

NALANDA LIVES AGAIN

Nalanda burnt for nine days. Now after centuries, Nalanda has risen again like the proverbial phoenix from the ashes. Civilization always had to defend itself against the forces of barbarism, often unsuccessfully. Nalanda as a university existed 500 years even before the famed European universities of Oxford and Paris came into existence. Of the 10000 students it had, many came from China and South East Asia. It was not only a great seat of learning of Buddhist philosophy and metaphysics but even subjects like medicine, logic, mathematics and astronomy were pursued with all seriousness.

Apart from the destruction of the monastic and residential complex of the students and massacre of thousands of inmates, the biggest blow to civilization came in the form of burning of Nalanda's legendary library which contained 9 million books! For a while it seemed that that knowledge itself had taken a body blow from which it could never recover. But the great spiritual masters teach us that knowledge is not in the books but is innate and a process of self-revelation. Swami Vivekananda said famously that Newton did not invent gravity; gravity was always there but Newton uncovered the knowledge of gravity from the depths of his own being.

There was a time when books did not exist but all knowledge was oral and resided in the memory. Knowledge was received as Revelation and Inspiration. Our Vedas and the Upanishads are a testimony to that. They appeared in book form after centuries of their formulation. Burnt books would be rewritten if the heritage, culture and the civilizational values remain alive in the individuals who represent that civilization. As for libraries, who visits one nowadays? Libraries are closing down all over the world without any burning because people are not reading anymore. The

danger now is not the burnt books and libraries but erosion of history, heritage, culture and civilization.

Otherwise how do you explain the name of "Bakhtiarpur Junction" for the station where you are supposed to get down to go to Nalanda – the very person (Bakhtiar Khilji) who reduced Nalanda to ashes? Today history is bearing testimony that a burnt Nalanda can get resurrected from the ashes when the wheel of Time turns the other way. But we are becoming a generation of morons without any sense of history, heritage and civilizational values. That is the danger.