



Path to Nirvana

THE LIFE, TEACHINGS AND TRAVELS OF THE BUDDHA



*“Now this is the noble truth about the origin of sorrow:
verily, sorrow arises from craving, which leads to
rebirth and thirst for sensual delights, seeking satisfaction
now here, now there—that is to say, the craving
for the gratification of passions, or the craving for life,
or the craving for success.”*

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA



PATH TO NIRVANA

THE LIFE, TEACHINGS
AND TRAVELS OF THE BUDDHA



The UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Ajanta Caves in Maharashtra features masterpieces of Buddhist rock-cut sculpture



*“If with a pure
mind a person speaks
or acts, happiness
follows them like a
never-departing
shadow.”*

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA





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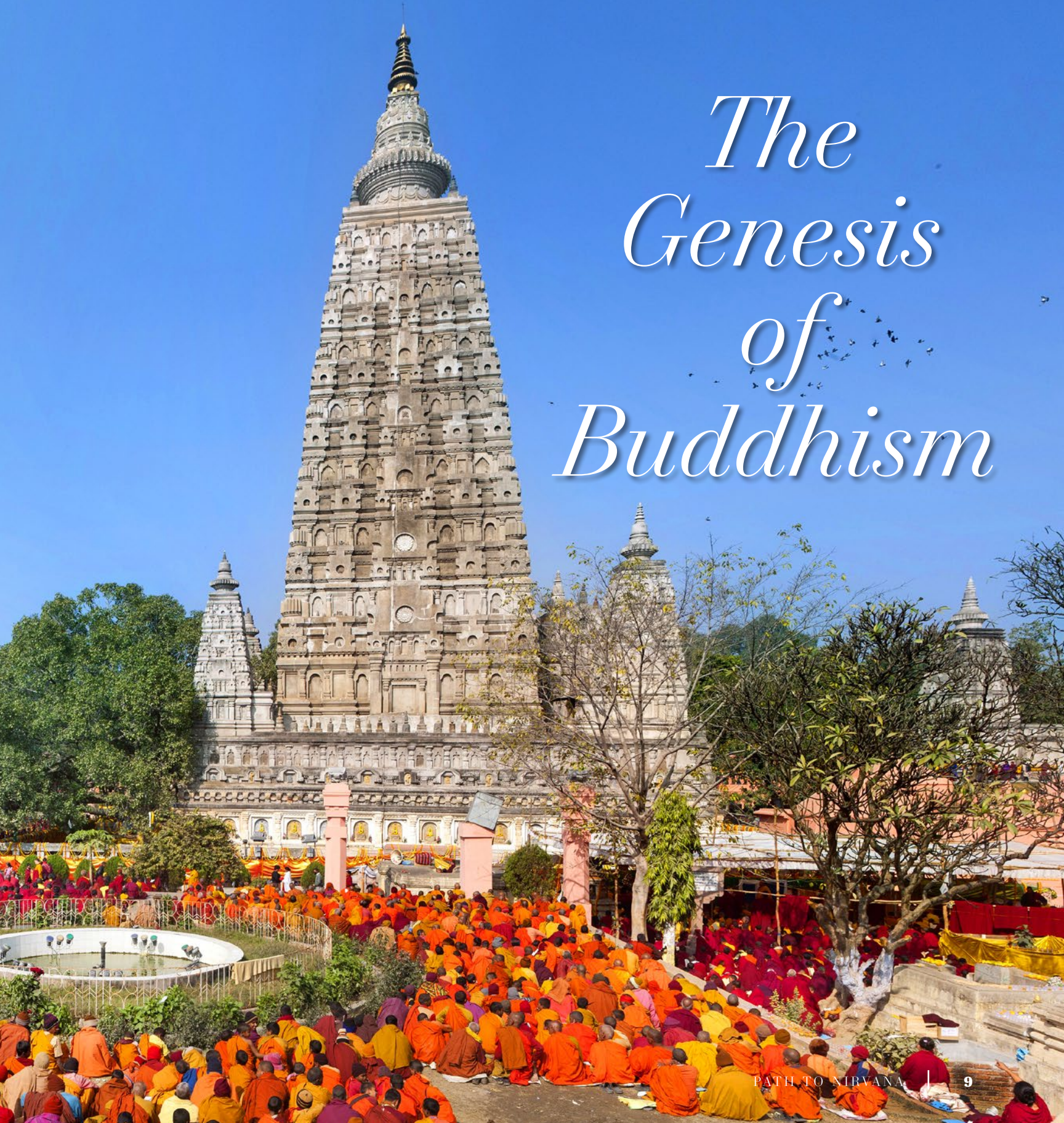
Buddhism: India's Gift to the World

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The Buddha's Life Lessons

The Mahabodhi Temple in Bihar adapted the Gandharan step design, carved with images of the Buddha





The Genesis of Buddhism

Heading towards the dawn of peace

*Buddham saranam gacchami.
Dhammam saranam gacchami.
Sangham saranam gacchami.*

I go to the Buddha for refuge.
I go to the Dhamma for refuge.
I go to the Sangha for refuge.

I ndia is the fountainhead of some of the world's most revered religious orders and philosophies. Buddhism is one of the most pre-eminent of them all. Buddhism originated from the teachings



Inside the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya, Bihar, a gilded statue of the seated Buddha holding the Earth with his right hand stands witness to his Enlightenment



WATCH NOW



The spot where the Buddha attained the Enlightenment, the Mahabodhi Tree in Bodhi Gaya, Bihar, draws monks from all over the world

of the Buddha, the Enlightened One, and spread like the famed Mahabodhi Tree—known as the *Peepal* (*Ficus Religiosa*), a sacred fig, under which the Buddha meditated and attained the Enlightenment. Over the last 2,500 years, Buddhism has found followers all across the world.

Over many centuries, although Buddhism

has become more prominent in many other countries of the world, it continues to remain a living religion in India, the country of its origin. Evidence of its presence, growth and adherence can be felt across the subcontinent. Undertake a train journey from the north to the south or the east to the west across the Indian peninsula,

THE GENESIS OF BUDDHISM

you can see many a magnificent structure demonstrating the splendour of Buddhism all across India. For instance, there is no sight more sublime than that of the Great Sanchi *Stupa*, the elegant shrine of the Buddhist faith in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, its structure symbolising the cosmic mountain. It was crowned by a *chatra* (umbrella), to protect and honour

the Buddha's relics housed inside the *stupa*. The magnificent *stupa* and vihara were built by Emperor Ashoka (268-232 BCE), and it exudes a sense of peace and calm, something like that of what the Buddha himself radiated, according to the ancient texts that were passed down orally.

Siddhārtha Gautama, a prince of the *Sakya* clan, gained the Enlightenment after



“His mind becomes calm. His word and deed are calm. Such is the state of tranquillity of one who has attained deliverance through the realisation of truth.”

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA



The Dhamekh Stupa in Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh is said to mark the site where the Buddha delivered his first sermon to his five disciples



A monk deep in meditation at the Swarna Gandha Kuti, Sravasti, Uttar Pradesh

meditating for 49 days sitting under the *Mahabodhi* Tree in Bodh Gaya, a major city of pilgrimage for the Hindus and the Buddhists in the state of Bihar. He became the Buddha and preached the need for inner peace that comes from letting go of attachment, desire, anger and sorrow, breaking free from the cycle of birth, old age and death. He gave his first sermon to five disciples in a deer park at Sarnath, near Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh), the oldest city in the world to have been continually



Built by Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE, the Great Stupa of Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh contains relics of the Buddha, while its structure symbolises the cosmic mountain



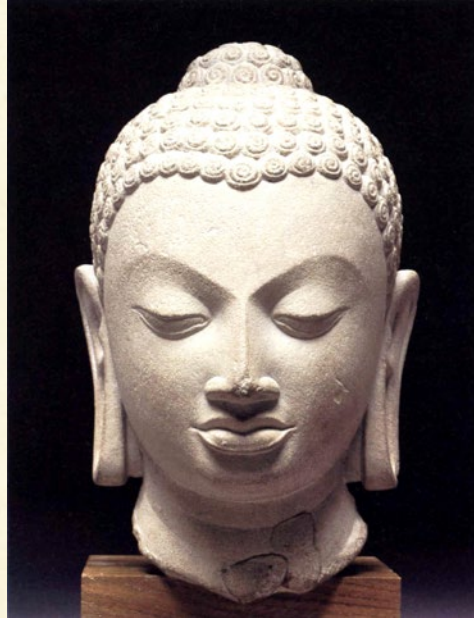
*“He who pays homage
to those who are worthy
of homage, be they the
Enlightened Ones or Their
Disciples. He who pays
homage to the Fearless and
Peaceful Ones, his merit
cannot be measured by any.”*

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA

inhabited. The name ‘Sarnath’ itself comes from the Sanskrit word *Sāranganātha*, which means ‘Lord of the Deer’. It echoes an old legend according to which the Buddha, in one of his previous births, was born as a deer and had offered his life to a king to prevent a doe and her unborn fawn from being hunted. The king was greatly moved by this act of generosity and decided to never hunt again.

At Sarnath, the Buddha first spoke of the Four Noble Truths, the foundation of the Buddhist teaching, namely, the existence of suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the path to that end.

Buddhism drew people from all strata of society because it came into being when Hinduism around that time, had become too rigid for commoners to follow. Buddhism and Hinduism influenced each other, and the Buddha is even considered



Housed at the National Museum in New Delhi, this Buddha bust in buff sandstone is from Sarnath and dates to the 5th century CE



The Buddha in Abhaya Mudra, 115 CE, from Govindnagar, Uttar Pradesh. This statue is now showcased at the Government Museum, Mathura

THE GENESIS OF BUDDHISM

an avatar of Lord Vishnu by some. The Hinduism prevalent between the 7th century and the 3rd century BCE was based on the Vedas, which emphasised strict social differentiation, rituals and an imposing role of the priests in religious affairs. On the other hand, Buddhism was inclusive and did not believe in rituals. The inclusiveness and ease of understanding and practice were probably the reasons why it drew large sections of the population towards it—kings and commoners, men and women, the rich and the poor.

The teachings of the Buddha were predominantly oral and had spread through word of mouth before written texts emerged. The edicts and pillars erected by Emperor Ashoka of the Mauryan dynasty, about 218 years after the Buddha's death were the earliest of the written representations of the Buddha's teachings.

Towering over the Arun Jaitley Stadium (formerly known as the Feroz Shah Kotla Stadium) in New Delhi is the famous Ashokan Pillar, which is over 13 metres high and made of polished sandstone. The

Renowned as a centre of learning from the 5th century CE to 1200 CE, the ruins of Nalanda, Bihar, are now a part of the Buddhism Circuit



*“One should follow the
steadfast, the wise, the
educated, the self-reliant, the
dutiful and the noble.
Even as the moon follows the
path of the stars, so
ought one to follow such
a virtuous and highly
intelligent man.”*

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA



Part of the Gupta Temple,
Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh, this
Buddha sculpture dates to
the 4th to 6th centuries
CE—the Golden Age



3rd century BCE pillar is covered with inscriptions that enunciate the tenets of dharma, ethics and religion. Emperor Ashoka had set up similar pillars across the subcontinent after the bloodshed of the Kalinga War in 261 BCE. The tales from Ashoka's life and reign and his teachings of Buddhism exist in several languages of the world, such as Pali, Sanskrit, Sinhala, Tibetan, Thai, Chinese and Burmese. These tales are often traced to two critical traditions: the North Indian tradition represented by the Sanskrit texts, such as *Divyavadana* (including *Ashokavadana*) and

*“The monk who is calm in body, calm in speech,
calm in thought, well-composed and who has spewn out
worldliness—he, truly, is called serene.”*

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA

After achieving the
Enlightenment, when the
Buddha went to Sarnath
in Uttar Pradesh, he laid
the foundation for the
Dharmachakra with
his teachings



Next to the historic Feroz Shah Kotla Stadium in New Delhi, the Ashokan Pillar from the 3rd century BCE rises from the fortress's crumbling remains



the Sri Lankan tradition represented by the Pali texts, such as *Dipavamsa*, *Mahavamsa*, Buddhaghosha's commentary on the Vinaya, and *Samanta-pasadika*. Some of these texts even mention the Buddha's prediction of the birth and rise of Ashoka.

