

## An imagination of Bikrampur Buddhist Vihara from the footprint of Atish Dipankar's travel.

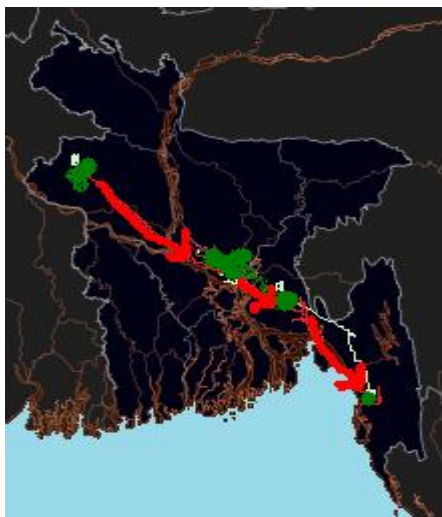
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**Abstract:** -Atish Dipankar Srijanan from Bangladesh in Ten-Eleventh century was the most respected educator of the sub-continent to convey the message of Buddha, acted as principal envoy of Vihara based education. In fact, he represents the great monastic learning tradition of more than 350 Viharas in this region within the development of Mahayana sect which lead all of them to contribute in scholarly literary creations including Buddhist mystic songs. If one wants to know the architectural features of that period, especially for the recently excavated Bikrampur Vihar, he or she need to trace Atish and have some observation over his interval points and end the journey in Tibet. To be contextual, the architecture of these Viharas influenced the style of monasteries and temples in South East Asia up to Myanmar, Cambodia to Java (Indonesia) and entire Bali peninsula and also in Tibet by implicit extend. In this regard, the style of gradual receding and crucified plan of the central shrine was most influential for practice. To exchange the thoughts they relied on such cooperation where spatial quality was followed as per their spirituality and architecture became the medium of a friendly brotherhood, as history kept the incident that King Devapala granted five villages attached to Nalanda for the installation of the Matha (individual Cella of vertical exposure) to honor the request of the King Sailendra of Java only for the scholars of Sumatra & Java. However, the aim of this study is to find an imagination of Bikrampur Vihar with the comparisons and similarities of the places which hold this noble sage's memories with their ruins. From that sense, this study is hypothetical one.

**Keywords:**-Atish Dipankar, Buddhist architectural features, Viharas in subcontinent, Bikrampur Vihar, Imagination.

### I. INTRODUCTION



Scratch on map: the location of Viharas in Bangladesh across Ganges delta.

During the Pala period big monasteries like Vikramshila, Agrapuri, Odantapuri (Viharas now in India) Somapura, Jagaddala, Kanakastupa,(of Bangladesh) etc. flourished as centers of learning on Buddhism as well as centers for remarkable development in the style of architecture, secular arts and sculpture. In fact, the Mahayana School undoubtedly developed within the great monastic learning tradition of the more than 350 Viharas whose remains are scattered through Bangladesh, as is one of the few Ashokan Pillars (marking where the Buddha himself taught) is identified by British archaeologist Cunningham on bank of river Korotoa, not visible at present day. In 7<sup>th</sup> century, Huen Tsang saw twenty monasteries in Pundrabardan (Rajshahi), 30 monasteries at Samatat (Comilla), 10 at Tamralipti (Medinipur) and 7 at Kajangal. Among these Somapura Vihara and Vikramasila Vihara were acknowledged two most important centers for Buddhist learning in the Buddhist world during the period between 9th and 12th centuries AD. Six particular Buddhist sites are considered the most important. The earlier excavated Buddhist sites are Sompura Mahavihara, Shalban Vihara, Mahasthangarh, Bhasu Vihara and Halud Vihara.

The interest of this research concentrate on recently excavated site of a Buddhist Vihara, named Bikrampur Vihara in Bikrampur of the Dhaka District. The importance of this archeological excavation lies into the architectural values and historical background of the area; which is yet to be decided. Again, this is found in the birthplace great philosopher, Atisha Dipankar; whose journey may guide us to find some clue about this Vihara. Let us have some light upon the remote history of Bangladesh to sublime this lost architectural asset as well as reveal the legacy in newer way. [1]

## Introduction

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#### 1 Atish Dipankar Srigyan

##### 1.1 Biography

More than 1500 years after Buddha, a scholar preached his teachings beyond subcontinent about which there are many verses found in Bengali folk literature of his birthplace:

*“He crossed the mountain*

*Covered with perilous frost:*

*He is the Atish of Bangla*

*Who lit the light of learning in Tibet”.....*

Atish Dipankar Srijanan of Ten-Eleventh Century AD was one of the most outstanding saints and scholars of the sub-continent and Principal of a number of big monasteries including Vikramshila Vihara. He ranks alongside Al-Khwarizmi (780-850); Ferdowsi (940-1020); and Al-Biruni (973-1048) the greatest sages of his time. Dipankar was born in a royal family of Guada in Vikramapur of Bengal to the east of Bajrasana. His father's name was Kalyansri and mother's name was Prabhavati. he was christened as Chandragarbha in his childhood. His birth place, Vajrayogini reminiscent of a 'Yogi with Vajra', a typical Buddhist name with Mahayana traditions. He got his early lessons at Bajrashan Bihar (today's Ashrafpur, near Dhaka). At the age of ten, he becomes a master of the teachings of Mahayana, Hinayana, and Vajrayana. He also mastered astrology, logic and philosophy; Sanskrit grammar and the sciences there under the great scholar Jetari.

At 19, Chandragarbha was formally ordained as Monk and given name as Dipankar Srigyan.

After a decade, at 29, Acharya Shilarakshita ordained him a full Monk and added the prefix 'Atish'. He would now be known as Atish Dipankar Srigyan (He Whose Deep Awareness Acts as a Lamp). The acharya was prudent enough to give him this title, because the lamp that first saw light in Bangladesh was ready to illuminate the Buddhist world later.

In 1012 AD, at the age of 32, he set out with a party of gem merchants on sea voyage to visit Suvaranadvipa, the most important center of Buddhist studies in those days, now in Java and Sumatra of Indonesia. After fourteen months of perilous journey across the tumultuous sea in a sail-driven wooden ship, Dipankar reached Suvarnadvipa and studied Buddhism for 12 years under Guru Serilingpa Dharmakirti.

#### 4 Let's have a trip with Atisha!

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#### 5 Home sweet Home!

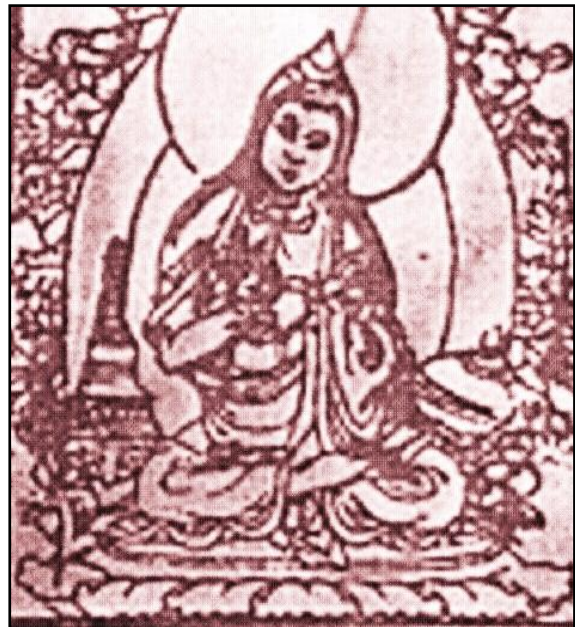
##### 5.1 Bikrampur Vihar: excavation in March 2013

##### 5.2 Background and importance of the site.

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He was considered the greatest scholar of Asia at the age. He taught him about Bodhicitta and the exclusive mind training techniques of oral origination. He studied there almost all Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools (Veda, Upanishadas) of his time, including teachings from Vishnu, Shiva, Tantric Hinduism and other beliefs.

He also studied the sixty-four kinds of art, the art of music and the art of logic, literature, medicine and accomplished these studies until the age of 22. He developed three main lineages were the *Lineage of the Profound Action*, the *Lineage of Profound View* and the *Lineage of Profound Experience*.

Eventually, Suvarnadvipi Dharmakirti advised Atisha to "go to the north in the Land of Snows." The master was referring to Tibet, a region with a Buddhist tradition forever changed after the arrival of Atisha. From his Master, Dharmakirti, Atisha learnt one meditation that became one of Tibetans fundamental meditation techniques.

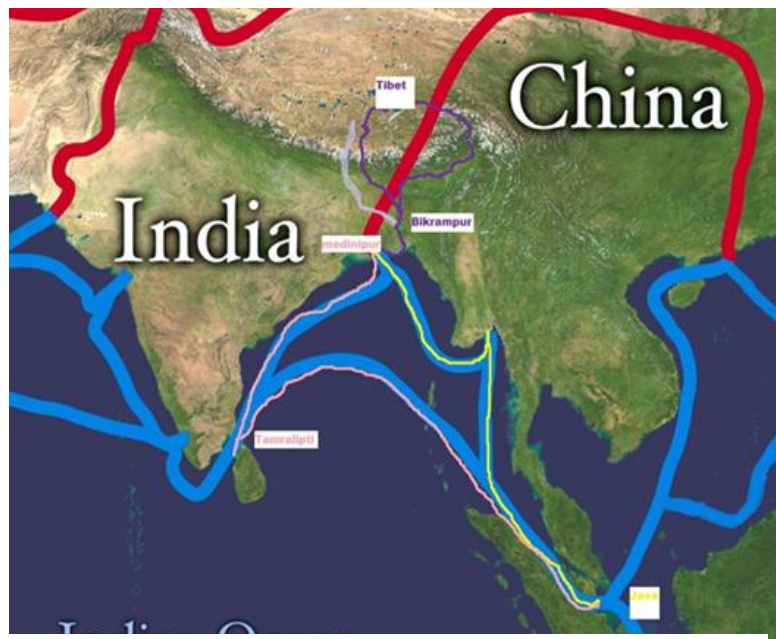


Figure: Journey of Atisha along with Silk Road. Yellow for Java trip from Tamluk, Pink for Srilanka trip on his return, and Violet for Tibet through Nepal.

