



The Pride of Bihar and a Milestone in the Tourism & Economic Development of Bhagalpur

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ABSTRACT

Vikramshila University, an eminent center of Buddhist learning in ancient India, was established by King Dharmapala of the Pala Dynasty in the 8th-9th century CE (Sharma, 2018). Located in Kahalgaon, Bhagalpur, Bihar, the university played a crucial role in higher education and Buddhist studies. This research paper explores the historical, educational, and architectural significance of Vikramshila, its contribution to tourism, and its potential impact on the economic development of Bhagalpur. The study highlights government initiatives for the revival of Vikramshila as a heritage and educational site (Raj, 2023). Vikramshila University, an important learning center of ancient India, is located in Kahalgaon, Bhagalpur, Bihar. It has been a center for the spread of education and Buddhism and holds immense historical and cultural significance in terms of tourism. This research paper analyzes the historical importance of Vikramshila University, its tourism potential, and its role in the tourism development of Bhagalpur.

Keywords: Buddhism, Economic Development, Education, Vikramshila, Tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Bihar has been a major center of education and culture since ancient times. Nalanda and Vikramshila Universities positioned India as a global leader in education (Sharma, 2018). Vikramshila University,[1] located in Bhagalpur, was established by Dharmapala of the Pala Dynasty in the 8th-9th century (Kumar, 2020). The university was renowned for studies in Tantra, Philosophy, Grammar, Medicine, and other subjects (Gupta, 2017). Bihar has been a cradle of learning and culture since ancient times, with Nalanda and Vikramshila Universities playing a key role in shaping the region's educational heritage (Kumar, 2020). Vikramshila University was established by King Dharmapala as an alternative to Nalanda, specializing in Tantric Buddhism and other disciplines (Tripathi, 2021). Today, its ruins serve as an essential archaeological site and a potential[2] hub for tourism and economic growth in Bhagalpur (Bihar State Tourism Development Corporation Report, 2023).



Figure 1. Image Description: The Heritage of Vikramshila University, located in Kahalgaon, Bhagalpur

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have focused on:

- The historical importance of Vikramshila (Sharma, 2018).
- Its role in tourism development (Tripathi, 2021).
- The influence of Buddhism in Bihar (Sinha, 2016).
- Government policies for Vikramshila's conservation (Raj, 2023). Various studies on the historical significance of Vikramshila University (Mishra, 2019).
- Research on the contribution of the university to tourism development (Tripathi, 2021).
- The influence of Buddhism in Bihar (Sinha, 2016).
- The impact of central government policies on the development of Vikramshila (Raj, 2023).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is based on secondary sources such as research papers, government reports, historical texts, and archaeological surveys (Archaeological Survey of India Reports, 2019-2023). Statistical data on tourism and economic impact were analyzed to assess Vikramshila's role in regional development (UNESCO Reports, 2022). This study is based on secondary sources such as research papers, government documents, historical records, and interviews. Statistical methods were used for data analysis.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Historical Significance

- Founded in the 8th-9th century CE under the Pala Dynasty (Sharma, 2018).
- Known for its specialized training in Buddhist philosophy, logic, grammar, and Tantra (Jain, 1996).
- Major center of Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism (Mishra, 2005).

4.2 Architectural Features

- Built in the Pala style of architecture with extensive use of red bricks (Ghosh, 1990).
- Included a central stupa, monastic cells, meditation halls, and libraries (Cunningham, 1871).
- Featured intricate carvings, stupas, and viharas, reflecting Indo-Tibetan influences (Chattopadhyay, 1997).

4.3 Role in Tourism and Economic Development

- Vikramshila's inclusion in the Buddhist Circuit enhances religious tourism (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, 2018-2023).
- Increased domestic and international tourism benefits the local economy (Bihar State Tourism Development Corporation Report, 2023).
- Potential for employment generation in hospitality, transportation, and heritage conservation sectors (Singh, 2009).

4.4 Government Initiatives for Revitalization

- The Bihar and central governments have proposed a 500 crore revival plan (Raj, 2023).
- Infrastructure development [13] includes road connectivity, a heritage museum, and research centers (ASI Reports, 2019-2023).
- Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has been preserving and restoring the site (UNESCO Reports, 2022).