Emperor Ashoka not only built *stupas* and *viharas* but also installed *dhamma thambha* (pillars of the *dharma*) all over

the subcontinent. These pillars were polished monolithic stones carved with his inscriptions, in which he expresses support for all the religions of the day such as *Brahmanism*, *Jainism* and *Ajivikaism* (an ancient Indian religion based on fatalism and preordained destiny, practised by ascetics and hermits). The most famous Ashokan Pillar is the one at Sarnath,



The Kesariya Stupa in Bihar is said to be the tallest and largest Buddhist stupa in the world

comprising four lions and the Ashoka Chakra. It is India's national emblem, officially adopted on January 26, 1950, when India became a republic. It carries forward the ancient Indian values of peace and tolerance into modern India.

Of the *stupas* Emperor Ashoka built, the most famous stupa is the one at Sanchi. He also built the *Dhamekh Stupa* at Sarnath, which is a significant stop for

the Buddhist pilgrims as it is built at the exact location where the Buddha preached his first sermon. The *stupa's* construction began in the 3rd century BCE though it was completed only in the 5th century CE under the Gupta dynasty.

The Kushinagar *stupa*, built at the place where the Buddha attained Nirvana, and the Kesariya *Stupa* near Nalanda, Bihar, are also famous pilgrimage sites. The Kesariya



Stupa is the tallest *stupa* to be excavated so far. Located in East Champaran district of Bihar, about 120 km from the state capital, Patna, this *stupa* was excavated in 1998 by the Archaeological Survey of India. Modern stupas are now a significant part of the Buddhist tourist circuit, such as the famous Shanti *Stupa* or the Peace *Pagoda*, built in 1972, at Dhauligiri in Odisha, close to the original site of Kalinga.

*“Should a person do good, let
him do it again and again. Let him
find pleasure therein, for blissful
is the accumulation of good.”*

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA



The Ajanta Caves in Maharashtra are home to countless meticulously-detailed murals that showcase pivotal scenes from the Buddha's life

*Life of
the Buddha*

Siddhārtha's journey

*Every morning we are born again.
What we do today is what matters most.*

More than 2,500 years ago, a prince was born in the Sakya clan, who grew up to become the Buddha and whose teachings formed the genesis of one of the world's foremost religions, Buddhism. Queen Maya, the wife of Shuddhodana, the chief of the Sakya clan, gave birth to Siddhārtha Gautama in a garden at Lumbini on the border between India and Nepal in the foothills of the mighty Himalayas on a full moon day. The

*“Should you find a wise
critic to point out your faults,
follow him as you would
a guide to hidden treasure.”*

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA

Surrounding the Maya Devi Temple in Lumbini, Nepal, which marks the site of the Buddha's birth, are remains of several ancient monasteries





The Little Buddha Statue in Lumbini, Nepal, stands between the Maya Devi Temple and the Eternal Peace Flame

day is celebrated as Buddha Purnima in the subcontinent and as Vesak in Sri Lanka, Singapore, Thailand, South Korea and other parts of Southeast Asia.

Lumbini has been designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO and has been a major pilgrimage centre for Buddhists probably since the time of the Buddha. An Ashokan pillar of the third century BCE testifies to Lumbini being the birthplace of the Buddha. According to legend, his mother had a dream before the Buddha was born in which she saw a white elephant, holding a

white lotus flower, entering her womb from her right side. This dream was interpreted to mean that she had conceived a child who would become either a world ruler or the Buddha. This particular story is seen in many Buddhist paintings, such as in a Japanese painting from the early 15th century CE (Muromachi period (1392 CE to 1573 CE) showcased in the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art in New York. The scene can also be seen in one of the cave paintings at Ajanta in Maharashtra, India. The painting shows the grove at Lumbini, with a building on the



This fresco at Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh, depicts Queen Maya dreaming of a white elephant, and the Buddha's first steps

left and a ceremonial gate on the right and a forest. In the centre of the painting, Queen Maya is seen clinging to the branches of a sal tree, turning her head slightly to the left, where a woman stands with a bunch of peacock feathers. A drum above symbolises the celestial music that accompanied the birth. On the left, deities stand on different levels, witnessing and expressing amazement at the miraculous

birth. Siddhārtha lost his mother just seven days after his birth and was cared for by his step-mother, Mahapajapati.

At the age of 16, Siddhārtha was married to Princess Yashodhara, the daughter of King Suppabuddha and Queen Amita. According to some texts, she was Siddhārtha's cousin and Devadatta's sister. They had a son, Rahul, soon after whose birth, Siddhārtha left home to live as an ascetic.

It is said that Brahmins predicted at Siddhārtha's birth that he would either become a great ruler or an enlightened leader. His father, Shuddhodana, wanted him to be a great ruler and so guided him towards that, keeping him away from human troubles and suffering. Siddhārtha, however, became known for his empathy, his caring for all living things. One of the tales of his childhood is about an injured swan landing at the boy's feet. He picked up the bird and after gently extracting the arrow that had pierced through its feathers, nursed it. Just then Devadatta, his cousin, ran out of the forest and claimed the swan, saying he had shot it down in flight. The two boys went to the king with their complaints. After

*“Just as treasures are
uncovered from the earth, so
virtue appears from good deeds, and
wisdom appears from a pure and
peaceful mind. To walk
safely through the maze of human
life, one needs the light of wisdom
and the guidance of virtue.”*

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA

The ancient ruins
at Kapilavastu,
Nepal, where
Siddhārtha spent
29 years of his life





Monks walk along the
Dhamekh Stupa at
Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh,
which marks the place
where the Buddha
first shared the Four
Noble Truths



listening to both, the king said that the claim of the one who saved the bird was stronger than that of the one who shot it down. So, Siddhārtha was allowed to keep the bird, which he nursed back to good health, before setting it free, because he believed that the bird did not really belong to anybody and was a free being.

The empathy that Siddhārtha felt intensified when the prince, who grew up in Kapilavastu, capital of the Sakya clan, near Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh, went for a ride one day and happened to see an old man, a sick man and a funeral procession. This was Siddhārtha's first ever experience of the suffering that existed in the world. He felt a compelling proclivity to end the suffering.

He returned home and was not able to

Paintings of the
Buddha adorn
the arches at the
Ajanta Caves in
Maharashtra



forget what he had seen. It is around this time that his son, Rahul, was born. Legend has it that he felt manacled by the baby and so named him Rahul, which means 'bondage'. A week after the birth of Rahul, Siddhārtha renounced his life as a prince, shaved his hair and became an ascetic. He was 29. Buddhist legends refer to this episode as the *Mahabhinishkramana* or the Great Renunciation.

So began Siddhārtha's journey to find a solution to the suffering he saw in this world and his search for an escape from the

"It is good to tame the mind, which is difficult to hold in and flighty; rushing wherever it listeth; a tamed mind brings happiness."

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA





Frescoes at the Thiksey Monastery in Leh illustrate the life of the Enlightened One

cycle of birth, old age and death. He lived as an ascetic for six years, but found it to be a futile exercise. In his untiring quest, he sat in meditation under the Mahabodhi Tree in Bodh Gaya, Bihar, resisting external influences, and 49 days later, was blessed with the Enlightenment. He, then, started to teach what he had learnt. He preached the Middle Path, the way of moderation. His first sermon was delivered in a deer park at Sarnath to five disciples and this is when he spoke of the Four Noble Truths: *Dukha* (suffering), *Samudaya* (cause of suffering), *Nirodha* (removing the cause of suffering),

and *Marga* (the path to cessation of suffering). The number of his disciples continued to grow, but it was not without challenges. The Buddha had to keep defending his knowledge and according to oral tradition, he was able to convince the others.

In the next few centuries, Buddhism spread far and wide. Emperor Ashoka sent his son, Mahindra, and daughter, Sanghamitra, to Sri Lanka where they helped establish and propagate Buddhism. The traditional 'Silk Route' became a conduit for the spread of Buddhism to various parts of Asia during this period.



The Buddha Park of Ravangla, Sikkim, is famous for a 130-foot-tall statue erected to mark the 2,550th birth anniversary of Gautama Buddha



The Wheel of Life

The Salvation of the soul

He, who walks the Noble Eightfold Path with unswerving determination, is sure to reach Nirvana.

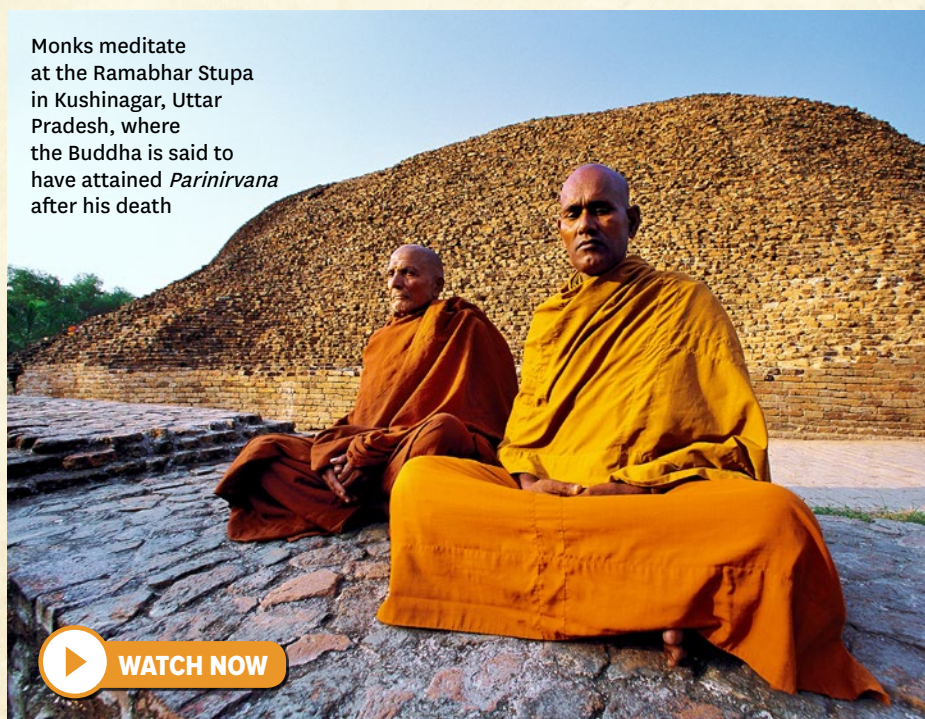
Having attained the Enlightenment, the Buddha began his life of teaching, wandering from village to village, kingdom to kingdom. According to legend, wherever he went, people thronged his meetings, and he gathered more and more disciples. People adopted the tough but simple life of begging for alms and readily abandoned material possessions without a second thought.

“The sharp edge of a razor is difficult to pass over; thus, the wise say the path to Salvation is hard.” A stanza from the *Katha Upanishad*, which contains the story of Nachiketa and his discourse with Yama, the God of Death, accurately enunciates the Buddha’s tortuous journey towards the Enlightenment and Salvation. The earliest Buddhist texts in *Pali*, a Middle Indo-Aryan language that was commonly spoken in northern India and is the language of the *Tipitaka*, also describe how the Buddha left his family. Although his parents shed tears and were sorrowful at the thought of their son’s renunciation, the Buddha shaved his hair and beard, put on a yellow robe, and left home. It must not have been easy leaving his weeping parents, wife and son behind but

“Earnestness is the path of immortality (Nirvana), thoughtlessness the path of death. Those who are in earnest do not die, those who are thoughtless are as if dead already.”

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA

Monks meditate at the Ramabhar Stupa in Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh, where the Buddha is said to have attained *Parinirvana* after his death



WATCH NOW

The Thiksey Monastery in Leh houses many items of Buddhist art such as stupas, statues and thangkas



another account says that he felt a sense of freedom when he left home.

No sooner did he commence his ascetic life than he deracinated himself from all the luxuries and comforts. The Buddha later told his disciples: “I was a penance-worker, outdoing others in penance; I was living rough, outdoing others in rough living; I was scrupulous, outdoing others in my scruples; solitary was I, outdoing others in solitude. Thus far did I go in my penance: I

went without clothes. I licked my food from my hands.” However, he realised that the torture was not helping him in gaining the knowledge he sought: how to break the cycle of birth, old age and death.