Tongleng Meditation (a meditation that aims to recycle supposedly negative energy into loving and healing energy). On way back to home from Suvarnadvipa, he visited Tamralipi (present-day Sri Lanka) or returned via Tamralipti port (Medinipure, west Bengal).

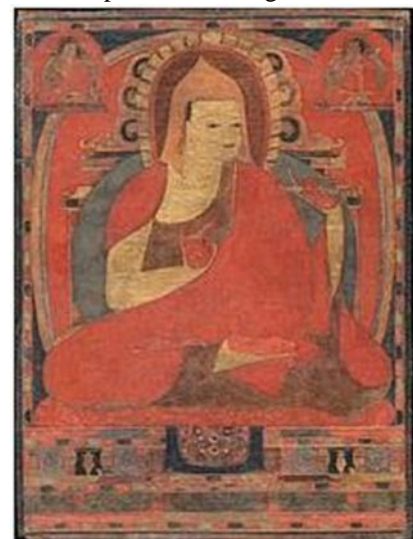
Back home in 1024 AD, at the request of King Dharmapala (781-821), Atish became the Chancellor of Vikramashila University in Bhagalpur, Bihar. His dissemination of the Dhamma or Dharma and scholastic teaching in a new dimension earned him the title "Dhammapala". There were 8,000 students and 108 professors in this Vihar, many of whom came from as far as China, Sri Lanka, Persia and Greece. The courses of studies included Therevada and Mahayana Buddhism, social sciences, Veda, Vedanta, Upanishad, philosophy, Logic, medicine, science, astronomy etc. At that time Nalanda was in a declining stage. However, during the 15 years of his stay in India, at the age of 44, Dipankar Srijnan devoted his life in the dissemination of the Dhamma and other knowledges in different monasteries such as Vajrasana, Somapuri, Nalanda, Odantapuri, Pandita and Vikramshila Mahaviharas which had developed as temples of learning like modern universities, inhabited by thousands of monks and scholars for studies and research. [2]

From the Western Tibetan kingdom of Guge, by the name of Lama Yeshe Yod, who was a strict believer in Dharma and decided to send his academic followers to learn and translate some of the Sanskrit Buddhist texts. Among these academics was Nagtso, who was sent to Vikramashila Vihara to study Sanskrit and plead with Atisha to come teach the Dharma in his homeland, Tibet. During his travels across the perilous Himalayas, the Tibetan scholar Nagtso wrote:

*"Vaguely realized that [...] miraculous manifestations assisted me in an uninterrupted flow."*

In 1042 AD he visited Tibet at the invitation of its ruler Chang Chub and Lama for the revival of Buddhism at the age of 62. Atish ventured first to Nepal, then to reach Tibet; his main rout was from Palpa of Nepal to Manassarover (Lake Manas) through a lot of hazards. The Prime Minister of Tibet gave him a rousing reception along with a large number of followers on his entrance to Tibet. In his welcoming words, the Prime Minister said:

*"You are the wisest and most meritorious savant. You have come from the land of Acharyas in the incarnation of divinity in response to the prayers of the people of Tibet. In this age, you are the representative of Lord Buddha and paragon of Buddhism. All living beings and gods worship you for your purity."*



The Tibetans still revere him as 'The Noble Lord' (Jo-Bo Rje). He is still worshipped in Tibet, China, Mongolia and northern Asian countries as the incarnation of Lord Buddha. Atisha Dipankara described as the 'Eye of Asia' is a shining symbol of mankind's glorious heritage for peace, compassion, humanism and wisdom throughout the ages. He lived there for 13 years until his death at the age of 73 in 1052 AD.

### 1.2 His contribution: offerings to mankind

A German scholar named Koppen for the first time in 1859 revealed the myriad-minded greatness of Atisha Dipankara who had elevated the Tibetan people with his moral preaching with songs and lyrics used like a vehicle of his philosophical thoughts. Atisha wrote more than **175 religious and philosophical books & thesis papers on Buddhism** which is preserved in ancient temples of Tibet. The main activities in the first three years may be summed up as follows:

- (1) Great ovation and loyalty shown to him by the ruler of Western Tibet and devotion shown by Byan chub-od or Budhiprabha,
  - (2) Conversion of 85 years old Rin-chen-bzan-po or Ratnabhadra, the greatest scholar of Tibet to his beliefs,
  - (3) Completion of his famous book 'Bodhi Patha Pradip'(Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment) to elevate the morality of the people in accordance with Buddha's Doctrine.
  - (4) Atisha's meeting with Brom-ston-pa-rgyal-bai-byun-gna who became the foremost of his Tibetan disciples and helped him in successfully organizing the Buddhist religious reformation movement throughout Tibet.
- He wrote books on Buddhist theology, medicine and engineering in Tibetan language. He discovered many old Indian Puthi (poems) written in Sanskrit from Tibet and translated many Sanskrit books in Vet language. His original Sanskrit books and many Bangla works around 200 by numbers are lost but the Tibetan translation still exists in the monasteries of Tibet. Followings are his most notable books that are found yet:

#### **Bodhi-patha-pradipa or Bodhipathapradipa**

[In this most famous writing of Atisha, he summarized and simplified the teachings of Lord Buddha in only 66 verses. These verses had philosophical depth to intrigue Monks as well as the simplicity to baffle even the Shepherds of Tibet.]

#### **Charya-sanggraha-pradipa**

[Contains some Kirtan (offering songs) verses composed by Atisha were discovered by surveyor of British empire Sharat Chandra Das in the 1890s. The main verses from which Atisha derived his own, are known as Charyapada (composed by monk-poets like Kanupa, Luipa, Haripa, Siddhipa etc in 8<sup>th</sup> century) later discovered by famous Bengali scholar Hariprasad Shastri, from the royal court of Nepal, seems to be most ancient literature work in Bangla language. ]

#### **Satya-dvayavatara**

[Of the many works that Atisha composed, translated, and brought to Tibet, one of the most well-known was his "Entry to the Two Realities" (Satyadvayāvātāra). Tibetan followers of Atisha understood the tenets of Buddhist philosophy, the nature of valid cognition (tshad ma), and the importance of spiritual authority. This early Tibetan commentary provides direct textual evidence of the beginnings of scholasticism in Tibet and offers an early perspective on the formative developments in the intellectual history of Tibetan Madhyamaka. [3]

#### **Vimala-ratna-lekha**

[A Sanskrit letter to Nayapala, king of Magadha about governing the region]

#### **Bodhi-sattva-manyavali**

#### **Madhyamaka-ratna-pradipa**

#### **Mahayana-patha-sadhana-sanggraha**

Besides many treatises on Buddhism, Atisha wrote on engineering and agriculture also. For the well-being of the people, he employed his engineering skill for construction of a dam for prevention of floods in a place named Thol in western Tibet. He helped in organizing irrigation system by digging canals which led to boosting of agricultural productivity.

#### **Shiksa-samuchchaya Abhisamya**

#### **Prajna-paramita-pindartha-pradipa**

#### **Ekavira-sadhana**

#### **Pradip Panjika**

#### **Budhipat Pradip**

#### **Ratna Karandowtghat**

## II. BACKGROUND OF BUDDHISM IN BANGLADESH

In fact, Buddhism is the original religion of Bangladesh for more than 2000 years and made deep impact on Bengali life, culture and civilization through centuries in the midst of rise and fall of dynasties and kingdoms. In the Seventh Century, the most outstanding Chinese traveller-pilgrim Fa Hien (359-415) toured India for 16 years from 629 to 645 AD. While touring ancient Bengal he noted that Buddhism existed in Northern Bangladesh, Pundravardan and Mahastan, the first city of this ancient land. He visited Samatata region in 639 AD in present-day Comilla and recorded in his travel diary as having seen 30 Sangharams or monasteries here inhabited by 2000 monks of Thervada School. Thus we can perceive an image that when Atisha dominated the religious scene in the 11th Century, the Buddhist Pala Dynasty was reigning with its full glory. The adjoining Magadha kingdom along with eastern India came under the magnetic spell of Buddhism.

