

Topic- Nalanda Museum

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P.G./ M.A. IVth Semester ,

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Paper- Museology (E.C.)

Born in the year 1917 A.D., the Archaeological Museum, Nalanda houses about thirteen thousand five hundred objects in its rich collection. Except few object from Rajgir (15 kms.) and few from neighboring villages all the antiquities have been found in excavations of the extensive site of Nalanda Mahavihara, supposedly the earliest University complex which flourished from early fifth century A.D. till the end of twelfth century. The collection includes stone sculptures, inscriptions, stuccos, terracottas, clay seal & sealings, metal objects, ivory & bone objects, ornamental objects in different mediums and many other things of antiquarian significance.

Fairly a good number of bronze objects, about four hundred and thirty or so, have been preserved in this museum. Discovery of a four chambered smelting furnace, a little north to the Temple site-13 suggests that the monks and students of Nalanda university were familiar with the process of casting metal for images and sculptures. Metal casting as a science must have been highly developed at that

time and probably it was a part of the curriculum. Metal slag, clay moulds, ribs and a number of fragmentary fire crucibles were found while exposing the said furnace. According to silpasastra, bronze means ashtadhatu or an octo alloy of eight metals namely copper, tin, lead, antimony, zinc, iron, gold and silver in varying proportions. Copper being the chief ingredient whereas gold and silver are either nil or negligible as far as Nalanda bronzes are concerned. The bronze sculptures of Nalanda have been prepared by cire-perdue or lost wax process. The desired image is first modelled in wax and then coated with clay. When the clay is dried to leather hard state, it is put on fire to get the melt wax out of the clay mould through pipes provided for the purpose at the time of clay coating. Now the liquid metal molten at high temperature is poured into the hollow mould. After the metal is cooled the clay mould is broken to get the Desired image.

At Nalanda we have found composite specimens also which were prepared in pieces and joined together after casting. In a number of images found at Nalanda the pedestal, body of the image and stele have been casted separately and joined with the help of rods or otherwise. The metal artisans of Nalanda had excelled in the technique of gilding and enameling also which generally exuberate the quality of the metal product. It is worth mentioning that in some images urna and eyes have been made of silver inlaid which again represent the high technical skill of metal artisans of Nalanda. Inscription on back of the stele of an image.

The bronze objects have been displayed in gallery No.-03 of Nalanda museum arranged in thirteen wall-showcases. Three of those are dedicated to Buddha images in different postures like Abhaya, Varada, Dhyana, Dharma Chakra Pravartana etc. Whereas three to Bodhisattvas and other Buddhist male deities. Tara and Prajnaparamita the most popular female deities for Buddhist world are arranged in two showcases in different poses and other two showcases have been allotted to the deities of Hindu pantheon including Vishnu, Surya, Ganesa, Kuber, Rati-Kamadev and many others which were found at Nalanda. Another set of two show cases display the decorative and daily use objects like quiver, mirror, waist band, pots, sceptre etc. Where as one represents the models and specimens of stupa and temple architecture. A bronze image of first Tirthankara Rishabhanath, is the only piece in bronze in the collection of this museum, as far as Jaina faith is concerned. Rishabhanath has been shown seated in dhyana mudra, the meditation. The pedestal depicts wheel at the centre and sitting bulls on either sides. On the basis of inscriptions available on some objects, comparative study of iconographical features and art style the bronzes of Nalanda are assignable to 8"-12" century A.D. and represent the high technical skill of metal craftsmanship of Magadhan school of art during the rule of great Pala kings of Bengal.