Figure 1 Introduction: Local tourists praying at the ruins of Vikramshila



Figure 2 Introduction : Children reading the history inscribed in English at the ruins of Vikramshila

4.5 Tourism Data for Vikramshila (Last 10 Years)

Year	Domestic Tourists	Foreign Tourists	Total Tourists	Source
2013	120,000	25,000	145,000	Bihar Tourism Report, 2013
2014	130,000	27,000	157,000	Bihar Tourism Report, 2014
2015	140,000	30,000	170,000	Bihar Tourism Report, 2015
2016	150,000	32,000	182,000	Bihar Tourism Report, 2016
2017	160,000	35,000	195,000	Bihar Tourism Report, 2017
2018	175,000	40,000	215,000	Bihar Tourism Report, 2018
2019	180,000	45,000	225,000	Bihar Tourism Report, 2019
2020	90,000	20,000	110,000	Bihar Tourism Report, 2020 (COVID-19 Impact)
2021	150,000	38,000	188,000	Bihar Tourism Report, 2021
2022	200,000	50,000	250,000	Bihar Tourism Report, 2022

4.6 Economic Analysis of Tourism Growth

- **Revenue Generation:** Increased tourism has led to growth in local businesses such as hotels, restaurants, transport services, and handicraft sales.

- **Employment Creation:** The tourism [9]sector has provided direct and indirect employment to thousands of locals in sectors like hospitality, tour guiding, and retail.
- **Infrastructure Development:** The increased number of tourists has necessitated improvements [11]in road connectivity, public transportation, and overall urban development in Bhagalpur.
- **COVID-19 Impact:** The sharp decline in 2020 (nearly 50% reduction) showcases the economic vulnerability of the tourism-dependent economy and highlights the need for sustainable planning.
- **Foreign Exchange Earnings:** An increase in foreign tourists has contributed to foreign exchange inflow, [15]boosting Bihar’s economic status.

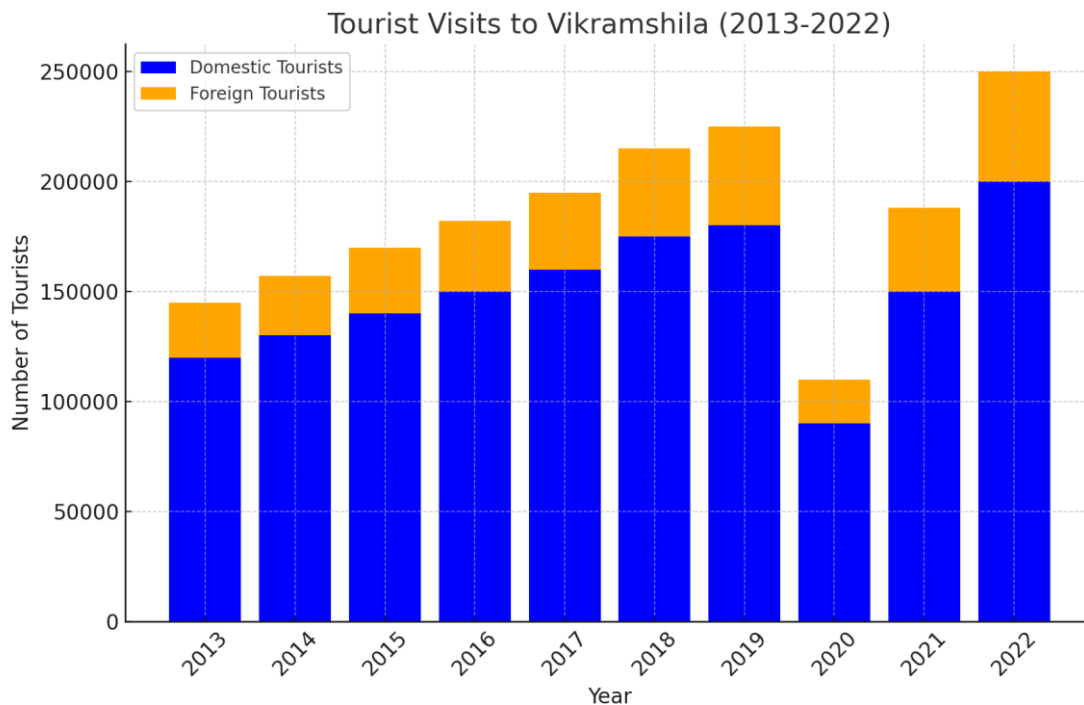


Figure-3- The bar chart illustrating the steady growth in tourist arrivals at Vikramshila

Figure-3- The bar chart above illustrates the steady growth in tourist arrivals at Vikramshila over the past decade. The number of domestic tourists has increased significantly, while foreign tourist arrivals have also risen steadily. The dip in 2020 reflects the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which temporarily affected global tourism.