Especially its Mahayana sect has traveled a long way under the patronage of series of ruling dynasties - Chandra in 7th Century, Pala in 8th to 11th Century, Deb in 9th to 13th Century and the Barman in 11th to 12th Century. These dynasties patronized Buddhism successively for nearly seven hundred years. Historians marked several facts for their opinion as follows:

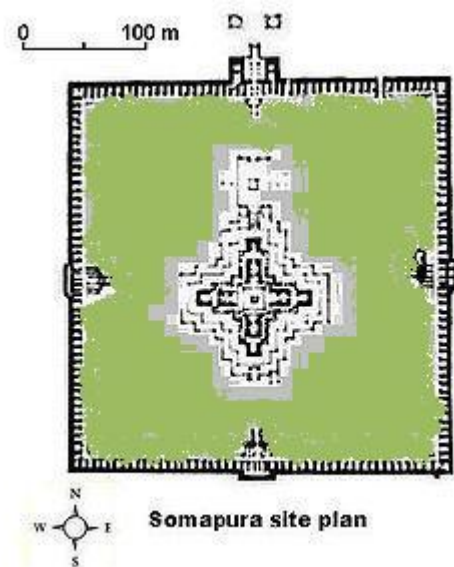
1. In 600 BC Gautama Buddha stayed for some time at Basu Bihar which was situated on the outskirts of Pundravardan as Hiuen-Tsang states.
2. Some scholars believe the names of two prominent disciples of Buddha Bangisha and Bangantaputta indicates that they might have derived their names from Banga (ancient name of central Bangladesh).
3. Names of two devotees from Bengal, Dharmadatta and Rishinandan of Pundravardhan are inscribed in the entrance gate of Sanchi Stupa, constructed during Emperor Asoka's reign 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.
4. The name 'Banga' appears in the stone inscription of Nagarjunikonda dated Fourth Century BC.
5. During the reign of the First King of the Pala Dynasty, Gopala, famous Buddhist Philosopher Acharya Santarakshita visited Tibet and stayed there till 762 AD for reformation and regeneration of Buddhism. He is known as 'Pandita Bodhisattva' in Tibet.
6. The Second Pala Emperor, Dharmapala was the founder of 'Prajnaparamita Sutra' of Buddhism. He constructed 50 monasteries and founded the famous Vikramshila Vihara and Sompuri Vihara.
7. In the Seventh Century, Bhikkhu Shilabhadra, born in present-day Comilla was the most outstanding monk who became the Principal of then the biggest University of world, Nalanda. Hieun Tsang studied Yogashastra under him for two years and paid glowing tributes to his Master as the most profound scholar and philosopher of ancient India.
8. King Devapala granted five villages at the request of the Sailendra king of Java for the installation the Matha (shrine with vertical exposure) established at Nalanda for the scholars of Sumatra & Java. Acharya Chandragomin of this period was known as an outstanding grammarian who wrote grammar deviating from the traditional Sanskrit vocabulary of Panini. [4]
9. The Gupta tradition of sculptural art attained a new height under the patronage of the Pala dynasty and it is designated as 'Pala School of Sculptural Art'. The art incorporated lot of local characteristics in Bengal and the fusion continued right up to the end of the 12th century to achieve its pinnacle. Terracotta pieces in the walls exemplify development of secular arts reflecting life, nature and social scene of those days. The most notable exhibits in the museums of Bangladesh and West Bengal (India) are the innumerable beautiful sculptures, parts of doorframes or pillars used in temples and replicas of temples on Rajmahal black basalt stone.

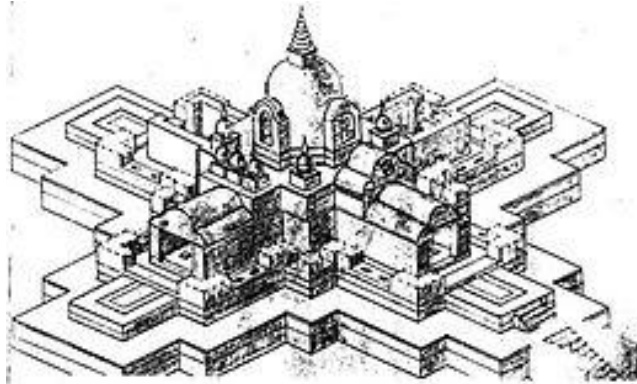
### 3 Some Viharas commemorate with Atisha

#### 3.1 Viharas in Bangladesh

##### 3.1.1 Paharpur Vihara, Naogon

The most significant of all monasteries was Sompuri Vihara whose massive ruins had been unearthed at Paharpur of Rajshahi district in northern part of Bangladesh by British archeologists in early 1900s. Unique in ancient temple architecture, this Mahavihara developed during Pala Dynasty from the 8th to 11th centuries and is described as the biggest monument south of the Himalayas. In addition, over time Atisha's spiritual preceptor, Ratnakara Shanti served as a sthavira of the Vihara. The somapura mahavihara at paharpur, a creation of Dharmapala, proudly announces the excellence of the architectural art achieved in the Pala period. It is the largest Buddhist Vihara in the Indian subcontinent and the plan of its central shrine was evolved in Bengal. In the Nalanda inscription of Vipulasimitra it has been described as **Jagatam netraikavishrama bhū (pleasing to the eyes of the world)**. The architecture of this Vihara has influenced the style of monasteries in South East Asia up to Indonesia where monumental Borobudur Temple of Java has been modeled after it. Experts believe that its architectural plan, especially the gradually receding crucified plan of its central shrine, had influenced the architecture of the neighboring countries like Myanmar and Indonesia. A few Buddhist buildings in these countries, built in the 13th and 14 centuries, seem to have followed the Paharpur example. Somapura Mahavihara totally covers the area of 27 acres (110,000 m<sup>2</sup>). It was an important intellectual center for Dhamma Traditions such as Buddhists, Jains and Hindus. The quadrangular structure consists of 177 cells and a major traditional Buddhist Stupa in the center along with and numerous Stupas. It was founded in a cruciform basement, where terraced structure with inset chambers and gradually dwindling pyramid form.





Archaeologist K.N. Dikhist in his book, *Paharpur, Memoirs of Archaeological Survey in India* (1938) made an attempt to suggest a probable architectural treatment of the missing parts of the structure through studying the

archaeological remains. This study is considered as the most authentic record of the Sompur Mahavihara.

Prudence of R. Myer published in a journal paper in 1969, in which he proposed the missing superstructure as a Stupa and illustrated the possible three-dimensional articulations. Myer embarked on his proposal through a diachronic study of the Stupa and Stupa shrines in India. He took Sompur Mahavihara as an example to elaborate his study and did a conjectural restoration of the central structure in support of his analysis.



The second work was published by a team of architects from Khulna University lead by Mohammed Ali Naqi, who proposed another theoretical reconstruction of the central structure as well as some parts of the peripheral block (mainly the entrance hall) in 1999. It was presented in the "International Seminar on Elaboration of an Archaeological Research Strategy for Paharpur World Heritage Site and Its Environment" jointly organized by UNESCO and Department of Archaeology of Bangladesh in 2004. Unlike Myer, Muhammad Ali Naqi proposed a temple-like spire at the top by considering the central mound as a 'Stupa-Shrine' with a 'Shikhara' type Stupa in his reconstruction.

### 3.1.2 Pandit Vihara, Chittagong

From the Tibetan book named Jyag-Sanjan translated by Roy Bahadur Sarat Chandra Das, we get the description about the creator of golden age in Bengal; Dharmapal the 2nd King of Pala dynasty in the 8th century established 50 monasteries in his Kingdom. The Pandit Vihar is one of them. Harikal (Chittagong) and Samatat (Dhaka and Comilla) were under the rule of Buddhist Kadga Kings in the 6th Century. [5].

A controversy comes when some scholars say that it was established by the King Chandra Dynasty of Pattikera in the 10th century. It is the conception of the scholars that the Buddhist kings called this hilly region 'SriChattala' (the land of peace). Again, The Chinese traveller Huen Tsang says about the location of Harikal Kingdom which was situated to the eight hundred miles away from Nalanda and thirty days journey from Srilanka. During this time, Chittagong was under the rule of Chandra Kings of Pattikera in the first half of the 10th Century and in the 11th Century. [6]. However, The Pandit Vihar was specially the center of study of Mahayani Buddhism as some description had been found about the



glorious past of Pandit Vihar by the Tibetan historian Lama Taranath in his famous book [7]. He mentioned Chittagong as Chatigum, the Capital of Gopi Chandra. After the destruction of Nalanda, One of the greatest centers of Buddhism in the sub-continent as the major establishment of the Tantric Mahayana School. Atish Dipankar Srijanan, the outstanding saint and philosopher studied under Tilopa, (988-1033) titled Prajnabhadrā who was the inhabitant of Chakrasala at Patiya, was principal of this university who had preached Buddhism in Bhutan also studied here. . The names of his written books in Sanskrit were Sree Shahaj Sambaradhistan, Acinta Mahamudranama, Catta-Chaturupadesha Prasanna Paradip, Mohamudropadesh, Dohakosa and Saro dharmopadesh etc. The translations in Tibetan language of these books are still preserved in Tibet. The memories of other mentionable Siddhacharyas (84 chancellors that had been found yet) who were related to Pandit Vihar were Luipa, Anangabajra Kanhabodhi, Jnanabajra, Buddha Jnanapa, Amoghanath and Dharmasri Maitra etc.[8]. The famous Buddhist Scholar of Magadh Naropa became the disciple of principal Prajnabhadrā. The Buddhist scholars of all around India and Tibet would come here to learn Buddhism and Philosophy. The Vihara was decorated with different books of different branches of Buddhism and accommodation cells were made for the Bhikkhus (monk). Many of the religious chiefs of Tibet were the inhabitants of Chittagong. Specially, one of the writers of Charyapada the first book of Bengali literature was Siddhipa who was the teacher of Tantrics of the 8th century was inhabitant of Chittagong. Most of the Buddhist mystic songs (Charyagiti) which were the main source of Bengali language were written by the 84 Siddhacharyas residing in this Pandit Vihar University. That is why it has been named Pandit Vihara (university of scholars).

Like Taxila, Nalanda, Vikramshila, teaching on eighteen subjects was given in this university. Eighteen Teachable Subjects: Sruti, Smriti, Sammuti, Samukhya, Yoga, Ethics, Baishesika, Music, Archery, Puran, Medicine, History, the teaching of Chandra, Ketu, Mantra, Sabda. These eighteen subjects are called Shastras means knowledge of the Scriptures. [9]

Along with these, Tantricism were also taught in this university. This is such sort of sect that developed after the 'Great demise' (Mahaparinirvana) of Buddha especially Mahayani Buddhism based on Vajrajan, Shajjan, Kalachakrajan etc. was expanded later in the course of time.