His limbs became weak; he was just skin and bone. He could hardly walk. Then, according to the *Majjhima Nikaya* scriptures, a thought occurred to him. His mind went back to his childhood memories, when watching a field being ploughed

THE WHEEL OF LIFE



Constructed in the 5th century CE, the Chaukandi Stupa in Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh, serves as a shrine for a relic of the Buddha



*“Meditation brings wisdom; lack of meditation leaves ignorance.
Know well what leads you forward and what holds you back, and
choose the path that leads to wisdom.”*

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA



A vaulted chamber inside the Parinirvana Temple in Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh, enshrines the Reclining Buddha

gave him a sense of calm and peace. “Why am I afraid of that state of ease, that ease which is apart from sensual desires and adverse conditions?” he wondered. He concluded that it was not easy for him to reach that state when he was so weak and exhausted. So, he resolved to eat well and lead a life without pain. However, he was still following the path of renunciation. He regained his mental composure and clarity as his health improved. He sat under a peepal tree facing east with renewed determination, and resolved not to rise

till he attained the Enlightenment. “My mind was emancipated,” he would later tell his disciples. “Ignorance was dispelled, knowledge sprang forth; darkness was dispelled, light shone.”

It was only the beginning of a long journey of preaching and dissemination of knowledge for the Buddha, which he continued till the ripe old age of 80. From the Four Noble Truths came The Eightfold Noble Path: Right View (an understanding of the Four Noble Truths), Right Thought (letting go of attachment, hatred and harm

The colossal statue of the Maitreya Buddha at the Diskit Monastery in Ladakh is a sight to behold



“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.”

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA



This iconic statue in Bodh Gaya, Bihar, represents the Buddha seated on a lotus in the dhyana mudra

to others), Right Speech (abstaining from lies, harsh words and foolish talk), Right Conduct (staying away from killing, stealing and sexual depravity), Right Livelihood (choosing trades that do not harm others), Right Effort (sustaining positivity and letting go of negativity), Right Mindfulness (awareness of the temporary nature of the

existing world including one's body) and Right Concentration (single-mindedness). He preached this as the path to Nirvana or Salvation, the ultimate goal.

He attained Nirvana at Kushinagar on a full moon day in the month of Vesak, the day he was born and the day he attained the Enlightenment. Kushinagar was the capital

*“Believe nothing, no matter where you read it,
or who said it, no matter if I have said it, unless it agrees with
your own reason and your own common sense.”*

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA

The mighty Buddha
statue overlooking
Langza, one of the
remotest villages
in Spiti Valley,
Himachal Pradesh



The Viswa Shanti Stupa, or the Peace Pagoda, stands atop the Ratnagiri Hills in Rajgir, Bihar



of the Kosala kingdom and, according to the sacred *Ramayana*, it was built by King Kush, son of Lord Rama. Up to the present day, the town remains a pilgrimage site for both Hindus and Buddhists. While some texts say that the Buddha had a premonition of his death and told his disciples that his end was near, others say he died of food poisoning after eating tainted meat. What they all agree on is that his end was peaceful. His last meal was from a blacksmith named Cunda. Whether or not that meal killed

him is not clear. What that meal was has also been lost in translation. While the *Theravada* Buddhists—practising the oldest form of Buddhism, the Doctrine of the Elders—believe it was meat, the *Mahayana* Buddhists—considered the ‘Greater Vehicle’—believe it was some truffle or mushroom. His final words to his disciples were that all living beings are perishable and each individual should strive for personal liberation.

He urged his disciples not to grieve





Painted at the Hemis Monastery in Leh, the Buddhist Wheel of Life, or Bhavachakra, is a symbolic representation of *samsara* (or the cycle of death and rebirth)

*“He insulted me, hit me,
beat me, robbed me—for those
who don’t brood on this,
hostility is stilled. Hostilities
aren’t stilled through
hostility; regardless. Hostilities
are stilled through
non-hostility.”*

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA

for him, reminding them of his teaching that everything that is born must undergo separation and loss. When a disciple, Ananda, asked how his body should be treated, he replied: “Do not hinder yourselves, Ananda, to honour the body of the *Tathagatha*. Rather, you should strive for your own good.”

After he attained Nirvana, his body was cremated and divided into relics installed at various stupas. Even today, they are worshipped and offer solace to millions, who strive to attain Nirvana. The Temple of the Tooth Relic in Sri Lanka is one such pilgrimage site. His influence transcends the boundaries of the land of his birth and reach out to the far corners of the world.



The Buddha Statue
Park in Nakhon Si
Thammarat, Thailand,
offers a stunning
view at sunset

*Buddhism:
India's
Gift to the
World*

Buddha Dharma Sangha

“The world belongs to humanity; not this leader; that leader; kings or religious leaders. The world belongs to humanity.”

—HH the 14th Dalai Lama in 2012
during an interview on CNN

These words explain the universal appeal of the 2,500 year-old religion. Buddhism spread across India even during the Buddha's lifetime. The Buddha preached his wisdom as he travelled through the northern plains of India on foot. Wherever he went, small communities of monks and nuns, known as *bhikkus* and *bhikkunis* in Pali, and *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis* in Sanskrit, sprang up. They helped spread Buddhism after the Buddha attained Nirvana in the fifth century BCE, but the major thrust came when the Maurya dynasty came to power in Magadha, today's Bihar, in the 4th century BCE.

Emperor Ashoka of the 3rd century BCE was instrumental in making Buddhism popular within the Indian subcontinent and spreading it across the sea to Sri Lanka. He sent his son, Mahindra, and daughter, Sanghamitra, to Sri Lanka, where they helped establish and propagate Buddhism. Sanghamitra carried a branch of the sacred Mahabodhi tree under which the Buddha attained the Enlightenment in Bodh Gaya,

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama delivers teachings to his followers in Bodh Gaya, Bihar



[WATCH NOW](#)

The Giant Standing Buddha statue in Monywa, Myanmar, is the third tallest statue in the world



“Let go of the past, let go of the future, let go of the present, and cross over to the farther shore of existence. With mind wholly liberated, you shall come no more to birth and death.”

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA

Bihar. Sri Lankan King Devanampiya Tissa planted the branch in his Royal Park in Anuradhapura. In Sri Lanka, this tree is referred to as the Jaya Sri Mahabodhi tree, and it is among the most sacred Buddhist sites in the world. It is the world’s oldest tree with a documented history, and its branches have been taken to various

countries where Buddhism flourished.

Buddhism reached China during the latter part of the Han dynasty in the 5th century CE through teachers and traders. It underwent much transformation and borrowed several elements from Taoism.

The six Buddhist Councils held at frequent intervals helped to preserve the



Ancient Buddhist temple mural depicting the life of the Buddha at Wat Pho in Bangkok, Thailand

teachings of the Buddha. The first council was held at Rajgriha during the first monsoon after the Buddha attained Nirvana. The second Buddhist Council was held in Vaishali and the third at Pataliputra during Ashoka's reign. Hundreds of monks gathered at these councils and various aspects of Buddhism were discussed and settled. The fourth council was held in Kashmir by Emperor Kanishka, while another fourth council was held by Theravada Buddhists in Sri Lanka. The fifth and sixth councils were held in Myanmar, owing to its increasing importance in relation to Buddhism.

The fourth Buddhist Council in Kashmir laid the foundations for the spread of Mahayana Buddhism. The Council was also significant for making the Sanskrit language one of the prime vehicles for Buddhist scriptures. The Mahayana school of thought, which was less austere than earlier

In 713 CE, Monk Hai Tong initiated the construction of the Leshan Giant Buddha in China, which depicts the Maitreya Buddha



The Jaya Sri Mahabodhi tree in Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka, was planted in 288 BCE as a cutting from the Mahabodhi Tree in Bodh Gaya, Bihar

Buddhism, soon gained popularity in the Gandhara region. It also spread from there to Central Asia and China.

By the 4th century CE, the method of yoga, or the Yogachara School of Buddhism was founded by Asanga and Vasubandhu. It was a graded path of evolution, through discipline and meditation. In the art of the Buddhist faith, Cave 90 at Kanheri in Maharashtra of the early 6th century CE, has the earliest-surviving mandala, which presents such a graded path. In Cave 41 at Kanheri, of the late 5th or early 6th century, is the first-known depiction of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara with eleven heads, presenting a view of the more detailed Buddhist iconography which was developing at this time in India.

The 8th century saw the founding of the Pala Empire, which ruled over most of Bengal and Bihar in the 12th century. Towards the end of the 8th century, a great university was founded in the present-day Bihar by King Dharmapala. This was the Vikramshila University, which was to rival the importance of the great Buddhist university Nalanda itself. By this time, Buddhism had entered its third major phase—the Vajrayana Order.

The many qualities of Buddhahood within us and the steps on the path to the



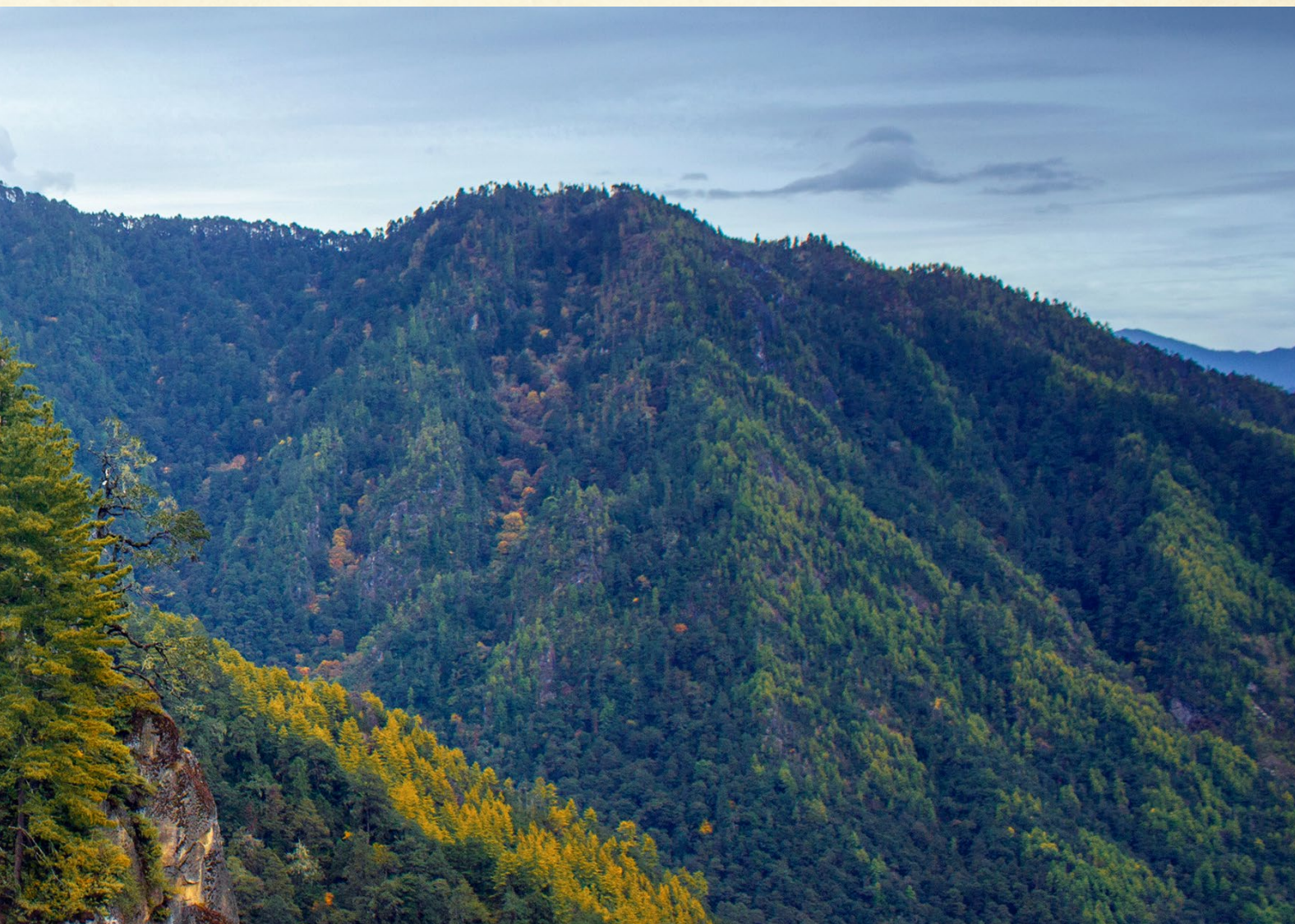
Enlightenment, came to be studied in great detail. This was Vajrayana Buddhism, the ‘Vehicle of the Thunderbolt’, whose logic was supposed to be ‘as striking as a clap of thunder’. It was also meant to be ‘as indestructible as diamond’.

