

**Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies, Banaras Hindu University (BHU),
Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India**

Prof. Siddharth Singh,
Ex-Head, Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies,
Banaras Hindu University (BHU),
Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, India

Introduction:

The Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies is one of the significant departments of the Faculty of Arts at Banaras Hindu University (BHU), Varanasi, in Uttar Pradesh, India. BHU was established in 1916, and is one of the oldest and most prestigious central universities in all of India, and is considered as one of the largest residential universities in Asia. The university has two campuses. The main campus, where Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies is located, is spread out over 1300 acres. Although the founder Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya attached “Hindu” word with the title of the university, his vision of “Hindu” had the sense of Indianness and encouraged all the disciplines of universal knowledge to be initiated in the university. Therefore, BHU has the facilities of the entire global knowledge in one campus including learning of most of the Indian and foreign languages.

Pali, the language of the oldest Buddhist canon *Tipitaka*, has been taught at Banaras Hindu University since 1940, introduced as a subject in the Sanskrit Department, because of the effort of Bhikshu Jagadish Kashyap, a Theravada Buddhist monk who played a significant role in the propagation of Pali-studies in India during the post-colonial period. Bhikshu Jagadish Kashyap was introduced to Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, the founder of this university and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the second Vice-chancellor by Yugal Kishore Birla, a noted industrialist in India. Bhikshu Kashyap successfully persuading them to begin the study of Pali at the university. Bhikshu Jagadish Kashyap would teach Pali for free in BHU and other financial responsibilities were borne by Birla.

The Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies got independent status on 31 July 1982, finally separated from the Department of Sanskrit in the Faculty of Arts; and Dr. N.H. Samtani was appointed as the first Head of the Department. The department has also been granted University Grants Commission’s *Centre for Buddhist Studies* (under the scheme of Epoch Making Social Thinkers of India) for the period of five years twice, once during the year 2000-2005 and now, for the period of 2013-2017.

The importance of the Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies is twofold for students and especially, for Buddhists: firstly, it is established in the proximity of Sarnath, the one of most sacred Buddhist pilgrimage site, where the Buddha delivered his first famous “Turning the wheel of Law” sermon; and secondly, the department offers the fusion of Pali language/literature and other various dimensions of Buddhist Studies in its curriculum.



BHU’s main gate.

The courses we offer:

The Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies conducts courses, in the following way: a Ph.D in Pali and Buddhist Studies – possesses two semesters of six months each in a year, namely, the Odd Semester (September-February) and the Even Semester (March-August); the M.A. in Pali – for a period of two years (four semesters); and the B.A. (Hons.) in Pali – over a period of three years (six semesters); and an additional Two Years Diploma in Pali - conducted at Level I (two semesters) and Level II (two semesters). The admission into the Diploma program is also open for non-students of BHU.

The department has the credit system provision for evaluations and admissions in these courses every year, for which online forms are provided on the BHU's online admissions web portal www.bhuonline.in. Foreigners are supposed to contact the International Centre of the university. The International Centre keeps notices posted on its web links:

- <http://www.bhu.ac.in/admission/international/>
- <http://www.bhu.ac.in/Centre/index1.htm>.

For general purposes, Banaras Hindu University (B.H.U.) has a website www.bhu.ac.in which contains all the information and web links for its different units.

The session in the university begins in July every year for undergraduates, post-graduates and diplomas; but for Ph.D. candidates, registrations are held twice a year, in March and September, for which one has to apply in advance through proper channels, following the guidelines of the university's International Centre.



BHU's central library.

Events held in the Department:

To enrich and enhance the depth of student knowledge, the Department, apart from offering the regular routine teaching and research, organizes special seminars and lectures from time to time by prominent scholars from India and abroad. The department organized an All India Seminar on “Early Buddhism and Mahayana”, under the sponsorship of Indian University Grants Commission from 10-13 November 1983. The seminar was inaugurated by his Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso. After that event, several other events were held: National Seminar in Commemoration of the Birth Centenary of Mahapandit Rahul Sankrityana in 1995, National Seminar on “Buddhism and Social Ideals” in 2001, National Seminar on “Dimensions of Mind in Buddhist Thought” in 2003, National Seminar on “Concept of Anattavada (No Soul Theory) in Buddhism” in 2005, International Conference in Commemoration of Birth Centenary of Bhikkhu Jagdish Kashyap on “The State Of Buddhism, Buddhists And

Buddhist Studies In India And Abroad” in 2009 and a National Conference on “Feminist Discourse in Indian Traditional and Modern Context” in 2014.

