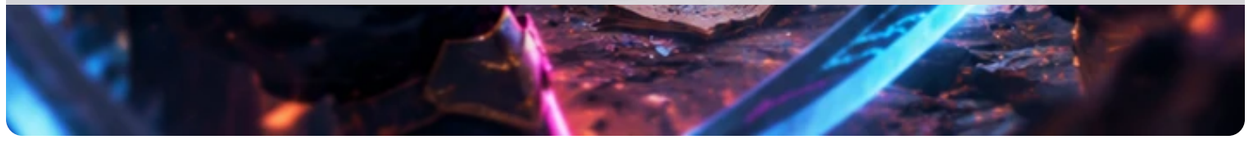


नालंदा: ज्ञान की अमर लौ

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Did you know there was once a grand library so vast that when it was set ablaze, it kept burning and smoldering for months? This is the tragic and awe-inspiring story of ancient Nalanda, the crown jewel of human wisdom. Hidden in the plains of ancient India, it stood as a beacon of light for seekers of truth from every corner of the earth.



The campus of Nalanda was a magnificent marvel of red brick architecture, surrounded by serene lotus ponds and lush green gardens. Thousands of eager students walked through its grand gates every morning, seeking knowledge under the guidance of wise and compassionate scholars. The air was filled with deep philosophical debates, the chanting of ancient mantras, and the scratching of stylus on palm leaves.



At the heart of this great institution stood the legendary library complex known as Ratnodadhi, meaning the Sea of Jewels. It comprised three massive multi-storied buildings—Ratnasagara, Ratnaranjaka, and Ratnodadhi—housing millions of irreplaceable manuscripts on subjects ranging from astronomy and medicine to grammar and philosophy. Scholars from China, Korea, Tibet, and Persia traveled thousands of miles just to study within these sacred walls.



Life at Nalanda was a harmonious blend of rigorous study, spiritual meditation, and communal living. Students did not pay tuition; rather, the generous patronage of kings and wealthy merchants sustained this egalitarian sanctuary of intellect. Acharya Devavrata, a revered senior scholar, spent his days carefully copying sacred texts, ensuring that the light of wisdom would pass untouched to future generations.



However, the winds of time began to shift as dark clouds of war approached the borders of northern India in the late twelfth century. Whispers of invading armies spreading destruction across the plains reached the tranquil courtyards of Nalanda. Despite the growing tension, the teachers and students continued their daily routines, hoping that the sanctity of learning would protect their sanctuary.



In the fateful year of 1193 CE, the invading forces led by Bakhtiyar Khilji arrived at the gates of the university. The peaceful monastic halls were suddenly shattered by the sounds of chaos, marching boots, and the clashing of steel. The invaders, unfamiliar with the vast intellectual wealth contained within, viewed the massive monastic complex as a fortified military stronghold.



Panic swept through the courtyards as the attackers breached the outer walls and began their ruthless assault on the unarmed scholars and monks. Acharya Devavrata and his peers tried desperately to salvage the most precious manuscripts, carrying them into the inner sanctums. But the sheer brutality of the invading forces overwhelmed the peaceful academic community.



In an act of devastating cultural vandalism, the grand libraries were intentionally set on fire. Thick, dark plumes of smoke choked the sky, blotting out the sun as millions of priceless texts turned into ash. According to historical accounts, the massive collection of manuscripts was so dense and vast that the fires within the stone walls continued to burn and smolder for months.



While historians debate the exact duration and scale of the fires due to limited contemporary records, the catastrophic loss to human civilization remains undeniable. Nalanda was reduced to silent, smoking ruins, marking the tragic end of a golden era of ancient Indian education and intellectual freedom. The surviving scholars scattered across the Himalayas and neighboring lands, carrying whatever fragments of knowledge they could rescue.



Today, the majestic red brick ruins of Nalanda stand in quiet dignity, serving as a powerful reminder of both humanity's capacity for destruction and our eternal quest for enlightenment. Though the fires burned out centuries ago, the spirit of Nalanda continues to inspire modern generations to cherish and protect the light of education. Its story echoes through time, whispering that while buildings can burn, the pursuit of truth can never truly be extinguished.