Some said that Pandit Vihar University was in Rangmahal Pahar (now in General Hospital Hill) where a big Buddha statue with some physical remains was found. Others say that it was in Chakrasala (Deang Hill area) at the west of Anwara to the south of the Karnafuli. There is a valley where a village named Barautthan is situated. Once upon a time there was Capital of the King Kanti Deva in this place. Some excavation in Anwara brought Buddha sculptures built with 66 metals (Made of brass, Silver and Bronze etc.) According to Asok Battacharya, the specialist on statues said, these statues were built by the 9th century in Mahayani and Tantric ideas: Buddha in ground touching gesture, Padmapani, Lokeswar, Manjushri, Basudhara, Kunda statue, Stupa with canopy, the replica of Mahabodhi Temple. Also by digging, a broad brick built wall were discovered measuring 12\*12\*3 inches. [9] It has historical evidence that this Pandit Vihar University destroyed by the attack of Umeid Khan in 16<sup>th</sup> century. As a result of Muslim occupation the influence of the Tantric Buddhism began to reduce and existence of Pandit Vihar was lost. [10]

3.1.2 Shalban Vihara, Mainamati, Comilla

Mainamati is an isolated low, dimpled range of hills, dotted-with more than 50 ancient Buddhist settlements of the 8th to 12th century. It consists of 115 cells, built around a spacious courtyard with a cruciform temple in the centre, facing its only gateway complex to the north, with residential facilities around resembling that of the Sompur Vihara. Infact, the archaeological excavations of Mainamati constitutes the ruins of the historic Kanakastupa Vihara witnessed by Hieun Tsang.

Queen 'Maynamati's Palace Mound' is the largest and highest mound in the northern extremity of the ridge near to the village that still bears the name of the queen, just east of Brahmanbaria road. The site is traditionally associated with the legendary Chandra queen Mainamati, mother of the last-known Chandra king, Govindachandra. Excavations on a limited scale have uncovered here parts of a massive defense wall round different parts of the site, probably a citadel, and the corner of a substantial structure, probably a palace, at the centre of the site. This is probably the only site in Mainamati that has revealed structures of secular nature.

In **Kutila Mura**, at the highest mound in the northeastern part of the ridge near Ananda Vihara, is the most attractive monuments in Mainamati The excavated monuments include three principal stupas and a number of subsidiary chapels and chaitya-halls built around them, all of which were enclosed by a massive boundary wall. Three stupas are representing the Buddhist "Trinity" or three jewels: Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Interesting and intricate structural forms and decorative styles have been preserved at the site. Excavations have not yet been completed here; the monastery in the northern end and two grand Stupas in two wings of the site remain to be cleared yet. The excavated evidence suggests 7th century AD as the date of the beginning of these monuments. The site continued to be occupied by Muslims till the 13th century AD as indicated by an Abbasid gold coin recovered from an upper level of the site.

**Charpatra Mura** is an isolated small oblong shrine situated about 2.5 km. North-west of Kutila Mura Stupas. The only approach to the shrine is from the East through a gateway which leads to a spacious hall.

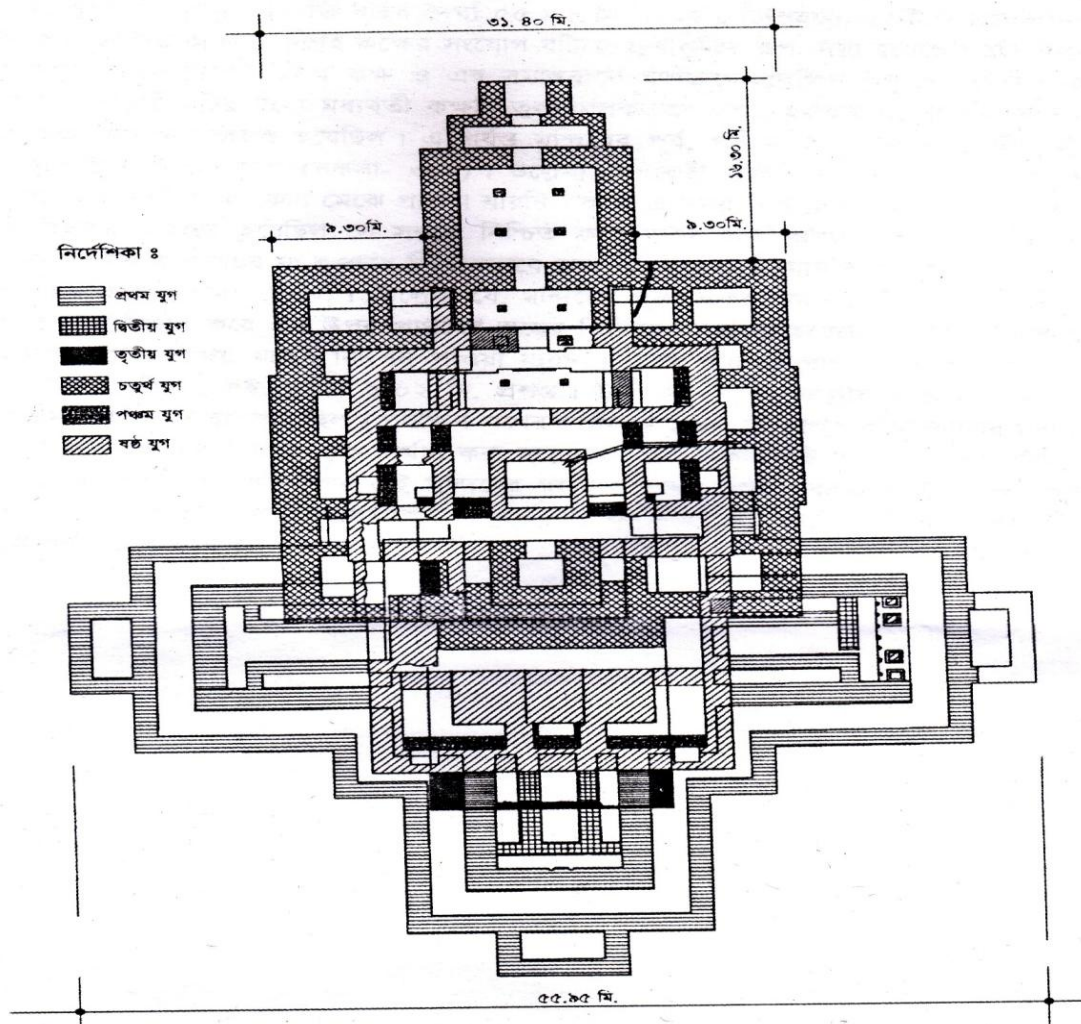


Fig: 6 development stages of Ananda Vihara in a single figure





Largest among the Mainamati monuments, situated in the archaeologically rich Kotbari central area, **Ananda Vihara** represents a huge religious-cum-educational establishment of viharas, stupas and chapels all around. The complex was built by Shri Anandadeva, the

third ruler of the early Deva dynasty of Devaparvata. The grand monastery together with its central shrine was built by Shri Bhavadeva, the fourth ruler of the early Deva dynasty, sometime towards early 8th century AD. This is actually a former Buddhist structure converted to Hindu shrine with different phases.

The third most important and extensive monastic establishment in Mainamati is the **Bhoja Vihara**, situated almost in the center of the Kotbari area; Excavations have revealed the outlines of a square monastery with a large cruciform shrine in the center of its open courtyard, very similar to Shalvan Vihara and Ananda Vihara.

**Rupban Mura**, an important site, lies on a hillock, on the south of the Comilla-Kalirbazar road. Excavations have revealed here the remains of a remarkable semi-cruciform shrine together with other subsidiary structures. It underwent by three main periods of building and rebuilding, the earliest of which correspond to c.6th - 7th centuries AD. Very little of the last period remains (10th - 11th centuries AD) are survived now in this site. Significant discoveries from the site include, besides the colossal stone Buddha, five debased gold plates of Balabhata (Khadga ruler, founder of Devparvata). The importance of the site lies in its subsequent extension to its lower base on the west, presumably after the river had dried out or changed its course. A part of the silted up riverbed was turned into a huge water reservoir called *Tara Dighi*, Chandi Mura, locally known as Rupban Mura, had visible structural remains in the shape of a circular dome at the top of the mound.

Together, they contribute significantly to our knowledge of ancient Vanga-Samatata, covering a period of about seven hundred years from the 6th to 13th centuries AD. The bronzes primarily represent religious art and show a perplexing variety of iconographic types, revealing the gradual transformation of the popular faith Mahayana to Tantric and ultimately to polytheistic forms in which Buddhism became inextricably mixed with Hindu and aboriginal elements. The sculptured terracotta plaques are the most numerous, attractive and representative of local folk art. The discovery of the remarkable early Deva dynasty and of Balabhata has settled a number of historical and geographical questions, for instance, concerning the extent and bounds of Samatata, the location of Devaparvata, Pattikera and Lalambi-vana, and the situation of Harikela.

### 3.2 Viharas in India

#### 3.2.1 Nalanda, Bihar

The place rose into prominence in 5th Century A.D. as a great monastic-cum-educational institution for oriental art and learning in the whole Buddhist world, exhibits an important interchange on developments in Indian architecture or technology, monumental art, town planning or landscape design. The Vihara attracted students like Hiuen Tsang and I-Tsing from China and other distant countries. The galaxy of luminaries associated with it includes Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Vasubandhu, Dharmapala, Suvishnu, Asanga, Silabhadra, Dharmakirti, Shantarakshita. From the record of I-Tsing in 673 AD, we get a detailed picture of the subject studied in Nalanda. His work talks about the curriculum which included logic, metaphysics and a very extensive study of Sanskrit grammar besides the Buddhist scriptures.