Today, several Asian countries including Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Cambodia, Japan, Mongolia, Myanmar, Lao PDR, China, Nepal, Singapore, Vietnam, Thailand and Korea have large Buddhist populations. Though Buddhism has evolved in each of these countries according to the people’s beliefs and lifestyles, the basic tenets remain strong and unchanged.

BUDDHISM: INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

Set on a cliffside in the midst of stunning landscape, Paro Takstang is also called the Tiger's Nest





Bhutan

BUDDHISM: INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

The Bhutanese refer to India as 'the land of the enlightened' and our shared heritage of Buddhism continues to be an unchanging constant in our bond. Oral traditions maintain that as early as the 1st or the 2nd centuries CE, Indian Buddhist masters meditated in Bhutanese hermitages. The spiritual link between India and Bhutan continued to strengthen over the centuries, when the Indian tantric master, Padmasambhava, popularly known as Guru Rimpoche, went to Bhutan. Legend has it that King Sindha of Bumthang was unwell, and Guru Rimpoche used his spiritual powers to cure the king of his sickness. After that, the king and his subjects converted to Buddhism. Guru Rimpoche is also considered the patron saint of Bhutan.

Another story that dates back to the 15th century is about a seer named Vanaratna, who visited Punakha in Bhutan because his mother was believed to be reborn there in the realm



Ancestral home of Bhutanese kings, the Lhuentse Dzong is set against stark cliffs



"We will develop and cultivate the liberation of mind by loving kindness, make it our vehicle, make it our basis, stabilise it, exercise ourselves in it, and fully perfect it."

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA

Padmasambhava, also known as Guru Rimpoche, was the legendary Indian Buddhist mystic who introduced Vajrayana Buddhism to Bhutan



Punakha Dzong is the second oldest as well as the second largest dzong (fortified monastery) in Bhutan



of hell. Vanaratna made that trip with the sole purpose of liberating his mother.

Some traditions even mention that the Buddha, in his previous life as Dondrup Gyalpo, underwent yogic practice in Bhutan after being exiled from India for going against his father's wishes and giving away wealth from the royal treasury.

From Cooch Behar to Ladakh, Indian kings and nobles have shared a great relationship with Bhutanese royals. In the 17th and the 18th centuries, the ties with Ladakh were cemented and the Drukpa government of Bhutan was said to have granted the establishment of more monasteries, which a Bhutanese representative administered.

In the 1960s, a formal diplomatic relationship was established between India and Bhutan. Ever since, many Bhutanese monks, nuns, and members of general public pursue higher Buddhist studies and undertake pilgrimages to India, the sacred land where the Buddha Shakyamuni was born and taught his sublime *dharma*. In June 2021, at the Grand Kuenrey of the Tashichho Dzong, the consecration and enshrining ceremony of a bronze statue of the Buddha



A unique bronze cast statue of the Buddha in a lotus pose gifted by India to Bhutan on the birth anniversary of Guru Padmasambhava

gifted to Bhutan by India commemorated Guru Padmasambhava's birth anniversary. Fine wall paintings have been made in recent years in the great Tawang Monastery of Arunachal Pradesh by Buddhist painters from Bhutan. There is no doubt that the deep spiritual bond between the two countries continues to grow from strength to strength.

BUDDHISM: INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

A notable Buddhist pilgrimage site, the Angkor Wat temple is an epitome of classic Khmer architecture





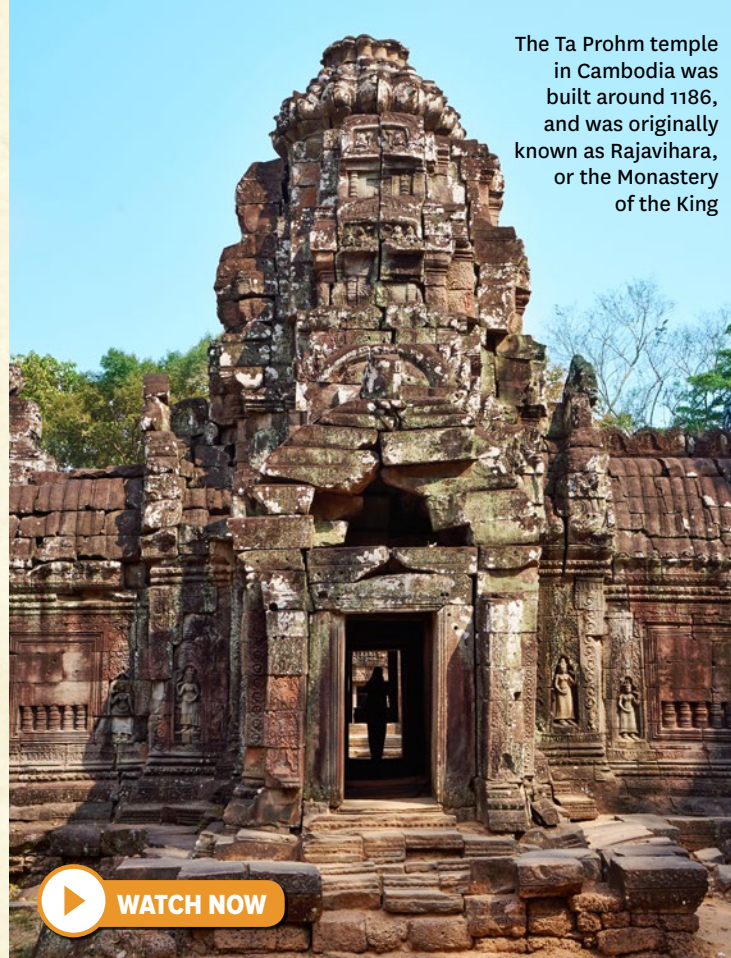
Cambodia

After the birth of Buddhism, Buddhist teachings travelled at the time of Ashoka to Southeast Asia. Ancient Suvannabhumi covers the large part of Southeast Asia, including Cambodia.

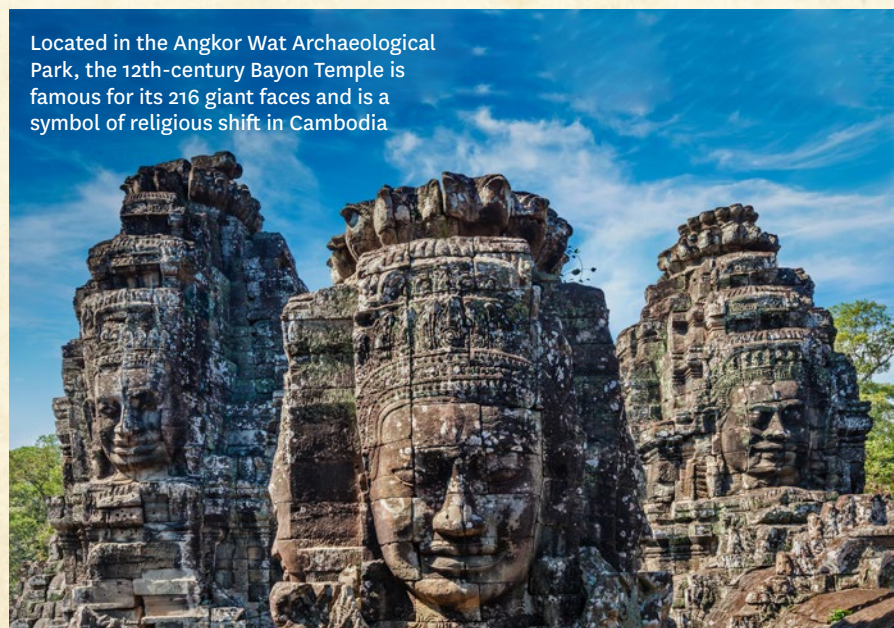
The history of Buddhism in Cambodia spans several successive kingdoms and empires. Hinduism and native animism deeply influenced Cambodian Buddhism. The earliest forms of Buddhism entered the Kingdom of Funan with Hindu merchants. The Kingdom of Funan that flourished between 100 BCE and 500 CE was a Hindu empire, with its kings sponsoring the worship of Hindu gods, Vishnu and Shiva. Buddhism began to assert its presence from about the year 450 onward. Some pre-Angkorean statuary in the Mekong Delta region indicate the existence of Sanskrit-based *Sarvāstivāda* Buddhism. King Jayavarman II (802–869), the first real Khmer king of the Angkor Empire, proclaimed himself Hindu god-king and identified himself as a *chakravartin*, or Universal Monarch. He was also supportive of Mahayana Buddhist influence, which was increasingly established in the region during his empire.

Theravada Buddhism is now the official religion of Cambodia, practiced by more than 95 per cent of the population with an estimated 4,392 monastery temples throughout the country. Mahayana Buddhism is the religion of most Chinese and Vietnamese populations in Cambodia. *Maha Nikāya* and *Dhammayuttika Nikāya* both are two major sects of Theravada

The Ta Prohm temple in Cambodia was built around 1186, and was originally known as Rajavihara, or the Monastery of the King



Located in the Angkor Wat Archaeological Park, the 12th-century Bayon Temple is famous for its 216 giant faces and is a symbol of religious shift in Cambodia



*“Following the noble path is like entering a dark room
with a light in the hand; the darkness will all be cleared away;
and the room will be filled with light.”*

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA

Buddhism. The Maha Nikāya is the most significant order of Theravada Buddhism in Cambodia. The Dhammayuttika Nikāya was supposedly imported from Thailand in 1855. A separate supreme patriarch for the Dhammayuttika Nikāya was appointed by former King Norodom Sihanouk. It is now headed by His Holiness Samdech Bour Kry as the current supreme patriarch. The Maha Nikāya monastic hierarchy is currently headed by the Maha Sangharaja (the great supreme patriarch) His Holiness Samdech Tep Vong. Cambodian Buddhism exists side-by-side with (and to some extent intermingles with) pre-Buddhist animism and Brahmanic practices. Most of the major annual Cambodian festivals relate to Buddhist observances.

India was the first country to start restoration and conservation of the world-famous Angkor Wat temple in Siem Reap with a total cost of about \$4 million. This was carried out in 1986-1993 through the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). The ASI has been working on restoring the Ta Prohm temple in Angkor Archaeological Park in Siem Reap project since 2003.

The Preah Vihear is an outstanding masterpiece of ancient Khmer architecture, both in its plan and detail of stone-carving decorations



BUDDHISM: INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

The Grand Buddha statue
at Ling Shan near Wuxi
towers over the lush
panorama by Lake Tai in
Jiangsu Province





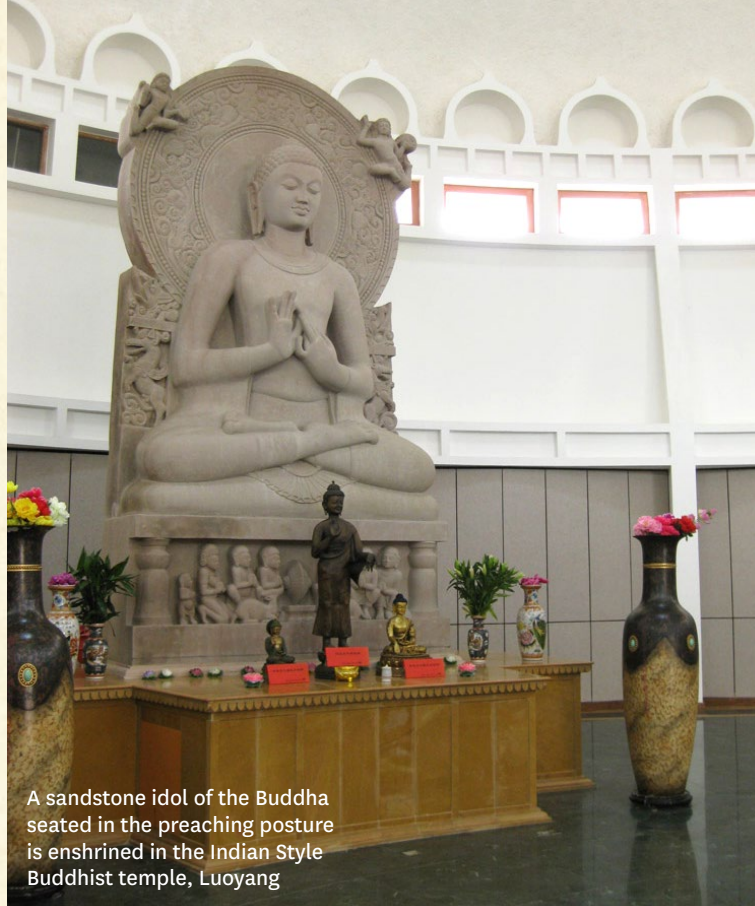
China

BUDDHISM, INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

China had its first brush with Buddhism in 68 CE, when Indian monks Kasyapa Matanga and Dharmaratnawas arrived in Luoyang, Henan province. They went on invitation, on a white horse, carrying Buddhist scriptures and statues. The following year, Emperor Han Mingdi ordered the construction of a Buddhist monastery in the northern part of Royal Road and named it White Horse temple; it is now known as the birthplace of Chinese Buddhism.