The department has organized formal lectures since its inception to inculcate knowledge into students despite having very limited financial resources. Among those who have been selected for speaking, are the following: Prof. Marek Mejer (Oriental Institute, Warsaw, Poland); Gregory Kramer (President, Clarity, Portland, USA); Prof. Sanghsen Singh (Ex- Professor and Head, Dept. of Buddhist Studies, Delhi University, Delhi); Prof. V.C. Srivastava (Ex-Director, Indian Institute of Advance Study, Shimla); Prof. Dr. Maja Milchinski (Professor of Asian Philosophies and Religions of Ljubljana University, Slovenia); Dr. James Duerlinger (Professor of Philosophy, Iowa University, USA); Prof. Charles Willemen (Vice-Rector, International Buddhist College, Thailand); Prof. Lauren Crane (Wittenberg University, USA), and Ven. Sumanasiri from Malaysia. Other programs of note have been the Celebration of Buddha Jayanti (Vesak Day) and a screening of the film “Panchama Veda”, directed by the noted journalist/film-maker Gautam Chatterjee, featuring an address to the audience.

Awards and Recognitions to Faculty Members and Alumni:

The department has produced several illustrious figures in the past and still is a great center for study and discourse on Buddhism. The founder of the Pali and Buddhist Studies Department, Dr. N.H. Samtani has since retired, and became the recipient of Certificate of Honor (President Award) by the President of India in 1999, and won the Bhasha Sammana (Sahitya Academy Award) in 2005 for his outstanding contribution to classical Indian Language and literature through his works in Pali and Buddhist studies. Another alumnus include: Prof. Bhagchandra Jain (retired, former head of the Department of Pali-Prakrit, University of Nagpur), who was awarded the Commonwealth Scholarship in 1963 to carry out his Ph.D. in Sri Lanka. He received the Certificate of Honor by the President of India in 2004 for his devotion to the classical Indian Languages of Pali and Prakrit. Other alumni include: Prof. Prem Suman Jain Director, National Institute of Prakrit Studies and Research, Shravanabelagola, Karnataka; and Prof. Dharmchandra Jain, former Head of the Department of Sanskrit, Pali-Prakrit, Kuruksetra University, Kuruksetra, also a recipient of the Certificate of Honor by the President of India in 2006 for outstanding contributions to the classical Indian Languages Pali and Prakrit in the years 2006 and 2009 respectively. Among the current faculty members, Prof. Lalji has been awarded the Sino-Indian Cultural Exchange Fellowship in 1988 by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India for two years to study Buddhist texts and Chinese Language at Beijing, China. Another young alumnus Dr. Vishwajit Kumar, presently the Associate Professor at Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, Deemed University, Ministry of Culture, has been the recipient of the prestigious Vadrāyana Vyas President Award in 2004. Prof. Siddharth Singh (the author of this article), has been awarded the Japan Foundation Fellowship, Japan, in 2003-04 and the Fulbright Senior Research Fellowship, USA 2011-12. He also has been honored by prestigious Vadrāyana Vyās President Award in 2005 as a Young Scholar of Pali and Buddhist Studies in a ceremony held at President’s House by the then President of India Mr. A.P.J Abdul Kalam. Additionally, Prof. Singh was the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) Visiting Professor of Indian Studies in Uppsala University, Sweden for the period from Oct. 2014 until March, 2015, Visiting Professor at the Central University of Hyderabad (UoH), Hyderabad from Dec. 2012-Jan.2013; Visiting Professor in Karlstad University, Sweden in 2006 and 2008 and an Associate at the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla during 2009 and 2010.



Prof. Siddharth Singh, with students.

Faculty Members at Present:

Currently, there are five teaching faculty members in the department of Pali and Buddhist Studies.: Professor Pradyumna Dubey is the Head of the Department; and the other professors are Prof. Lalji, Prof. Bimalendra Kumar, Prof. Siddharth Singh and Prof. Priti Kumari Dubey. There is one vacancy for an Assistant Professor (reserved for scheduled caste, a constitutional term to denote the suppressed caste of the past) and two vacancies (general for all) of Associate Professors are advertised on the Universities website, which still haven't been filled.

Conclusion:

In a controversial decision, the Government of India removed Pāli (the famous ancient classical language of India and early Buddhism) as a subject from the main Civil Services Examination, commonly known as the Indian Administrative Services (IAS) of India in 2013; conducted by UPSC (Union Public service Commission) of India. UPSC is India's central agency authorized to conduct the Civil Services Examination, Engineering Services Examination, Combined Defense Services Examination, National Defense Academy Examination, Naval Academy Examination and Combined Medical Services Examination. Out of these, the Civil Services Examination (IAS) is the highest civil services examination through which the top bureaucrats are selected to administer the different departments of the central government of India.