The city was spread over an area of sixteen square kilometers of which only an area of around square kilometer is excavated. It has a central monumental axis of thirty meter wide, running north-south with the row of temples on the west and monasteries on the east. The extensive remains are of six brick temples and eleven monasteries arranged on a systematic layout. The temples thronged by small Stupas along the west of an avenue also revealed. All these temples were surrounded with the votive Stupas of varying sizes. The Stupas mostly contained in their cores are tablets, bearing the Buddhist creeds (Dharanis) and bricks inscribed with the Pratitya Samutpata-Sutras. The dimension and disposition of rooms within monasteries is almost identical. The architectural members were richly carved, painted and ornamented. The most imposing structure is Temple No. 3 at the southern extremity which was constructed in seven phases.

This follows the *Pancharatra* concept of planning consisting of a central shrine and four subsidiary ones in the corner. This was destined to be of the Buddhist architecture in India.

The rows of magnificent Stupas placed side by side forming a central monumental axis. Parallel to and on both sides of this axis were monasteries along with the establishment, functioned both as units of accommodation as well as learning for monks. The monasteries were imposed in rectangular building and were planned around a



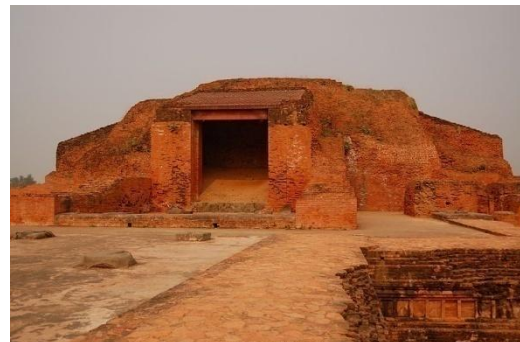
central open court. The lower storey contained the refectory, areas of instructions and communal worship, while the upper floor built in timber was quadrangle of cells for resident students. Each subsequent higher storey was stepped back from the previous one to create open air terraces for the cells. These were used by more preserving students who had graduated to an advanced stage of learning. A number of such monasteries were built close to each other like many colleges in a university campus. Till now, eleven monasteries have been unearthed; nine in a row, facing West and two adjoining them at right angles on the Southern side. All the monasteries bear indications of having

being rebuilt again and again, without any material deviation from an original plan.

Around second century of its establishment, Suvishnu built one hundred and eight temples at Nalanda to prevent the decline of the Hinayana and Mahayana schools of Buddhism. The excavations conducted by Archaeological Survey of India during 1915-37 and 1974-82.

### 3.2.2 Vikramashila Mahavihara, Bihar

Vikramashila University was one of the two most important centers of Buddhist learning in India during the Pala dynasty, along with Nalanda University. Established by King Dharmapala, (783 to 820) in the late 8th or early 9th century in response to a supposed decline in the quality of scholarship at Nalanda. It was one of the largest Buddhist universities, with more than one hundred teachers and about one thousand students. It produced eminent scholars who were often invited by foreign countries to spread Buddhist learning, culture and religion. The most distinguished and eminent



among all was Atisha Dipankar, listed as a notable abbot and founder of the Sarma traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. Subjects like philosophy, grammar, metaphysics, Indian logic etc. were taught here, but the most important branch of learning was Tantrism. It prospered for about four centuries before it was destroyed by Bakhtiyar Khilji during fighting with the Sena dynasty along with the other major centers of Buddhism in India around 12<sup>th</sup> century.



Vikramashila is known to us mainly through Tibetan sources, especially the writings of Taranatha, the Tibetan monk historian of the 16th-17th centuries. According to him, Vikramashila reached at its peak during the reign of King Kanaka (955-83). It appears to have had a hierarchical organization lineage than other Mahaviharas as scholar Sukumar Dutt believes:



1. Abbot (Adhyaksa)
2. Six gate scholars (Dvarapala or Dvarapandita), one each for the Eastern, Western, First Central, Second Central, Northern, and Southern Gates. Ratnakarashanti (Eastern Gate), Vagisvarakirti (Western Gate), Ratnavajra (First Central Gate), Jnanasrimitra (Second Central Gate), Naropa (Northern Gate), and Prajnakaramati (Southern Gate). If this is correct, it must have been toward the end of Kanaka's reign given the generally accepted dates for Naropa (956-1041).
3. Great Scholars (Mahapandiita)
4. Scholars (Pandita), roughly 108 in number

5. Professors or Teachers (Upadhyaya or Acharya), roughly 160 in number including pandits.
6. Resident monks (Bhiksu), roughly 1,000 in number.

It has revealed a huge square monastery with a cruciform Stupa in its center, a library building and cluster of votive Stupas. To the north of monastery a number of scattered structures including a Tibetan and a Hindu temple have been found. The entire spread is over an area of more than one hundred acres. The monastery is a huge square structure, each side measuring 330 meters having a series of 208 cells, 52 on each of the four sides opening into a common verandah. A few brick arched underground chambers beneath some of the cells have also been noticed which were probably meant for confined meditation by the monks.

About 32 meters south of the monastery on its south west corner and attached with the main monastery through a narrow corridor is a rectangular structure identified as a library building. It was air-conditioned by cooled water of the adjoining reservoir through a range of vents in the back wall. The system was perhaps meant for preserving delicate manuscripts.

The main Stupa built for the purpose of worship is a brick structure laid in mud mortar which stands in the center of the square monastery. This two-terraced Stupa is cruciform on plan and about 15 meters high from the ground level accessible through a flight of steps on the north side on each of the four cardinal directions. There is a protruding chamber with a pillared antechamber and a separate pillared Mandapa in front, placed beyond the circumbulatory passage.

In the four chambers of Stupa were placed colossal stucco images of seated Buddha of which three were found in situ, but the remaining of the north side was possibly replaced by a stone image after the clay image was somehow damaged. All the stucco images are unfortunately broken above the waist. The images are placed over a brick pedestal having traces of painting in red and black pigments. The walls and floors of the chamber and antechamber were plastered with lime. The lower terrace is about 2.25 meters high from the ground level and the upper terrace is at a similar height from the lower side. At both terraces there is a circumbulatory path, the lower about 4.5 meters wide and the upper about 3 meters wide.

The wall carvings of various deities show the magnificence of Pala art. The architecture of the stupa and the terracotta plaques bear great resemblance to the Somapura Mahavihar, Paharpur (Bangladesh) which, too, was founded by the same king Dharmapala. In plan both are very much alike with the significant difference that Somapura is centered on a central temple rather than a Stupa. Vikramasila monastery is also larger and has fort-like projections on its outer wall.

### 3.2.3 Tamralipti Vihar, Medinipur

Tamralipti, ancient settlement mentioned in early Indian literature, Ceylonese texts, in the descriptions of Greek geographers and Chinese pilgrims. In the map of the Greek geographer Ptolemy, Tamralipti appears as Tamalities and Chinese pilgrim Hiuen-Tsang calls the town Tan-mo-lih-ti. In Tamralipti Fa-hien had spent two years, and visited twenty-two monasteries, inhabited by monks in 5<sup>th</sup> century. Another Chinese traveler in 7<sup>th</sup> century, I-Tsing, is said to have noticed an Ashokan pillar there and he referred to Tamralipti as a thriving port for exporting indigo, silk, and copper (Sanskrit: *Tamra*), from which it derived its name.[11]

Jain sources identify Tamralipti as the capital of the kingdom of Banga. According to the *Mahavamsa*, an epic history of Sri Lanka, it was the departure point of Prince Vijaya's expedition to colonize Sri Lanka in 500 BC. These indicate that Tamralipti was located on the eastern coast near the shore of the Bay of Bengal and River Ganga.. According to scholars, the settlement dated roughly between fourth-third centuries BC to eighth century AD. The Dudhpani rock inscription of Udaymana (eighth century) contains the last record of Tamralipti as a port of ancient South Asia. This justifies the existence of maritime trade links between Bengal and Southeast Asia with the Bhagirathi acting as maritime channel. It was related to trade routes and pilgrimage. It has also led to the belief that Tamralipti had emerged as a thriving urban settlement in this period and had multidirectional links with different geographical regions of South Asia. In fact, if we consider the socio-religious pattern of Tamluk, there is evidence to suggest that the culture of Aryan influenced life in early period.



The worship of Bheema is a sign of the acceptance of Aryan culture in this area. Once, the famous Buddhist Religious and Academic center of South-Eastern India gradually became a centre of Sanatan Shakti Peeth (dedicated to the Hindu goddess Kali) and later in 15<sup>th</sup> century, became important Vaisnava Tirtha (holy place). Though there is controversy regarding the identification of this port, historians have generally agreed that present day Tamluk town of Medinipur district, (known as Midhunapura in the ancient period) West Bengal, is the site of the ancient city.

In 1954-55, no structures could be unearthed in the primary excavation; only rammed floor levels and ring wells were encountered. Later in 1973-74, excavation revealed four successive architectural periods:

**Period I** yielded an assemblage of Neolithic Celts.

**Period II** dated to third-second century BC, we may link this period to the so-called Maurya-Shunga reign and evidence of a brick built tank and a few terracotta ring wells were also exposed.

**Period III** belongs to the Shunga-Kusana phase seems the richest one and have yielded a very large collection of terracotta figures, some with definite Hellenistic affiliation. The assemblage indicates a sophisticated urban life where citizens were expert in art.