The Indian Style Buddhist temple is located to the west of the White Horse temple and is the first overseas Buddhist hall to have its construction funded by the Indian Government. In April 2005, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and the then Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, signed a memorandum and it was decided that India would fund the project, provide the architectural design, depute experts, donate an Indian-style statue of the Buddha apart from giving raw and finished stone material.

The temple is a contemporary structure that draws inspiration from the traditional Buddhist architecture of India. It has a circular structure patterned on the Sanchi Stupa, which



A sandstone idol of the Buddha seated in the preaching posture is enshrined in the Indian Style Buddhist temple, Luoyang

“Know from the rivers in clefts and in crevices: those in small channels flow noisily; the great flow silent. Whatever’s not full makes noise. Whatever is full is quiet.”

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA



The Longmen Grottoes in Henan, China, house countless statues of the Shakyamuni Buddha and his disciples

is placed within a colonnaded enclosure. The circular structure is situated in a pond, and it, therefore, appears to be rising from the lotus pond. A replica of the Sarnath Buddha statue in Chunar sandstone, a 4.5-metre sitting statue of Shakyamuni, is enshrined in the temple. The outside wall has carved panels along the circular Pradakshina path with themes from the life of the Buddha such as Mayadevi's dream, the four significant incidents in Prince Siddhartha's life, his departure from Kapilavastu, the Enlightenment under the Mahabodhi tree, the First Sermon in Sarnath, his return to Kapilavastu, Yashodhara handing over their son, Rahul, to the Buddha and the *Mahaparinirvana* at Kushinagar. The main building is the Big Buddha Hall, but it also hosts a preaching hall, a training room, an exhibition hall and a garden.

In May 2010, the then President of India, Pratibha Devisingh Patil, and Vice Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Wang Zhizhen, attended the opening ceremony and cut the ribbon at the temple, which stands as testimony to the deep spiritual bond between the two countries.

Another great monument which shows the ancient cultural bonds between India and China, are the Kizil Caves at Kucha. The Indian Pundit Kumarayana was married to Princess Jiva of Kucha in the 4th century CE. Their child named Kumarajiva studied in Kashmir for 13 years and became the most famous translator of Buddhist scriptures in China. His translations of scriptures, such as the Lotus Sutra remain till today the most popular translations among the Chinese people. There is a big statue of Kumarajiva in front of the

Putuoshan, one of the four sacred Buddhist mountains in China, has many monasteries and the Guanyin Buddhist statue



Kizil Caves at Kucha. The art of the Kizil Caves shows clear roots in Indian art.

Bodhidharma of the 6th century CE, from Tamil Nadu in India, is another great cultural bridge between India and China. It is he who took Dhyana Buddhism from India to China, where it was termed Chan Buddhism. From China, it eventually went to Japan, where it is called Zen Buddhism. He is also famous for having taught self defense to monks at the Shaolin Monastery, which resulted in the martial arts form of Shaolin Kung Fu.

Xuanzang was a 7th century CE Chinese Buddhist monk and pilgrim to India. He translated sacred scriptures of Buddhism from Sanskrit into Chinese and founded in China the Buddhist Consciousness Only school. Among his notable contributions is that he provided descriptions of numerous Buddhist sites in India during the 7th century CE, including the famous Nalanda University.

Faxian was a Chinese Buddhist monk whose pilgrimage to India in the early 5th century CE contributed to Sino-Indian relations and whose writings give important information about Buddhism in India at that time. After his return to China he translated into Chinese the many Sanskrit Buddhist texts he had brought back.

BUDDHISM: INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

Dating back to 8th-9th CE, Borobudur, a Buddhist temple in Java with 72 openwork stupas, is a sight to behold at sunrise





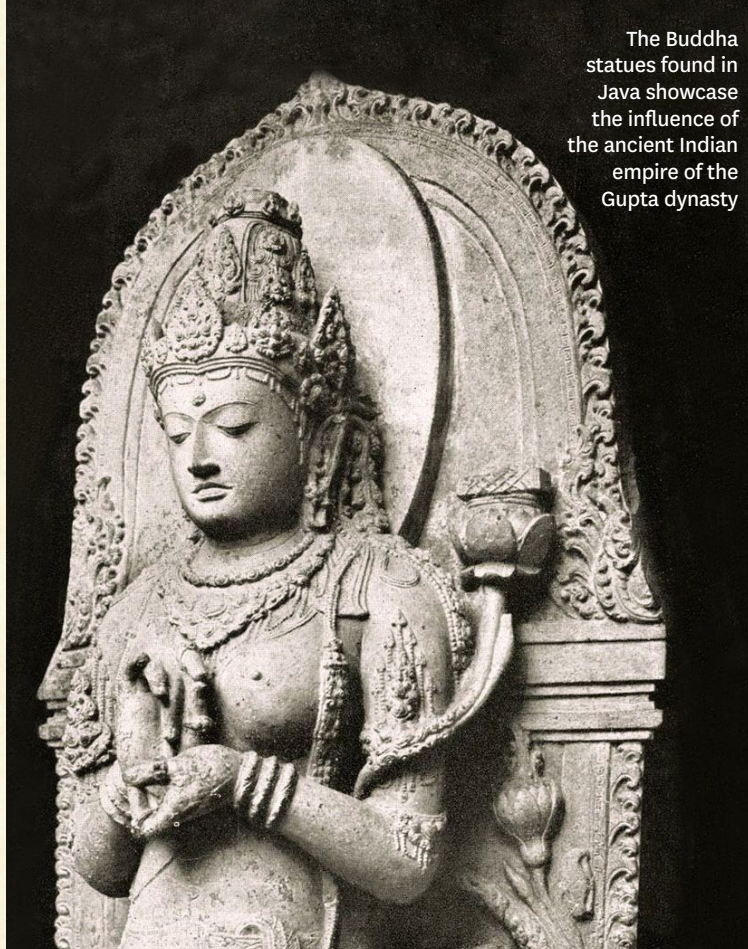
Indonesia

BUDDHISM: INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

According to historians, the first Buddhists arrived in Indonesia from India, encouraged by trading activities in the first century. Buddhism reached its peak during the Sri Vijaya dynasty's rule, which was once the largest Buddhist kingdom in Southeast Asia, from around the seventh century until the 14th century. During that time, many Buddhist colleges and monasteries were built in Indonesia, and famous Buddhist scholars like Dharmapala and Sakyakirti taught there.

The arrival of Buddhism from India did not displace pre-existing indigenous beliefs and worship. Instead, the local traditions and beliefs were fused with the incoming religion. This can be seen from the architectural style and relics of that time. However, the Shailendra dynasty was by far the most famous

The Buddha statues found in Java showcase the influence of the ancient Indian empire of the Gupta dynasty



Dating back to 450 CE, these sculptures are from Tarumanagara, an early Sundanese Indianised kingdom



The temples at Candi Sewu, a Mahayana Buddhist site, are arranged in a cosmic mandala layout

*“Bhikkhus, you should
train yourselves thus:
We will develop and cultivate
the liberation of mind by loving
kindness, make it our vehicle,
make it our basis, stabilise it,
exercise ourselves in it, and
fully perfect it.”*

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA

Buddhist kingdom in Indonesian history. During this time, the famous Buddhist stupa at Borobudur, Central Java—the most-visited tourist attraction of Indonesia—was built. This ninth century Mahayana Buddhist monument, located on top of a hill, consists of nine terraces, each receding from the one beneath it, and is crowned by a bell-shaped *stupa*—which represents the concept of emptiness or *Shunyata*—at the centre of the topmost terrace. Borobudur’s reliefs depict two major Buddhist narratives: the *Lalitavistara*, which narrates the life of the Buddha, and *Gandavyuha*, which portrays the pilgrimage of Sudhana in his search for knowledge.

The Batujaya *stupa* complex in Karawang, West Java, is the oldest Buddhist archaeological site in Indonesia, as it was within the location of Tarumanagara, the oldest Hindu-Buddhist kingdom in Indonesia. The 5th century ruler, Purnawarman, produced the earliest known inscriptions in Java, which were found on numerous votive tablets in the area, including small clay tablets and pictures of the Buddha. Subsequently, a significant number of Buddhist sites were found in Jambi, Palembang, and Riau



provinces in Sumatra, and in Central and East Java. The Chinese monk Yijing, who made several lengthy visits to Sumatra on his way to study at Nalanda University in India in 671 and 695 CE, and the Bengali Buddhist scholar Atisha (982-1054 CE) had documented Buddhism flourishing in Sumatra.

That India and Indonesia share centuries of close ties is also borne out by the fact that there are art and architectural similarities found in both countries. A visit to the Candi Muaro temple complex will reinforce the historical-cultural connection. The moonstone of damaged walls at Nalanda Mahavihara in Bihar, India, closely resembles that found at Sari and Kalasan temples in Java and Candi Muaro.

BUDDHISM: INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

Tōdai-ji, also called the Eastern Great temple, serves as the headquarters of the Kegon School of Buddhism



