories itself as that of the most powerful supercomputer. This is akin to positing mnemonic arrogance of a particular race. This is not critical wisdom of Nalanda tradition. Buddha never wrote. No one recorded his teachings. Ananda was his companion for his last 25 years and still he was not an arahat till Buddha died. The First Dharma Council was sponsored by King Ajatshatru in the Sattapaāāi Cave situated outside Rājagir three months after Buddha's mahaparinirvana. Buddha's Teachings were recited first by a senior monk and then chanted once again in chorus by all the 500 monks attending the assembly. This was approved as authentic only when the decision was taken unanimously. Imagine if Buddha had spoken 84000 teachings, it would have taken many years to build consensus. Not in one life time of even the youngest monks. Moreover, it was not recorded and aberrations and difference of opinions cropped up. Another Council was summoned one hundred years after the First one on trivial ground like teaching of Buddha with regard to storing salt in a bull's horn and so on. If the monks could not even agree on ascertaining Buddha's simple instructions, how was it possible for them to remember Buddha's serious teachings and philosophy perfectly only with the aid of memory.

Let us come to the medieval and modern centuries. In spite of having a written script culture, Tibetans do not recite great mantras properly. They pronounce 'pema' for 'padma'. *Lokachakshu* degenerates into Lotsawa. Tibetan monks neither follow indigenous linguistic universe nor the imported Sanskrit phonemes. It is like catching a horned rabbit. Just as Nagabodhi, the mahasiddha grew horn in mythical account, similarly the narrative of 84000 Buddha's teachings have grown like a wildfire. Earlier it is doused, better it will be for the followers of Nalanda Tradition.

Critical wisdom is the marker of Nalanda tradition and this has to be applied even against over zealot teachers. Contemplating over the thought of what Nalanda stood for made me to take a detour to the town of Nalanda. I was standing in the museum before a 9-10<sup>th</sup> century shila-patta(No.00002A, Nalanda Museum). Along with the image of an elephant and a fish, the most fascinating sight was that of a chimera- a fish with an elephant head and trunk. Iranian philosopher Reza Negarestani and electronic composer/sound artist Florian Hecker term Chimeras as "*integrated bodies that synthesize incompatible modalities, surpassing their respective particularities without fusing them, finding a common ground, or reducing one to the other.*" Nalanda tradition in my view was such a chimerical tradition of synthesis. The place was visited by Jain Tirthankars and Buddha himself. They did not validate the concept of god. Nalanda produced the greatest logicians in Asia like Dingnaga, Nagarjuna and Dharmapala, yet it also spread the cult of Tara, Marichi and Prajnaparamita goddesses. This was the site of scientific study of microcosm and macrocosm in physical aspect, yet also the site of fabrication of legends about 84 mahasiddhas and their ruminations over human existence through non-logic and absurdity. Nalanda tradition stood for synthetic philosophy based upon critical wisdom and ingenious imagination. In fact, it was Asia's own site of chimerical knowledge.

The Journal of Indian tradition with its diversity of disciplines ranging from Kashmir Śaivism. to meteorology; spectroscopy to zoology is such a site of production of knowledge. The JIR is trying to push forward the authentic Nalanda tradition. The timely publication of the fourth issue of the first volume encourage us to further dig India's ancient wisdom for building a better way to comprehend the complexity of the cosmos. The archaeology of Nalanda tradition of knowledge is as important as the archaeology of material ruins. The JIR will be in the forefront of this effort in the coming year. Happy New Year 2014!

– Niraj Kumar