**Period IV** stratigraphically represents the so-called Gupta period. Unfortunately the evidences do not match the narrations furnished by Chinese pilgrims about the Vihar. [12]

Near Tamuk, in the west, in Moghalmari village, an archaeological excavation site in the west Medinipur district

revealed a built form consisted of a structural mound with bricks strewn over the surface, locally known as 'SashisenRajar

**Dhibi.'** The site revealed a Triratha projection in the western part of the site consisting of a



wall running north-south which is considered to be a wall of a small monastic complex. Triratha means, three chariots. Where Tri- an architectural practice where wall divided into three segments and Ratha - segments produced upon the face of the temple wall by projecting part of it to a more forward plane. The divided wall and Panchayatana (5 shrined) temple surrounded by a boundary wall. The excavation also revealed square and rectangular structures (considered to be cells) apart from other antiquities. The artifact remains indicated that it belongs to 6th-7th Century. The other site consists of five circular brick bases of Stupas and pottery strewn over the surface. This second site revealed three circular brick structures considered to be base of Stupas.

In 2006-07 another extensive excavation was started on another site. The excavations in third site revealed a long wall covered with stucco decorations consisting of floral, animals and human figurines, along with an important discovery of Buddha image on a slate stone. It also evidenced two stages of construction of the structure.



Another round of excavations in 2012, the excavation also revealed a Pradikshana path in the eastern and southern part of the site. The excavation has also revealed a central temple structure with cells surrounding a square courtyard.

According to Rajat Sanyal, from the excavating team, the structure was constructed during the Vajrayana phase of Buddhism, when deity worship started in Buddhism, as the presence of figures of some Hindu deities in the walls including Jambala and Saraswati are prominent, which demonstrate that the influence of Gupta tradition in the artifacts of Bengal from middle Ganges region.

### 3.2.4 Odantapuri Vihara

It also spelled Uddandapura, a Buddhist center of learning (*vihara*) in Bihar, India. It was founded in the 7th century by Gopala, the first ruler of the Pala dynasty, no doubt in emulation of its neighbor Nalanda. The Vihar lost in the womb of time and only little remains.

Odantapuri served as a model and inspiration for Tibetan Buddhists. Tibetan sources indicate that in 749 AD the Sam-Ye (Bsam-Yas) monastery was modeled upon it and several distinguished Tibetan scholars studied there. It fell into decline during the 11th century, and it was probably sacked and destroyed, along with Nalanda, in 1200, when Muslims under Ikhtiyar- al-Din Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khalji invaded Bihar.



## 4 Let's have a trip with Atisha!

### 4.1 Atisha in Java-Sumatra (Indonesia)



#### 4.1.1 Borobudur Temple, Indonesia

This temple is located at Borobudur District, South of Magelang, Central Java, dates to between 750 and 850 AD. Borobudur was built by Sanmaratungga in the 8th century and belongs to Buddha Mahayana. Borobudur was revealed by Sir Thomas Stanford Raffles in 1814, was found in ruined condition and was buried under volcanic ash.

#### Architectural conception

Nieuwenkamp (an artist) imagined Borobudur as "A big lotus flower bud is ready to bloom" which looks "floating" on the lake. Nieuwenkamp's imagination was supported by N. Rangkuti (1987) that the Borobudur Temple looks floating from bird's eye view. From geological studies, experts were able to prove that Borobudur area was one time a big lake. Based on the inscription dated 842 AD stated a phrase such as: "Kawulan i Bhumi Sambhara". Kawulan means the origin of holiness; "bhumi sambhara" is a name of a place in Borobudur. The imaginary power of human had shown its best for this temple, as Borobudur Temple is considered as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Thus Bernet Kemper said, "Borobudur is Borobudur", meaning that Borobudur Temple is very unique in her own way. However, the name "Borobudur" probably comes from the Sanskrit words 'Vihara Buddha Urh,' meaning "Buddhist Monastery on the Hill." Borobudur seems to be the work of the predominantly-Buddhist Sailendra Dynasty, a tributary power to the Srivijayan Empire. Most experts believe that this was erected in such height due to volcanic eruptions in the area during the 10th and 11th centuries.

#### Structural Design and Construction of Borobudur Temple:

Ever since the first excavation, most experts speculated on the exact shape of the temple. Hoenig, in his book "Das form problem des Borobudur" speculate that the original form of Borobudur Temple had four gates and nine floors. According to Parmentier, the huge single Stupa on top of the temple made the smaller Stupas in the lower part looked drowned.

Stutterheim who had been studying Stupas, concluded that the structure was an Indian origin. The original purpose of Stupa building was as storage of Buddha Gautama and other holy priest's cremation ash.

According to Stutterheim, the overall form of Borobudur Temple is a combination of Zigurat (middle Asian Pyramid) and Indian Stupa. Stutterheim opinion was supported by the existence of this type of form in Ancient Javanese literature.

Paul Mus stated that Borobudur Temple had the structure of Stupa (conical form) with double expression. As a whole, the Borobudur Temple was an open-flat Stupa, but on the other hand, the temple expressed the idea of a "closed world". Actually, Borobudur is a symbol of cosmic mountain covered by the sky roof, a specific world that could be reached through isolated alleys as stages. The closed structural design of the temple expressed the concept of a closed world, so called Buddha's observation about earthly life, not just any technical reason as had been suggested by other experts. [13]

The overall height was 42 meters, but was only 34.5 meters after restoration, and had the dimension of 123 x 123 meters (15,129 square meters). There were 10 floors. The first floor up to the sixth floor was square by form; the seventh to the tenth floor were round form. Borobudur is facing to the East with a total of 1460 panels (2 meters wide each). Total size of the temple walls was 2500 square meters, full of relief. The total number of panels with relief was 1212. According to investigations, the total number of Buddha statue was 504 including the intact and damaged statues.



The temple itself is made of some 60,000 square meters of stone, all of which had to be quarried elsewhere, shaped, and carved under the scorching tropical sun. A huge number of laborers must have worked on the colossal building, which consists of six square platform layers topped by three circular platform layers. Borobudur is decorated with 504 Buddha statues and 2,670 beautifully-carved relief panels, with 72 Stupas on top. The reliefs at the Walls of the Alley of Borobudur temple started from the base of the temple up to the fourth platform. There was a long series of main relieves at the first alley, either at the main wall or at the inner side of Kutamara wall. Division of panels are decorated with 120 frames contained the story of the life of Buddha. The first frames began from the South of stairway of the curved gate at the East and follow the path of the sun (the temple on the right side). There were many beautiful

ornaments inscribed at the wall of the fourth alley, because the fifth alley did not contain any ornaments as it is a transitional alley to the next platform, the round one. The next round platforms also did not contained any ornaments at all. [14]The base relief panels depict everyday life in 9th century Java, courtiers and soldiers, local plants and animals, and the activities of common people. Other panels feature Buddhist myths and stories, and show such spiritual beings as gods, bodhisattvas, Kinnaras, Asuras and Apsaras. The carvings confirm Gupta India's strong influence on Java at the time; the higher beings are depicted mostly in the Tribhanga (three folded) pose typical of contemporary Indian statuary, in which the figure stands on one bent leg with the other foot propped in front, and gracefully bends its neck and waist so that the body forms a gentle 'S' shape.

## 4.2 Atisha in Tibet

### 4.2.1 Drolma lhakhang (The Monastery of goddess Tara)

In 1046, Atisha (the matchless Jowo Je) was invited to Nyetang by his disciple Zhongdunba and he stayed in Nyetang from this time onwards and when he died in 1054. One year after Atisha had passed, his disciples decided to build a small monastery Drolma lhakhang to house the statue of Zhomalhakang Tara (the speaking Tara) which Atisha had worshipped. It was established on the flat land in Nyetang, in Chushul district, approximately 20 km away from the holy city, Lhasa, by his foremost disciples Dromtonpa, founder of Kadampa order, to which the monastery belongs.



Near the monastery there is a pagoda which serves as the tomb for some of Atisha's bones. To the east and not far from the monastery is a carved rock statue of the Nyetang Buddha.

In the middle of the ground floor of the shrine of the two-story temple, the most important item is the relic of the tutelary deity of Atisha, a bronze statue of Jetsun (green) Tara. To the right and left of these, on two levels, are statues of Tara made of gold and copper dated eighteenth century. Inside the shrine, to the right, is the one-storey high Namgyal Stupa. To the right and left are the four great bronze Stupas which Atisha brought from India. To the right and left are eight bronze statues of Medicine Buddha brought. To the left of the temple, on the inside, behind the main stone throne, is a statue of the Conqueror Dipamkara (a previous emanation of Shakyamuni Buddha). Atisha's (Jowo Je) robes are contained in the two clay Stupas.



West of the temple is a protector chapel, containing Atisha's protector guardian and protector deities, the caretaker's residence, a large courtyard and a door with two steps. The Tsulagkhang (central temple), one thousand years of age, was built in different phases.

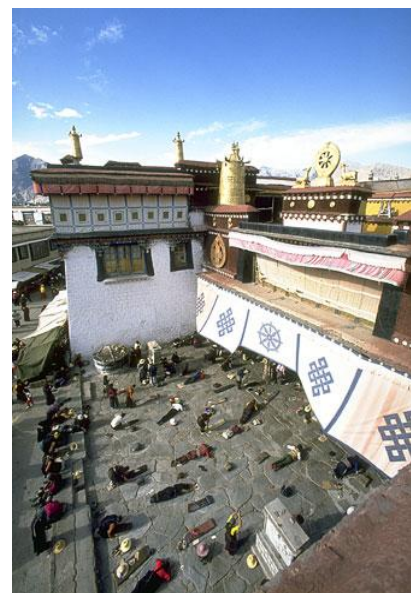
The exterior has long open-porch, symmetrical windows. Outside the wall are some turning Mani (prayer) wheels. In the middle of the upper floor there is a residence for the Dalai Lama and to the right and left are two private residences. The interior has decorated with several representations and frescoes of Bodhisattva Tara (*Drolma Lhakhang*). These representations are depicted in natural pigment white, blue, green, and red.