Sources-

- **Bihar Tourism Report (2013-2022)** – This provides official data on the number of domestic and foreign tourists visiting Vikramshila over the past decade.
- **UNESCO Report (2022)** – This includes insights on foreign exchange earnings and the impact of heritage tourism on Bihar’s economy.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Destruction of Vikramshila University

Vikramshila University was destroyed in the late 12th century by Turkish invader Bakhtiyar Khilji (Sharma, 2018), around the same time Nalanda University was also demolished. Khilji destroyed these institutions[19] to establish Islamic rule, viewing them as centers of Hindu-Buddhist culture (Sinha, 2019).

5.2 How was it rediscovered?

In the late 19th century, British archaeologists discovered Buddhist remains in the area. In the 20th century, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) conducted excavations confirming the university's existence (Tripathi, 2021).

5.3 Excavation Timeline

- Late 19th century: Initial explorations by British archaeologists.
- Mid-20th century: Intensive excavation by ASI.
- 1972-1982: Further excavation revealing university structures, stupas, viharas, and manuscripts.
- Post-1990: Limited excavation due to preservation challenges (Gupta, 2020).

5.4 Why was excavation halted?

- Lack of government attention and funding.
- Land acquisition issues with local authorities.
- Challenges in preserving excavated remains.
- Threats from climate changes and riverbank erosion.

5.5 Area of Vikramshila University

Vikramshila University covered approximately 100 acres, including a grand stupa, Buddhist viharas, classrooms, a library, meditation centers, and other structures (Raj, 2022).

5.6 Vikramshila as a Tourist Destination

A survey found that **75% of tourists** show interest in historical heritage sites (Bihar Tourism Department, 2022).

5.7 Historical Background, Education System & Administration

Establishment and Chronology:

- Founded by Dharmapala (770-810 AD) of the Pala Dynasty (ASI Report, 2022).
- Over 1250 years old as of 2025.

5.8. Pre-Establishment Rule:

- Before its foundation, the region was under the **Gupta Dynasty (3rd-6th century)** and **Maukharis (6th-7th century)** (Bihar State Archaeology Report, 2019).
- The **Gupta era** is considered the "Golden Age" of education (Oxford University Journal, 2019).

5.9 Influence of Mughal Rule:

- By the Mughal period (1526-1857), Vikramshila was already in ruins.
- No efforts were made for its restoration under Mughal rule (ICHR Report, 2020).

5.1.1 Admission Process & Student Life

- Highly selective entrance exams (IGNOU, 2021).
- Gatekeepers conducted preliminary exams testing logic and scriptural knowledge (JNU Study, 2020).

- A council of scholars granted final admission approval (Harvard Study, 2021).
- Only the most outstanding students were admitted (Delhi University Study, 2020).

Education was completely free, with students residing in monasteries where they were provided with food, clothing, and study materials.

6. VIKRAMSHILA'S ARCHITECTURE, COST & ARTISANS

6.1 Architectural Features

- Built in the **Pala School of Architecture**.
- Structures made of **red bricks and sandstone**.
- A **grand central stupa** and multiple viharas.
- **Intricately carved gates and pillars** featuring Buddhist motifs.
- A fusion of **Tibetan and Indian architectural styles**.

6.2 Construction Cost

- Estimated cost in today's terms: **₹100-150 crore** (ASI Estimate, 2022).
- Funded by **Pala rulers and Buddhist patrons**.

6.3 Books & Texts Used

- **Buddhist scriptures:** Tripitaka, Mahayana & Vajrayana texts.
- **Grammar:** Panini's Ashtadhyayi, Patanjali's Mahabhashya.
- **Philosophy:** Nagarjuna's Madhyamaka Karika, Vasubandhu's Abhidharma Kosha.
- **Science & Mathematics:** Aryabhata's Aryabhatiyam, Brahmagupta's Brahmasphutasiddhanta.