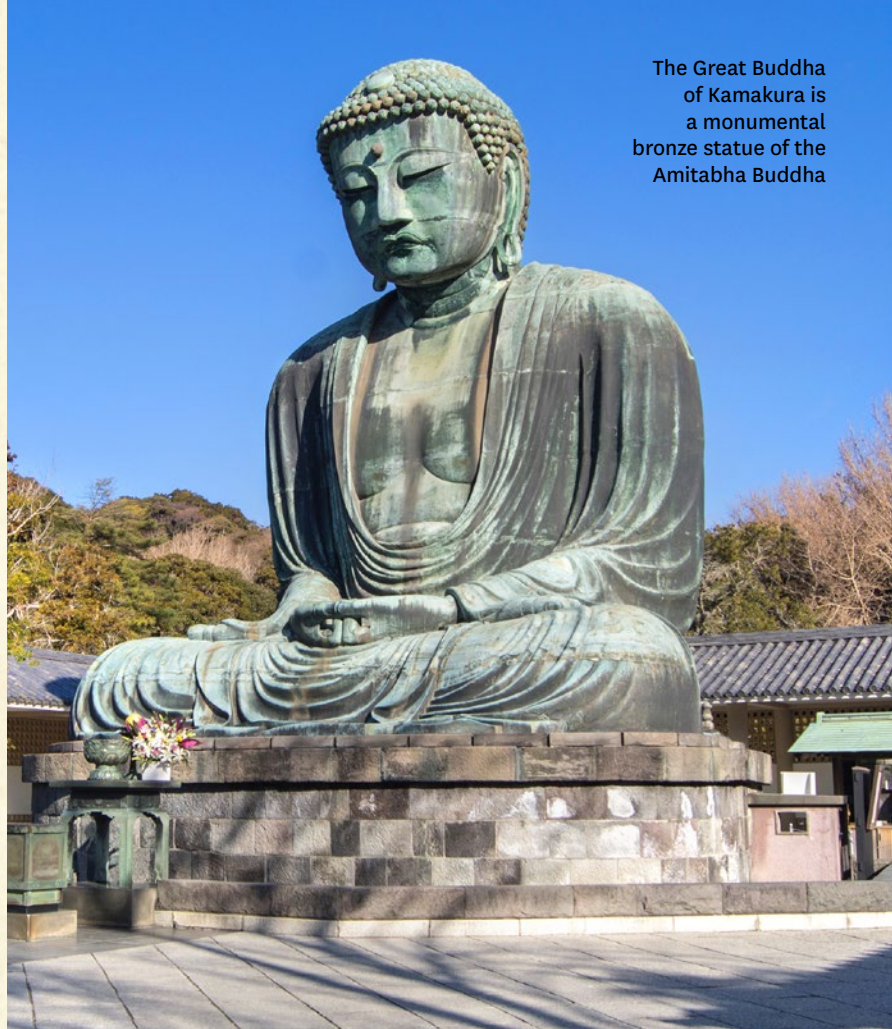


Japan

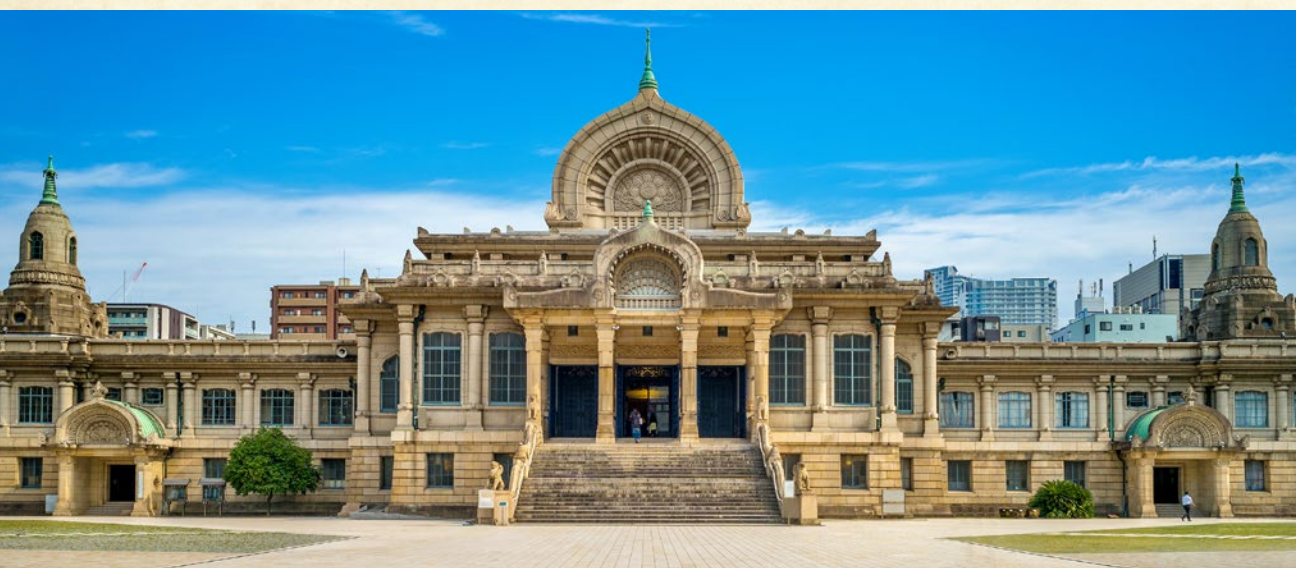
BUDDHISM: INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

Buddhism was introduced to Japan via the Korean Peninsula in the 6th century CE, and subsequently, Buddhist priests travelled from India to Japan, spreading Buddhist teachings. Indian culture, filtered through the lens of Buddhism, has had a great impact on Japanese culture and thought, and continues to foster strong spiritual ties between the two countries.

However, it's interesting to note that it was not until the arrival of the Buddhist scholar from South India, Bodhisena, in 736 CE that Japan got a first-hand view of Buddhism, which until then had been entirely mediated through Korea. Bodhisena was held in reverence and housed at Daian-ji temple, the primary education and research institute for Buddhism at the time. The Indian monk taught Sanskrit at a college in Nara and helped establish the Kegon school of Buddhism, a variant of the Chinese Huayan school. In 752 CE, Emperor



The Great Buddha of Kamakura is a monumental bronze statue of the Amitabha Buddha



Tsukiji Hongan-ji Temple in Tokyo is noted for its unique architecture, influenced by temples in India

“Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment.”

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA

Shōmu asked him to perform the eye-opening ceremony for the giant bronze statue of the Buddha Vairocana built in the famous Tōdai-ji temple at Nara. The painting of the eyes was done by Bodhisena. He died in 760 CE and is buried in Ryusenji-temple on the slopes of Mount Omine.

India was referred to as *Tenjiku* (heaven) by the Japanese from the lyrics of a popular folk song, reflecting the Japanese people’s adoration for Lord Buddha’s motherland. Buddhism was preached, practised, and patronised by the state in ancient Japan and innumerable Buddhist temples and monasteries were founded and co-existed with Shinto shrines. This impacted the spiritual practices of the common man in the areas of *mantras*, *mudras* (ritual hand gestures) and *mandalas* (spiritual and symbolic representations of the cosmos). Many Hindu deities are found in the Buddhist temples of Japan, from the earliest to the recent ones. These show the continuance of such a tradition, from the stupa railings which survive in India from the Sunga Period of the 2nd century BCE. The earliest depictions of Saraswati and Lakshmi in India are in the Buddhist stupa railings of Bharhut and Sanchi. Till today, there are several hundreds of shrines to Saraswati in Japan. Brahma and Indra continue to be worshipped in practically all Japanese Buddhist temples. Some of the Japanese names of Hindu deities are as follows: Bonten or Brahmā; Taishakuten or Indra; Bentzāiten or Saraswati; Kangiten or Ganesha, and Kichijoten or Lakshmi.



The Ryusenji temple surrounded by autumn hues in Tondabayashi, Osaka



BUDDHISM: INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

A national symbol, Pha
That Luang is a golden
Buddhist pagoda
located at the heart
of Vientiane city





Laos

Did you know that 66 per cent of Laos' population practises Theravada Buddhism, the country's dominant religion? It is believed to have first reached Laos during the 7th to 8th centuries CE, via the kingdom of Dvaravati. Lao Buddhism is, in fact, a unique version of Theravada Buddhism.

The Lao people produced significant Hindu and Buddhist temples besides sculptures of both Hindu and Buddhist deities. One such example is the Vat Phou temple complex—earlier known as the Shiva temple of Bhadreshwara—where the cult of Lord Shiva flourished in the form of the Linga. Now known as Vat Phou or Wat Phu (*wat* - temple, *phou* - mountain), it is a ruined Khmer Hindu temple complex in southern Laos, which later became a



Buddha Park, also known as Xieng Khuan, is a sculpture garden situated in a meadow by the Mekong river



A golden statue of the reclining Buddha graces the gardens of Pha That Luang in Vientiane

centre of Theravada Buddhist worship, which it remains today.

The Champasak cultural landscape, including the Vat Phou temple complex, is a remarkably well-preserved planned landscape, which is more than 1,000 years old. It was shaped to express the Hindu vision of the relationship between nature and humanity, using an axis from the mountain top to the riverbank to lay out a geometric pattern of temples, shrines and waterworks extending over 10 km. The unique layout of Khmer architecture found at Vat Phou World Heritage Complex earned it the UNESCO World Heritage label in 2001. The Vat Phou restoration project is one of the symbols of India-Laos cooperation and is being helmed by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) with funding from India.

However, the country's most sacred monument is the Pha That Luang, as it is believed that the shrine houses a breastbone of the Buddha. Local legend has it that the original temple was built around the third century CE by an Indian missionary who brought the relic of the Buddha to Laos. The current structure, however, was built by King Setthathirat in 1566 on the site of a thirteenth century Khmer temple ruin. It contains an impressive 45-metre-high stupa.

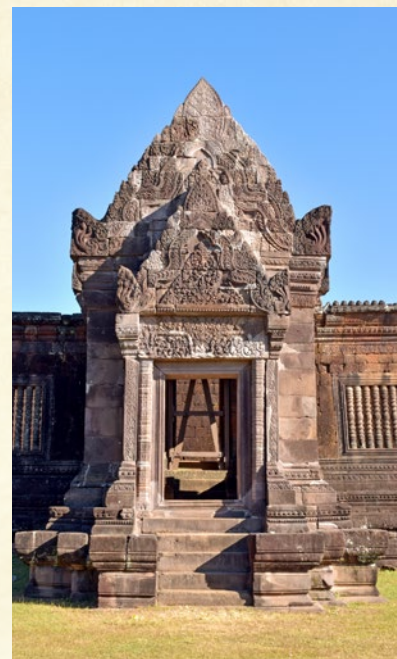
Other telling signs of the Buddhist link between India and Laos are the number of Sanskrit inscriptions found in Laos. Sanskrit and Pali both made a deep imprint on the Laotian script, language and literature. In Lao language, about 60 per cent words have Sanskrit and Pali origins.

The ancient, sacred site of That Ing Hang Stupa was built in 16th century in Savannakhet, Central Laos. It is said to be the home to a relic of the Buddha's spine.



“Radiate boundless love towards the entire world—above, below, and across—unhindered, without ill will, without enmity.”

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA



The northern quadrangle porch at Vat Phou before and after the restoration project helmed by the Archaeological Survey of India

BUDDHISM: INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

Located in Övörkhangai,
Erdene Zuu is the earliest
surviving Buddhist
monastery in Mongolia





Mongolia

Several centuries ago, the spirit of Buddhism traversed the Himalayas in India, across Tibet and China, into the Mongolian steppes and became a precious shared heritage. In the 3rd century BCE, according to scholar Lobsang Tamdin, Indian Emperor Ashoka captured the city of Khotan in the Hor region (part of modern-day China), which fell northward along the Silk Route. From there, Buddhism gradually spread eastward to the Mongolian Gobi kingdoms. Even then, Hor is said to have supported a population of over 100,000 Buddhist monks,

*“As a water bead on a lotus leaf,
as water on a red lily; does not adhere, so
the sage does not adhere to the seen,
the heard, or the sensed.”*

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA

Statues of the Buddha and
his two disciples by Indian
sculptor Ram V Sutar at Gandan
Tegchenling Monastery



proof of which lies in the cave paintings of Dunhuang (also a part of China today).

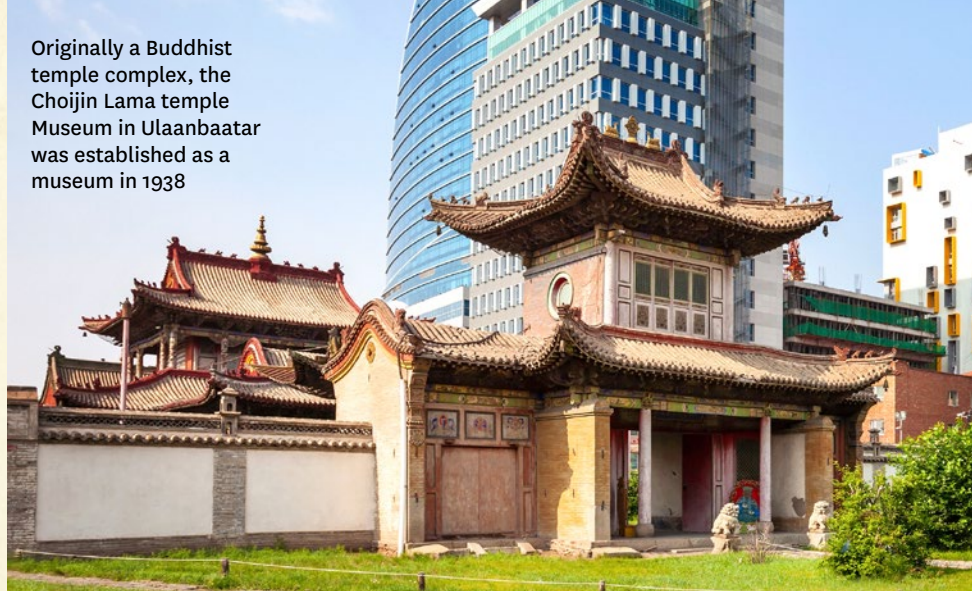
In the early 15th century, Buddhists entered the service of the Mongol Empire, and in the reign of Emperor Möngke, Namo, a Buddhist monk from Kashmir, was elected as the chief of all Buddhist monks of the Mongol Empire. Indian Buddhist textual traditions also strongly influenced the religious life of Mongolians, and this connection continues to bind the people of the two nations, forming a bond of hearts.

As a testimony of Buddhism being a pillar of India's relationship with Mongolia, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the gift of a life-size statue of the Buddha and two disciples to Gandan Tegchenling Monastery, the centre of Buddhism in Mongolia, when he visited the country in 2015. The statues were to be installed in the newly constructed Batsaagan Grand Assembly Hall.

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations was entrusted with the task of commissioning the statue and engaged the renowned Indian sculptor, Ram V Sutar. After three years of painstaking work, the life-size statues of Lord Buddha and his two disciples were completed. These stunning golden statues, cast in brass and bronze, were installed in the Grand Assembly Hall in April 2019, with traditional Mongolian Buddhist rituals. While Lord Buddha's statue stands in the centre, 18 feet high with a 12-foot base, the two disciples on either side are about 10 feet tall with a 4.3-foot base each.