The moral remains and other personal effects of the great philosopher are still preserved in Nyetang Monastery. Rahula Sankrityana, an eminent scholar monk of India who spent a number of years studying development of Buddhism in Tibet writes:

*"On my return from Lasha during April 1930 visited this very sacred place. There have been very few changes in this monastery since the time of Atisha. The massive red sandal pillar of those days is its proof. Till today Atisha's begging bowl, 'Dhammakarika' and wooden stick are still enshrined with veneration in a casket with royal seals as if to inform the world of the indomitable courage and abilities of the elderly Bengali saint."*[15]

## 2 The Jokhang Temple (House of Religious Science or House of Wisdom)

Another temple commemorate with Atisha, is located on Barkhor Square in the old town section of Lhasa. The entire temple complex occupies an area of 25,000 sq. meters approximately. For most Tibetans it is the most sacred and important temple in Tibet.



The temple has remained a key center of Buddhist pilgrimage for many centuries. Along with the Potala Palace, it is probably the most popular tourist attraction in Lhasa because this is also UNESCO World Heritage Site. The circumambulation route is known as the "kora" in Tibetan and is marked by four large stone incense burners placed at the corners of the temple complex. The Jokhang temple is a four-story construction, with roofs covered with gilded bronze tiles. The architectural style is based on the Indian Vihara design and later extensions followed a blend of Nepalese and Tang Dynasty styles. Many Nepalese artists worked during the construction of the temple.

A walled enclosure in front of the Jokhang contains the stumps of willows known as the 'Jowo Utra' (Hair of the Jowo je) which according to tradition were planted. Two Doling or inscribed pillars flank the north and south entrances to the temple. Jokhang's interior is a dark and atmospheric labyrinth of chapels dedicated to various gods and bodhisattvas, illuminated by votive candles and thick with the smoke of incense.

The Jokhang Temple was greatly expanded between 1690 and 1694. Although some parts of the temple has been rebuilt but original elements remained: wooden carvings and lintels, the wooden beams and rafters; the Newari door frames, columns and finials which date from the 7th and 8th centuries.

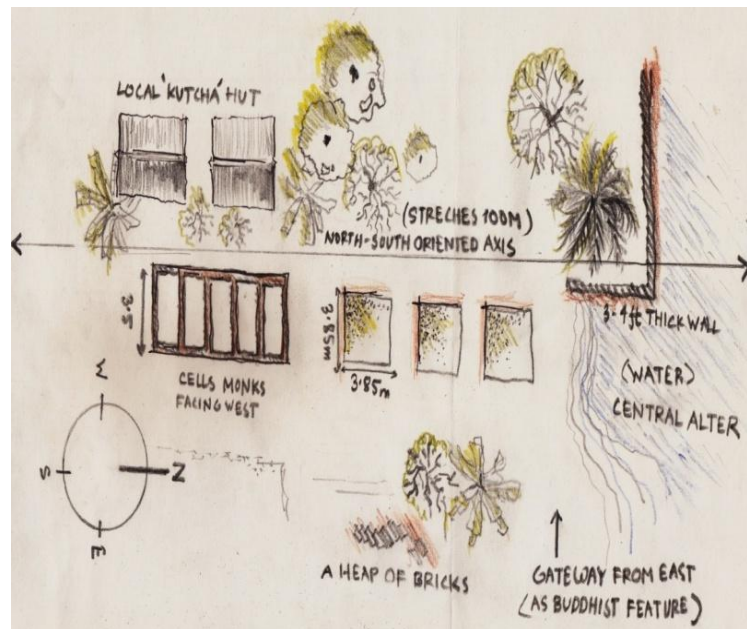
### III. HOME, SWEET HOME!

#### 5.1 Bikrampur Vihar: (Excavation in March, 2013)



*"This is an incident of huge importance to all of us. Many historians have mentioned about a Vihar at Bajrojogini in Bikrampur, but we are lucky to find it just within three years. The similarity between the names of the Bihar and this area also suggests so."* said Prof. Sufi Mustafizur Rahman.

Recently Archaeologists lead by professor Sufi Mostafizur Rahman of Jahangirnagar University have discovered an old Buddhist monastery in Munshiganj, considered to be at least 1000 Years old, sites at Ramapal and Bojrojogini villages situated nearby the homestead of Buddhist scholar Atish Dipankar. With financial support from the Ministry of Culture in 2011, the excavation continued for 3 consecutive seasons, last one held in March 2013. The monastery is located at Raghurampur village under Rampal Upazila of Munshiganj District at the junction of many rivers that flow into the tidal waters of the Delta which comprised the area with the river Padma on the west, the Dhaleswari on the north east, and the confluence of the Arial Kha river and the Meghna River on the south. According to a map from 1781, the river Kaliganga ran through the middle of the region creating the two parts – North Bikramapur and South Bikramapur. It stretched 30 to 40 miles from east to west and about 8 to 10 miles from north to south.





This is the first Buddhist monastery in Munshiganj and assumed to be "Bikrampur Buddhist Monastery" which was built during the Pala period and patronized by king Dharma Pala. The site including local 'Kutchha' houses measures 100m x 70m and about 2m high from surrounding low lands at a distant of 8km from district headquarter. They have exposed five rooms of Buddhist monks sized 3.5x3.5 meters. Also a wall has been exposed from the monastery which stretches towards the south and the west from the central alter which yet to be evaluated by the means of time; archaeologists believe they may have finally found Atish Dipankar's great Vihara. This solid brick walls, measuring in many cases more than 3 or 4 feet thick; appear to be the result of at least two periods of development, dating prior to the 11th Century.

An interesting addition to this site is what appear to be the remains of, perhaps, a Jain Temple, adjoining a nearby British Period farmhouse.



## 5.2 Background and importance of the site.



Now, what the message that the bricks, faced the sun after several centuries due to excavation; are trying to interpret? The lost monastery of Bikrampur, located at Raghurampur village of Rampal surrounded by rivers comprising the Delta which bored ancient civilizations recurrently, but couldn't protect them from the womb of "Kirtinasha" (one who destroys the creations of human) another name of river Ganges. The numerous ruins scattered all over this low flood prone region were meant not only for monastic devotion but also for flourishing the craftsmanship on brass crafts, earthen pottery and so on which made this region as centre of trade. The names of districts surrounding the area includes the word 'Gonj' means 'trade centre' which have some sort of Muslim influence as the area

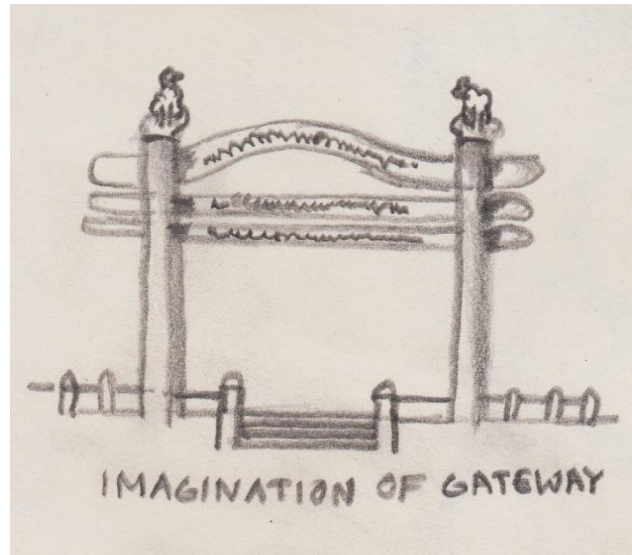
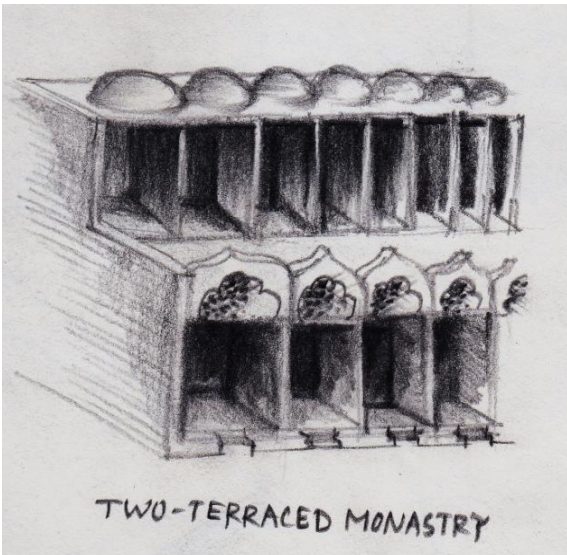
ruled later by them but couldn't erase its origin. Don't forget the importance of Uwary-Bateswar, mostly recognized as the river port 'Ganga-Riddhi' (means established by river Ganges herself) indicated in the writings of Ptolemy dated from roman age is only in distant to northern periphery. However, from many historians' description, we know that in Samata there were two centers of learning- Bikrampur Vihar at Bikrampur (Munshigonj) and Dhammarajika Bihar at Dhamrai (Dhaka). In the book of **Buddhism in Bangladesh: Harry Belitz** described some important information -