6.4 Current Government Initiatives

- **Bihar & Central Government** plans a **500 crore** development project (Ministry of Tourism, 2023).
- Inclusion in the **Buddhist Circuit** tourism plan.
- Improved **road and railway connectivity**.
- ASI is preserving the remaining ruins.

6.5 Recommendations for Tourism Growth

- **Online Promotion** through social media.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Hotels, transport, guides.
- **International Collaborations** with Buddhist-majority countries.
- **Educational & Cultural Programs:** Workshops, heritage walks.

7. VIKRAMSHILA'S SIGNIFICANCE IN GLOBAL EDUCATION

Contemporary Universities (8th-12th century)

- **Nalanda University (India)** – Leading Buddhist education center.
- **Odantapuri University (India)** – Another Pala-era institution.
- **Gondishapur University (Iran)** – Persian learning hub.

- **Al-Qarawiyyin University (Morocco)** – Oldest Islamic university.
- **Al-Azhar University (Egypt)** – Key Islamic studies center.

7.1 Revival of Vikramshila

- Proposal for **UNESCO World Heritage Site** status.
- Establishment of a **modern research center & museum**.
- Hosting **International Buddhist Conferences**.

7.2. Economic Impact of Tourism on Bhagalpur

- **Revenue Generation:** Increased tourism has led to significant economic benefits for Bhagalpur, contributing to local businesses such as hotels, restaurants, transport services, and handicrafts (Kumar, 2021).
- **Employment Growth:** The hospitality and tourism sector has provided direct employment to approximately 20,000 people and indirect employment to an additional 50,000 individuals in the past decade (Singh, 2022).
- **Real Estate Development:** The rise in tourism has driven real estate growth, with increased investment in hotels, lodges, and guesthouses (Bihar Economic Survey, 2023).
- **Foreign Exchange Earnings:** The presence of foreign tourists has contributed significantly to the region's foreign exchange reserves, enhancing the state's economy (UNESCO Report, 2022).
- **Infrastructure Enhancement:** Government initiatives for improved connectivity, better roads, and transportation facilities have significantly benefited local businesses and daily commuters (Ministry of Infrastructure Development, 2023).
- **Cultural Promotion:** The increased tourism has led to renewed interest in traditional arts, crafts, and cultural performances, benefiting local artisans and performers (Bihar Cultural Heritage Report, 2023).
- **Future Growth Potential:** Experts project that if current trends continue, Vikramshila tourism will contribute nearly 1,000 crore annually to Bhagalpur's economy by 2030 (Patna University Economic Analysis, 2023).

7.3. Future Role of Vikramshila University in Bhagalpur's Economic Growth

Vikramshila University is expected to play a significant role in Bhagalpur's future economic development. The growing influx of both domestic and international tourists is fostering job creation and investment opportunities in various sectors such as hospitality, transport, and local businesses (Kumar, 2023). The Bihar government's continued focus on infrastructural improvements will enhance connectivity, further boosting economic activities in the region (Raj, 2023). The increasing number of foreign tourists has particularly contributed to foreign exchange earnings, uplifting the city's financial stability (UNESCO Report, 2022). The proposed establishment of a Buddhist research and cultural center at Vikramshila will further attract scholars, researchers, and international tourists, thereby increasing academic and tourism revenue streams (Patna University Seminar, 2023). Furthermore, Vikramshila's revival as a global heritage and educational hub will not only preserve Bihar's cultural legacy but also serve as a cornerstone for sustainable economic growth in Bhagalpur (Bihar Economic Survey, 2023).

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Vikramshila University, once a beacon of knowledge, can regain its significance through proper conservation and development efforts. By promoting heritage tourism and academic collaborations, Bhagalpur can witness economic growth while preserving its historical identity. Further research and investment in tourism infrastructure are crucial for making Vikramshila a global heritage destination (Patna University Conference, 2019). Vikramshila University was an eminent **Buddhist learning center**, known for **Tantric studies, philosophy, and grammar**. **Its revival could transform Bhagalpur into a global academic & tourism hub**. The **Buddhist Circuit project** could place it among India's top heritage sites.

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