During the visit of President Battulga to India, these statues were formally inaugurated jointly by the Prime Minister

Originally a Buddhist temple complex, the Chojjin Lama temple Museum in Ulaanbaatar was established as a museum in 1938



Amarbayasgalant Monastery in Iven Valley is one of the three largest Buddhist monastic centres in Mongolia



of India and President of Mongolia in an impressive and solemn ceremony organised digitally in September 2019.

This statue of Lord Buddha in Gandan Monastery continues to attract a large number of devotees and tourists in Mongolia and has since witnessed three grand events—the 50th anniversary of the Asian Buddhist Conference on Peace (ABCP), the third Samvaad—Hinduism-Buddhism International Conference in 2019, and the Buddha Purnima celebrations in 2020.

BUDDHISM: INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

A UNESCO World
Heritage Site, the Bagan
Archaeological Area
in Myanmar appears
surreal at sunset





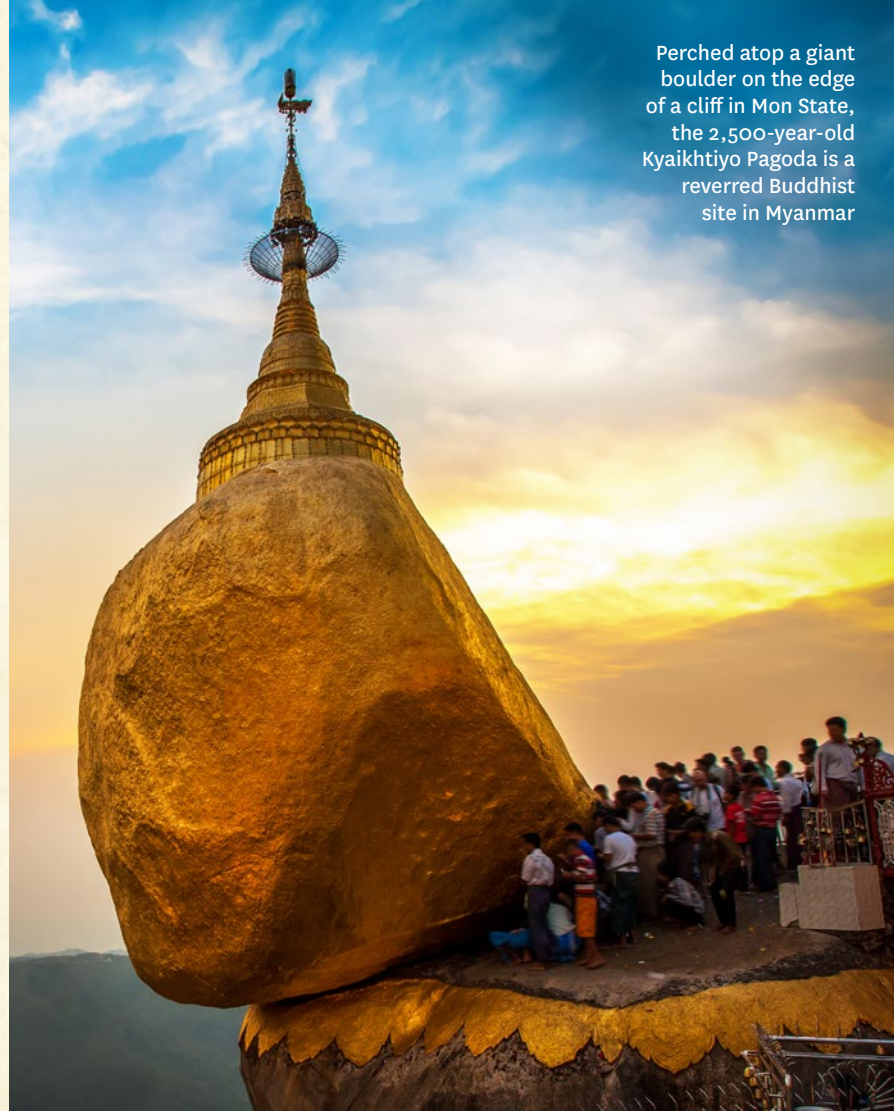
Myanmar

BUDDHISM: INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

Historical chronicles in the ancient language of Pali state that Emperor Ashoka sent two bhikkhus, Sona and Uttara, to Suvannabhūmi (The Golden Land) in the 3rd century BCE with other monks and sacred texts as part of his effort to spread Buddhism. As early as the end of the first millennium, Myanmar was strongly influenced by Bodh Gaya in Bihar, India. While this is not verified, the oldest surviving Buddhist texts (mid 5th to 6th centuries CE) in the Pali language come from Pyu, the city-state of Sri Ksetra. Written on solid gold plaques, the script used bears similarity to that used in the Andhra-Kuntala-Pallava region and this points to the fact that Theravada Buddhism travelled to Myanmar from this region in the south of India. Today, Buddhism is practised by 90 per cent of Myanmar's population.

India and Myanmar share historical, cultural and spiritual ties spanning centuries. Between the 11th and the 13th centuries, more than 10,000 Buddhist temples, pagodas and monasteries were constructed in the

Perched atop a giant boulder on the edge of a cliff in Mon State, the 2,500-year-old Kyaikhtiyo Pagoda is a revered Buddhist site in Myanmar



Gilded statues of the Buddha in Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon

"Imagine that every person in the world is enlightened but you. They are all your teachers, each doing just the right things to help you learn perfect patience, perfect wisdom, perfect compassion."

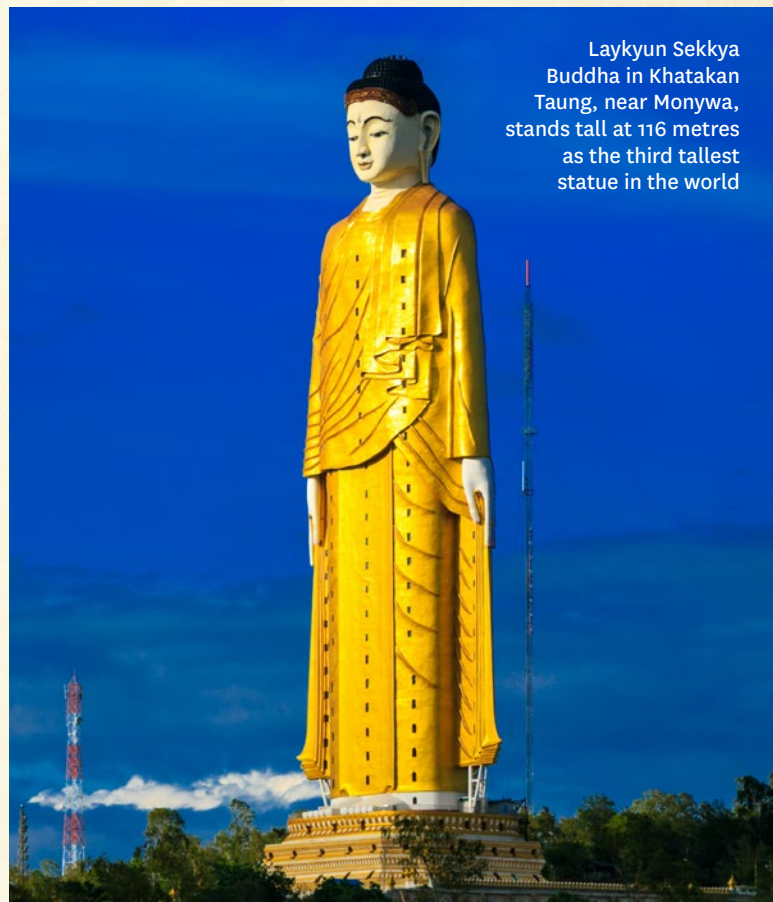
— GAUTAMA BUDDHA

The Ananda temple houses four standing Buddhas, each facing one of the cardinal directions

Bagan region. Most of these temples were inspired by the Mahabodhi temple in Bihar, India. Reflecting the Buddhist heritage of India, interiors of these temples are adorned with images from the life of the Buddha and the Jataka tales, depicted brilliantly through intricate paintings and sculptures. The governments of India and Myanmar came together in 2010 for the conservation of the Ananda temple at Bagan. The Archaeological Survey of India started to work on the structural conservation as well as chemical preservation of the temple, with the assistance of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Culture of Myanmar. The work was carried out in phases between May 2012 and June 2018.

Repairs were made to the four gates, the boundary wall, corridors and the Tha Gya Pya temple, to name a few. In 2016, a severe earthquake at Bagan damaged the *stupas* and *pagodas*, and the Indian government helped with the conservation and restoration of the 92 damaged structures as well as the chemical preservation of the murals. While executing the work, an eighteenth century bronze sculpture of Goddess Durga was also retrieved.

The Indian government has gifted a 16-foot statue of the Buddha, a replica of the Sarnath Buddha, to the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon, which is believed to enshrine the relics of the past four Buddhas. During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Myanmar in 2017, the Government of India donated \$100,000 to the Shwedagon Pagoda towards installing heat-resistant tiles.



Laykyun Sekkya Buddha in Khatakan Taung, near Monywa, stands tall at 116 metres as the third tallest statue in the world

BUDDHISM: INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

One of the largest spherical stupas in the world, the Boudha Stupa in Kathmandu houses a massive mandala





Nepal

Born in Lumbini, which falls within modern-day Nepal, the Buddha had travelled to Bodh Gaya, where he achieved Enlightenment. The *Mulasarvastivada Vinaya Samgraha* compiled by Jinamitra and translated around 700 CE, mentions an episode relating to the transport of wool and a group of bhikkhus en route Nepal (Ni-po-lo) at the time the Buddha was residing at Shravasti.

Buddhism in Nepal, though, started spreading during the reign of Emperor Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE, through Indian missionaries. Emperor Ashoka visited the Kathmandu Valley with his royal preceptor, Bhikshu Upagupta. He paid homage at Swayambhu Stupa, Guhyeshvari, and eight Vitaragas. It is said that he erected many Chaityas and offered his daughter, Charumati, to a local prince, Devapala. In the following centuries, several great Buddhist masters visited the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal and contributed to the propagation of the religion, such as Vasubandhu (4th century CE), Santarakshita, Padmasambhava (8th century CE), Atisha Dipamkara Srijnana and Milarepa (11th century CE).

The Kiratas were the first people in Nepal who embraced the Buddha's teachings, followed by the Licchavis and the Newars. Newar Buddhists practise a particular variant of Vajrayana Buddhism and Theravada Buddhism but the one that's most widely

The interior of the temple at Boudha is adorned with detailed, colourful paintings



The World Peace Pagoda in Lumbini is designed as a symbol of humanity



“As a lotus flower is born in water, grows in water and rises out of water to stand above it unsoiled, so I, born in the world, raised in the world, having overcome the world, live unsoiled by the world.”

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA

followed is Tibetan Buddhism. In Nepal's hill and mountain regions, Hinduism has absorbed Buddhist tenets to such an extent that in many cases they have shared deities and temples. For instance, the Muktinath temple is sacred and a common house of worship for both Hindus and Buddhists.

Nepal is believed to have over 1,200 Buddhist temples, some dating as far back as 2,000 years. In the Kathmandu Valley as well, monasteries can be found in many of the mountain districts that border Tibet to the north and India to the east. Important temples, Swayambhunath and Boudhanath are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Patan, the oldest city in Kathmandu Valley, has at least 18 ancient Buddhist temples such as the Golden temple, Ashoka *Stupas*, Mahaboudha, Rato Machhendranath, and so on.

The art and architecture of Nepalese temples and stupas were partly guided by their Indian counterparts. The *stupa* at Boudha in Kathmandu, the largest Buddhist temple in the country and one of the largest *stupas* in the world, is believed to have been built originally sometime in the 7th century. It was later rebuilt. It features a huge dome structure with a gilded spire and a brass canopy and has Lord Buddha's eyes painted on the base. The relics of the Kashyapa Buddha are said to be enshrined there. Like the pantheon on the stone temples of India,



the pantheon of Nepal is laid out mainly on the exterior of the temple.

As close neighbours, India and Nepal share unique ties of friendship characterised by an open border and deep-rooted people-to-people contact. The Indian government recently committed a \$50 million grant for post-earthquake reconstruction of various cultural heritage sites. The Seto Machindranath temple in Jana Bahal will be restored, as will the Kumari Chhen, the historic house of the Living Goddess of Patan, located inside Ratnakar Mahavihara.