*'One local dynasty, that of the Khadgas are mentioned in a plate found in the Dhaka district at Ashrafpur. These kings were Buddhists and their capital was Karmanta, which identified as Kamta, fourteen miles west of Comilla. In the 10th and 11th Century there was another line of local ruler, also Buddhist by religion, who bear the name of Chandra and had their capital at Bikrampur in the Dhaka district. Their existence is due to the discovery of copper plate grants at Idirpur and Kedarpur in this district, as well as Rampal, the old capital of Bikrampur in Dhaka. There may be some doubt that any portion of Dhaka district was included in the ancient kingdom of Bramhaputra valley of Kamrup. A passage in the Jogini Tantra distinctly states that the southern boundary of that kingdom was the junction of the river Bramhaputra and the Shito-Lakshya, where Narayangonj district is located to-day. The numerous Bihars scattered all over this region were meant not only for monastic way of teaching but also for imparting lessons on subjects like arts, crafts, astronomy, geography, agriculture, herbal medicines, pottery and so on which made this region as centre of trade .....According to O'malley, this was Bangladesh depicted through the pen of Hiuen-Tsang - "There were about thirty Buddhist monasteries with some 3000 priests and thirty Brahminical temples.*

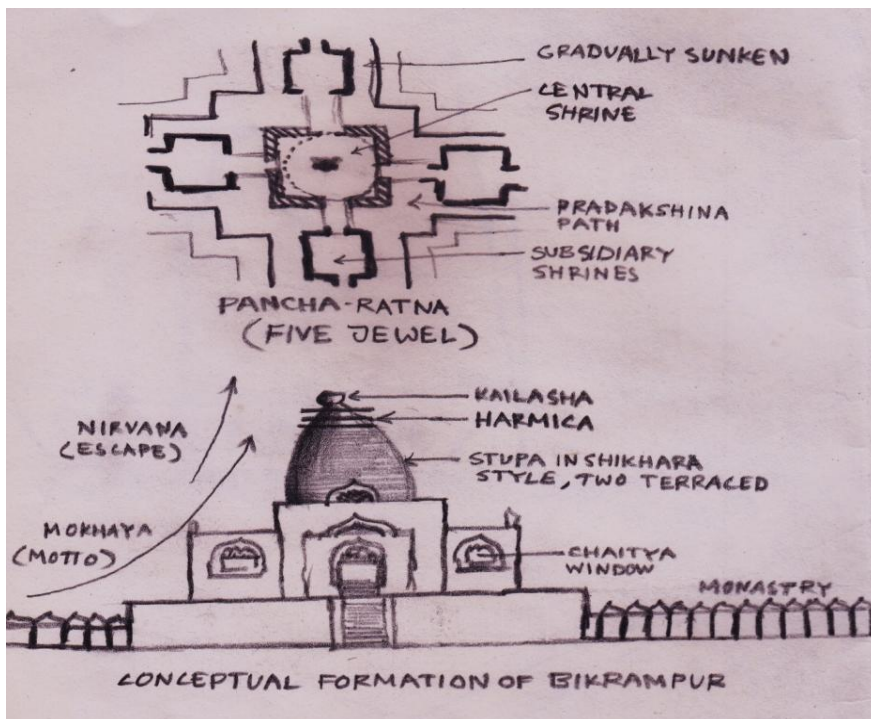
It is interesting to observe that adherents of orthodox Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism lived side by side apparently peacefully.”..... Ruins of stupas built by Ashoka in the village Dhamrai (Dhaka) still stands as a witness of flourishing state of Buddhism. Dhamrai is supposed to have derived its name from Dharmarajika. This view was corroborated by the historian Jatindra Nath Bose. ....Scholars like Santarakshit, a professor of Nalanda University; Pandit Shilabhadra, the Principal of Nalanda University and other scholars made many contributions to the progress of mankind. [16]

**5.3 What it could be?**

Let us imagine about the features of this Vihara, according through a diachronic study of the Buddhist architecture. There could be a gradually sunken crucified plan of its central shrine. This follows the Pancharatna concept of planning (consisting of a central shrine and four subsidiary ones in the corner). This was destined to be of the Buddhist architecture in India. A quadrangular built-form may contain those five cells (3.5x3.5 meters) or the extensive remains of these five brick monasteries may be arranged on a systematic layout. Monasteries were facing west and the adjoining happens at right angles on the edges. Built around a spacious and square courtyard with that cruciform shrine in the center, the approach might be facing its steps to



gateway to the north-south axis. As we see in Borobudur temple, frames began from the South of stairway to the curved gate at the East, might be following the path of the sun. Who knows, there may be some subsidiary Chaitya-halls built around the path, but sure, all of these may enclosed by a massive boundary for fortification.



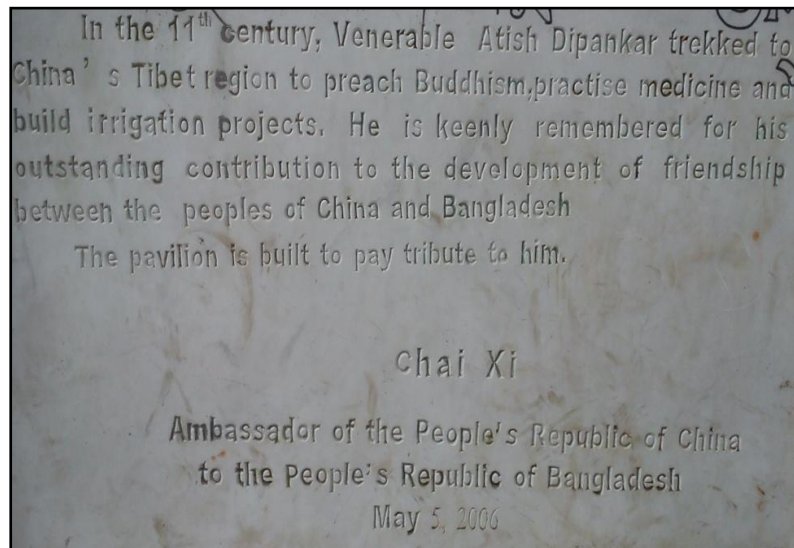
At the centre, as maximum Viharas tends to have a pivotal mound, we can either propose a temple-like spire ‘Shikhara’ at the top or a Stupa with canopy (Harmika) or combined. The projection toward verticality with stepped progress reminds us the Buddhist practice to decide a Mokhsa (motto) to achieve the Nirvana (eternal escape). But it’s my opinion that the Stupa seems impossible as brick as material cannot be a fundamental element for large dome. That’s why; the material of great Stupa at Sanchi was stone.

As we see in Shalbon Vihara, the row of temples on the west and monasteries on the east of the central monumental axis, have orientation to north-south. Adjacent with the main monastery through a narrow corridor is a rectangular structure identified as a library building there. Again, the 15 meters high two-terraced Stupa, to perform worship, is of brick and lies in mud mortar. The Stupa is accessible through a flight of steps on each of the four cardinal directions to the pillared Mandapa surrounded by circumbulatory passage (pradikshana). For information, This circumambulation path is known as the "kora" in Tibet and is marked by four large stone, as we see in Jokhang Temple, had its origin in Viharas of Bengal. Incense burners placed at the corners, which could be a Tibetan addition.

Same thing we can perceive for Bikrampur Vihara like Shalbon as it is not only its closest neighbor but also contemporary by the means of foundation. Except the pillared Mundapa, which is a Hindu feature that probably added in later centuries, as we know, Anada Vihar lost its character during Deva dynasty.



The brick size of Bikrampur Vihar found varying between 15cm x 11cm x 4cm and 16cm x 9cm x 3cm which is approximate to Ananda Vihar. Sculptures of different gods, some small pieces of Basalt sculpture, a great deal of pottery and other relics including beads and masks. Moreover, copper plates of different dynasties including Chankra, Barman, Sena, and Deva have been found in and around Bikrampur. The name of Bikrampur appeared on those plates several times. [16]



For information, the homestead of Atisha is to the north-east corner of this site where commemorative pillars stand of 1.10m high erected by govt. of China in 2004 to celebrate 1000 years of his birth.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Bangladesh may boast for a precious educational background as long before Europe's first universities in Bologna (1088); Paris (1150); Oxford (1167); and Cambridge (1209), centers of learning flourished in this part of the world. Established during the Mourya, the Gupta and the Pala dynasties, they attracted scholars from all over the world. Chinese scholar-travelers Fa-Hien (Faxian, 337-422 AD) and Hiuen Tsang (Xuanzang, 602-664 AD) ventured to this part of the world for its enriched archive of knowledge in its libraries. Mahasthangarh (Est: 3rd Cent BC) in Bogra; Mainamati (Est: 8th Cent AD) in Comilla; and Somapura Mahavira (Est: 8th Cent AD) in Paharpur, bear testimony of grand civilizations that once blossomed in Bangladesh.

As from previous discussion, it is obvious that architect and archaeologist have different role to play on same research like this. The duty of archaeologist comes first, actually the vital one which is his/her intellectual property also. As well as this belongs to Dr. Sufi Mostafiz for this site. Architects are the simply trouble-maker! But the 'fruit' taken by architects is kept for forever, once it is excavated; with lot of controversy and argument, even after 100 years as we see for the remodeling of Paharpur Vihar by prof. Naqi.

There shouldn't be any offence if a crazy architect goes too much optimistic with available rationality to imagine about the plight of his own country. Whether the excavation of Bikrampur Vihar is just of onset stage, it is difficult to predict the success of this essay depending on the valuable opinions by the scholars of different subjects including historians, archaeologists, architects, urban specialist, sociologists etc. through constructive arguments. Hope, this may open the window for the researchers and further studies & research can enrich my findings in future to promote our history of architecture as well as to uphold Bangladesh's very much own identity.

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