The Government of India and several states recently, over the last 10 years, have realized that Buddhism may be a great saleable commodity to enhance the revenue by fetching the Buddhist tourists in their states. Some states ruled by Hindu ideology oriented politically parties, such as the B.J.P., the think that Buddhism, having a close philosophical and religious proximity with Hinduism, may be a natural partner with Hinduism to combat the Islamic or Christian fanatic-forces. India's recent political strategy inclined towards "Look East Policy" is also playing a role in the organization of such events. In the contest of cashing in on the name of the Buddha in order to collect huge revenue from tourism, states are making alliances with various political parties. On the other hand, Pāli and Buddhist studies are desperately struggling to survive as a discipline of study in the country; alternatively, the government is spending huge amounts of money to attract tourists from Buddhist countries. The name of the Buddha is being misused for a nuclear bomb test with the slogan of "Smiling Buddha" - and for the political nexus, also by Hindu fundamentalist groups as a tool. If you participate in the *Buddha Mahotsava* (Buddha Festival), an event being organized by the various state governments of India nowadays on the days of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment

and *Mahāparinibbāna*, you will find that the Buddha himself is absent from the whole occasion. The whole occasion appears more like a ruling political party program where there is neither any concern with the Buddha's teachings nor there is any scope of proper participation by true scholars.



The main road to BHU

There has been widespread discussion since 2010, over the revival of the ancient Nalanda tradition in India through national and international media because of the establishment of Nālandā International University, at Rajgir (site of ancient Rājagaha) in Bihar State. This is truly enthusiastic news for any scholar of Buddhism or Indology. But unlike ancient Nālandā University based on Buddhism and its allied subjects, four out of seven schools are the schools of Business Management, Information Sciences and Technology, International Relation and Environmental Studies. The proposed school of Buddhist Studies is merged with Philosophy and Comparative Religion in the same school and another school entitled “Languages and Literatures” doesn't have any declaration of the languages proposed to be studied within its fold and it is doubtful whether this list includes the languages contributory to Buddhist Studies like Pāli, Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese etc. or would that too be decided according to market demands? Interestingly, the schools to be opened in the Phase I does neither include Buddhist Studies nor Languages and Literature but the two schools of Historical Studies and Ecology & Environmental Studies. The Government of India desires to show its inclination towards Buddha, not for the true purpose of serving and propagating his ideas, but for the fact that this name is marketable and may fetch the tourists and funding from other Buddhists or Buddhist-oriented nations.

India needs serious and scholarly studies of Buddhism too, apart from government's revenue-generating marketing-campaign of the Buddha and Buddhism. The future study of Pāli and Buddhist Studies depends on if it leads towards any job perspective or not – leading to an interdependent relationship for the rest of India. Otherwise, there is no point for youngsters to study this entirely new (yet ancient) subject that hardly has any scope of jobs outside of the classroom or tourist places in any sphere of normal life within India. Therefore, the presence of Pāli on the IAS exam was one of the major reasons to attract many Indian youngsters to opt to study Pāli and Buddhist Studies, and at least this was playing a major role to inhibit the declining but rich discipline still surviving within its homeland. The questionable removal of Pāli from this examination means a death-knell towards Pāli and Buddhist Studies in India for Indian people. Fortunately, the Nagpur High Court has recently accepted a petition against the government's decision for removing Pali, and the future is still indeterminable, the consequences have yet to be seen. Meanwhile, the Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies, at BHU, still strives to propagate the Buddhavacana.



Faculty of Arts, BHU

BHU's Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies endeavors to propagate the Buddhavacana at its utmost capacity but considering the Indian government's partial attitude towards the Buddhist Studies, it may not be as successful it should be. The department heartily welcomes everyone to its address:

Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies
Banaras Hindu University (BHU)
Varanasi 221005, Uttar Pradesh, India
Phone No.: 0091-542-6703129 (Head/Chairperson of the Department)
Phone No.: 0091-542-6703138 (Secretary of the Office)

Since admission procedures for foreigners are by default, dealt with by the International Centre of the University, admission seekers should directly contact to the International Centre, at their address:

International Centre, C/3/3, Tagore House,
Banaras Hindu University,
Varanasi - 221005., INDIA,
Phone: 91-542-2307639, 2368130,
E-mail: intcent@bhu.ac.in, internationalcentrebhu@gmail.com