



VEDIC india

This series takes a close look at facets of Vedic India that are alive even today.



the buddha

This article is a researched article and borrows heavily from printed and electronic encyclopedias as well as material provided by our panel of research scholars, astrologers, academics and pundits.

On 17th May 2011, Buddha Purnima was celebrated across India, Nepal and many other countries. This article throws light on Lord Buddha and Buddhism.

The festival of Buddha Purnima or Buddha Jayanti celebrates the birth of Gautam Buddha in 563 BC. Bodhgaya (Bihar) and Sarnath (Uttar Pradesh) are, in particular, known for the Buddha Purnima celebrations which are held in these two cities. On this day, Buddhists all over the world commemorate three great events: The Birth, Enlightenment and the Passing Away of Gautama Buddha.



The Main Image Of Lord Buddha In Bodhgaya Temple

The most important of all the Buddhist festivals, Buddha Purnima is considered the most auspicious of all days in the year. Although there are minor regional variations in the way Buddha Purnima is observed, the festival is generally observed by lighting oil lamps before the image of the Buddha, by reciting prayers or reading from the Buddhist scriptures and worshipping the statue of Buddha. Meditation and offerings of flowers, silk scarves, incense sticks and fruits are also part of the worship ritual.



Buddhism addresses itself to all people irrespective of race, nationality, or gender. However, because Buddhism does not include the idea of worshipping a creator the God, some people do not see it as a religion in the normal sense. Buddhism is seen as a path of practice and spiritual development leading to insight into the true nature of life. Buddhist practices such as meditation are means of changing oneself in order to develop the qualities of awareness, kindness, and wisdom. The experience developed within the Buddhist tradition over thousands of years has created an incomparable resource for all those who wish to follow a path — a path which ultimately culminates in Enlightenment or Buddhahood.

Life and Times of The Buddha

Siddhartha Gautama (Born 563 BC or 623 BC) is the primary figure in Buddhism, and accounts of his life, discourses, and monastic rules are believed by Buddhists to have been summarized after his death and

memorized by his followers. Various collections of teachings attributed to him were passed down by oral tradition, and first committed to writing about 400 years later. According to tradition King Suddhodana, the leader of Shakya clan, whose capital was Kapilavastu is the father of Gautam Buddha. Gautama was his family name. His mother, Queen MahaMaya left Kapilavastu for her father's kingdom to give birth to her son. However, her son is said to have been born on the way, at Lumbini, in a garden beneath a sal tree. King Suddhodana held a naming ceremony on the fifth day, and invited eight brahmin scholars to read the future. All gave a dual prediction that the baby would either become a great king or a great holy man. The infant was given the name Siddhartha, meaning "he who achieves his aim".

King Suddhodana, wishing for his son to be a great king, is said to have shielded him from religious teachings and from knowledge of human suffering. When he reached the age of 16, his father reputedly arranged his marriage to a cousin of the



Renovated Bodhgaya Temple

same age named Yasodhara .According to the traditional account, she gave birth to a son, named Rahula. Although his father ensured that Siddhartha was provided with everything he could want or need, Buddhist scriptures say that the future Buddha felt that material wealth was not life's ultimate goal.

At the age of 29, Siddhartha left his palace to meet his subjects. Despite his father's efforts to hide from him the sick, aged and suffering, Siddhartha was said to have seen an old man. When his charioteer Channa explained to him that all people grew old, the prince went on further trips beyond the palace. On these he encountered a diseased man, a decaying corpse, and an ascetic. These depressed him, and he initially strove to overcome ageing, sickness, and death by living the life of an ascetic. Accompanied by Channa and aboard his horse Kanthaka, Gautama quit his palace for the life of a mendicant. It's said that, "the horse's hooves were muffled by the Gods" to prevent guards from knowing of his departure.

After a reputed 49 days of meditation, under a pipal tree - now known as the Bodhi tree - in Bodh Gaya, India, Siddhartha, at the age of 35, is said to have attained Enlightenment. From that time, Gautama was known to his followers as the Buddha or "The Awakened One."

After his awakening, the Buddha travelled to the Deer Park near Varanasi in northern India, where he set in motion what

Quotes of the Buddha

- "Thousands of candles can be lit from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared."
- "An idea that is developed and put into action is more important than an idea that exists only as an idea."
- "All that we are is the result of what we have thought. The mind is everything. What we think we become."
- "To understand everything is to forgive everything"
- "However many holy words you read, However many you speak, What good will they do you If you do not act on upon them?"
- "No one saves us but ourselves. No one can and no one may. We ourselves must walk the path."
- "To keep the body in good health is a duty...otherwise we shall not be able to keep our mind strong and clear."
- "Meditate. Live purely. Be quiet. Do your work with mastery. Like the moon, come out from behind the clouds! Shine."

Buddhists call the Wheel of Dharma by delivering his first sermon to the five companions with whom he had sought enlightenment. Together with him, they formed the first sangha: the company of Buddhist monks. For the remaining 45 years of his life, Buddha is said to have travelled in the Gangetic Plain, in what is now Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and southern Nepal, teaching a diverse range of people: from nobles to outcaste street sweepers, murderers such as Angulimala, and cannibals such as Alavaka. From the outset, Buddhism was equally open to all races and classes, and had no caste structure, as was the rule in Hinduism.

Upon hearing of his son's awakening, Suddhodana sent, over a period, ten delegations to ask him to return to Kapilavastu. On the first nine occasions, the delegates failed to deliver the message, and instead joined the sangha to become arahants (a spiritual practitioner who has realized certain high stages of attainment. the word arahant is interpreted to mean the "worthy one" or "one who has destroyed the foes of afflictions.") The tenth delegation, led by Kaludayi, a childhood friend of Gautama however, delivered the message but he, too, later became an arahant, On his return to Kapilavastu, many members of the royal

family also joined the sangha and his son Rahulaat became one of his ten chief disciples. At the age of 80, (about two centuries before the coronation of Emperor Ashoka) the Buddha announced that he would soon reach Parinirvana, or the final deathless state, and abandon his earthly body. The Buddha's final words are reported to have been: "All composite things pass away. Strive for your own liberation with diligence." His body was cremated and the relics were placed in monuments or stupas, some of which are believed to have survived until the present.

Please note that scholars are hesitant to make unqualified claims about the historical facts of the Buddha's life. Most accept that he lived, taught and founded a monastic order but do not consistently accept all of the details contained in his biographies.

In writing her biography of Buddha, Karen Armstrong noted, "It is obviously difficult to write a biography of the Buddha that will meet modern criteria, because we have very little information that can be considered historically sound... [but] we can be reasonably confident Siddhartha Gautama did indeed exist and that his disciples preserved the memory of his life and teachings as well as they could."



वैदिक india

Witnesses to the Buddha



80 Foot Buddha Statue

Before his death, Buddha enjoined his followers to make pilgrimages to four sites: Lumbini, where he was born; Uruvela (modern Bodh Gaya), the site of his enlightenment; Sarnath, the place of his first sermon; and Kushinara, where he died. Each of these sites may be visited today, and Bodh Gaya remains the most sacred of the four. Unfortunately, after the decline of Indian Buddhism in the 12th century, most Buddhist sites were destroyed or fell into disrepair.

Bodh Gaya (Bihar): It is famous for being the place of Gautama Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment, known by the Buddhist as Bodhimandala. The name Bodh Gaya did not come into use until the 18th century. Historically, it was known as Uruvela, Sambodhi, Vajrasana or Mahabodhi. The main monastery of Bodh Gaya used to be called the Bodhimanda-vihara. Now it is called the Mahabodhi Temple. In 2002, Mahabodhi Temple, located in Bodh Gaya, became a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Bodh Gaya today is a busy centre of

pilgrimage with monasteries and meditation centres run by Tibetan, Burmese, Thai and Vietnamese communities.

Sarnath (Uttar Pradesh): The Deer Park at Sarnath just north of Varanasi was the site of the Buddha's first discourse, and also where the Buddhist Sangha came into existence through the enlightenment of Kondanna. Today, it contains some of the most impressive Buddhist monuments in India. The beautiful park is dominated by the 5th-century Dhamekhstupa: one of two stupas marking the spot where the Buddha is said to have first taught the Dharma.

Buddha went from Bodhgaya to Sarnath about 5 weeks after his enlightenment. Before Gautama (the Buddha-to-be) attained enlightenment, he gave up his austere penances and his friends, the Pañcavaggiya monks, left him and went to Isipatana. After attaining Enlightenment the Buddha, leaving Uruvela, (Bodh Gaya) travelled to the Isipatana to join and teach them. He went to them because, using

his spiritual powers, he had seen that his five former companions would be able to understand Dharma quickly.

When Gautama Buddha found his five former companions, he taught them, they understood and as a result they also became enlightened. At that time the Sangha, the community of the enlightened ones, was founded. The sermon Buddha gave to the five monks was his first sermon, called the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta.

Kapilavastu and Lumbini: Siddhartha Gautama, the future Buddha, was born at Lumbini near the Shakyan capital of Kapilavastu in the southern region of Nepal known as the Terai. The 5th-century Chinese pilgrim Fa-hsien described Kapilavastu as a "great scene of empty desolation", populated by a few monks, a score or two of families and dangerous animals such as lions and white elephants. Fa-hsien none the less visited well-known sites, including the Shakyan palace, the place where the child bodhisattva's identifying marks were discovered, and, east of the city, the garden of Lumbini where the future Buddha's mother bathed and gave birth. Mounds, stupas and other ruins testified to previous Buddhist institutional prosperity. Buddhist tradition tells that emperor Ashoka visited Nepal in the 3rd century BC and erected a stupa and an inscribed column at Lumbini. ■