The golden statues of Avalokiteshvara, Buddha Shakyamuni and Padmasambhava on lotus thrones in Buddha Park, Kathmandu

BUDDHISM: INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

Buddhist monks pray
at Seng Guan temple in
Manila on the occasion
of Lunar New Year





Philippines

Every year, the full-moon day of the month of May is celebrated as Vesak Day in the Philippines, to mark the birth of the Buddha. Propagating the message of peace, unity, compassion and non-violence, Buddhist institutions and organisations engage in humanitarian activities.

If we go back in history, the most ancient evidence of Indian influence is the images of the Dipankara Buddha, who enjoyed great favour with the seamen frequenting the southern islands. From the 9th century onwards, the islands were introduced to the Buddha's teachings, as per texts by Yi Jing, a Tang-era Chinese monk and scholar. Buddhism seems to have opened the way, thanks to its missionary spirit and lack of racial prejudice. However, the paucity of Hindu or Buddhist idols or images in the Philippines is attributed by scholars to the fact that such images were never plentiful to begin with.

However, there have been some discoveries. The Golden Tara, an eight-inch image of the deity in gold, was discovered in Maasin, Esperanza, in 1917. The icon, a 21-karat gold figurine, is at present kept in the Gem Room of the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, United States. It has been suggested that the figurine represents a Mahayana Buddhist goddess from the tenth century. A suggestion



Two gigantic golden Buddha statues tower over Isdaan Park in Tarlac

“Whatever living beings there may be—feeble or strong, long, stout, or of medium size, short, small, large, those seen or those unseen, those dwelling far or near, those who are born as well as those yet to be born—may all beings have happy minds.”

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA

A golden statuette of the Hindu-Buddhist goddess, Kinnari, was excavated in Butuan



The Agusan image, or the Golden Tara statuette, is now on display at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, United States

is that it may belong to the second half of the Shailendra period; the Shailendras ruled Sri Vijaya between 850 and 950 CE and were Buddhists. Therefore, the sculptural techniques would have been influenced by the Indo (Buddhist)-Javanese art of this period. The Sri Vijaya empire and the Javanese Majapahit empire had flourished as Buddhist cultural centres, allowing the spread of Theravada Buddhism, as well as the rituals of Vajrayāna in the 7th century.

Another important excavation was of the Avalokitesvara icon at Mactan, Cebu, in 1921. The statue is of bronze and may be a Siva-Buddhist blending rather than being purely Buddhist. The icon was unfortunately destroyed during World War II. Also, a clay medallion was discovered during an archaeological dig in 1961. It is locally made, 2.6-inches high and 1.9-inches wide, with a low relief image of the Mahayana Buddhist Bodhisattva, Avalokitesvara.

In the modern-day Philippines,



Longhua temple is one of the most famous Mahayana Buddhist temples in Davao city

Buddhism is kept alive thanks to temples such as the one under the aegis of the International Kadampa Buddhist Union in Manila; its objective is to promote the Buddhist faith and preach the importance of cultivating human values.

BUDDHISM: INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

Tongdosa temple in Yangsan city is one of the hermitages dedicated to housing artefacts of the Buddha in the Republic of Korea





Audio Credit: Tongdo-sa Temple in Yangsan City, Republic of Korea

Republic of Korea

Centuries after Buddhism originated in India, Mahayana Buddhism arrived in China through the Silk Route in the 1st century CE, then in the Korean peninsula in the 3rd century during the Three Kingdoms Period from where it was taken later to Japan. The Samguk yusa records three monks who were among the first to bring Buddhist teachings, or Dharma, to Korea: Malananta, an Indian Buddhist monk who brought Buddhism to Baekje in the southern Korean peninsula in the late fourth century; Sundo, a Chinese Buddhist monk who brought Buddhism to Goguryeo in northern Korea; and Ado, a Chinese Buddhist monk who brought Buddhism to Silla in Central Korea. In Korea, Buddhism was adopted as the state religion of three constituent polities of the Three Kingdoms Period.

In 526 CE, a Korean monk, Gyeomik, went to India to learn Sanskrit and study the monastic discipline, Vinaya; he later founded the Gyeul branch of Buddhism based on Vinaya. Another famous Korean visitor to India was Hyecho, a Korean Buddhist monk, who, on the advice of his Indian teachers in China, set out for India in 723 CE to acquaint himself with the language and culture of the land of the Buddha. He wrote a travelogue of his journey in Chinese, *Wang*



Haesugwan-eum Sarira Pagoda at Naksansa temple, which is believed to be the site where Bodhisattva, Avalokitesvara resides

“You can search throughout the entire universe for someone who is more deserving of your love and affection than you are yourself, and that person is not to be found anywhere. You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection.”

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA



The Eunhasa temple is located on Sineosan Mountain



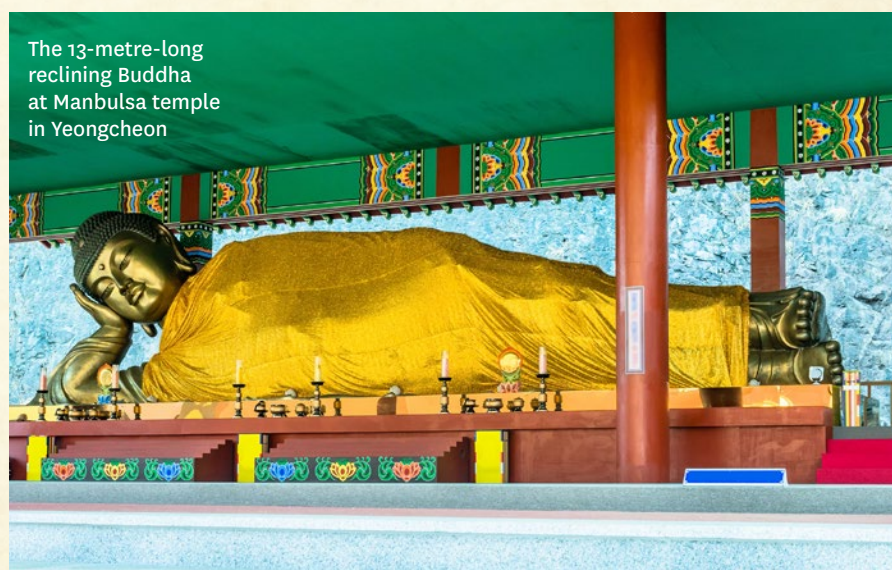
ocheonchukguk jeon or ‘An account of travel to the five Indian kingdoms.’

The spread of Buddhism from India to East Asia formed a direct connection between India and the Republic of Korea but many are not aware that there is a deeper cultural bond: Legend has it that Korean King Suro married Suriratna, a princess from Ayodhya, the sacred birthplace of the Hindu god, Lord Rama. The Eunhasa temple was originally built during their reign but was unfortunately burnt down during the 1592 Japanese invasion. It was rebuilt and subsequently renovated.

Tongdosa temple (one of the Three Jewel Temples of Korea), was founded by Jajang-yulsa after he returned from a pilgrimage to China in 646 CE. It houses a robe, a begging bowl and a piece of skull said to belong to the Buddha. The Bongjeongam hermitage is said to have a *sarira* (holy relic of the Buddha), while Sangwonsa is also known to house bone relics. At Bulguksa temple, beneath a three-storey stone pagoda lie 46 holy relics *sarira* that have been kept for over 1,200 years, with two more having appeared recently.



A traditional Korean Pasa stone pagoda at the royal tomb of King Suro in Gimhae



The 13-metre-long reclining Buddha at Manbulsal temple in Yeongcheon

BUDDHISM: INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

One of the most spectacular sights in Singapore, the Buddha Tooth Relic temple is dedicated to the Maitreya Buddha





Singapore

BUDDHISM, INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

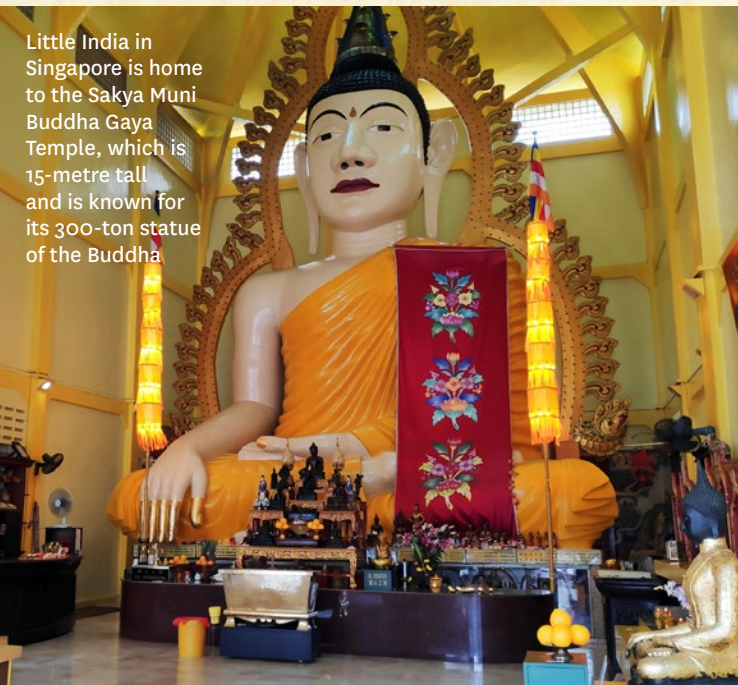
Archaeological evidence found in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam between the 6th and the 7th centuries clearly shows how Buddhism developed in a localised form, intermingling with local belief systems, and then manifesting in their art and architecture. In Singapore, many of the early Buddhist Theravada and Mahayana religious practices and study of texts came from Sri Lanka, China, Thailand, and Myanmar. This can be seen through the major monasteries, temples and Buddhist colleges set up in the 19th and the 20th centuries. The only Indian Buddhist meditation practice that came into Singapore directly from India is Vipassana meditation practice.

In the absence of any Buddhist antiquities of the Sri Vijaya period found on Singapore's soil,

The Buddha Tooth Relic temple draws inspiration from Japanese architecture



Little India in Singapore is home to the Sakya Muni Buddha Gaya Temple, which is 15-metre tall and is known for its 300-ton statue of the Buddha

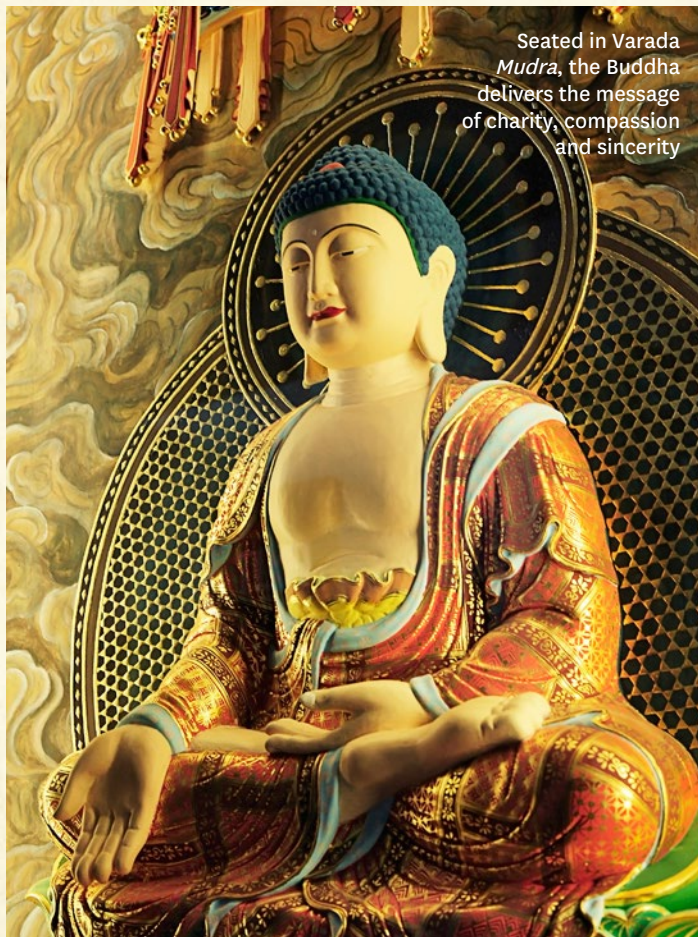


it is not certain if Singapore was active during the Sri Vijaya period, but it certainly was during the Majapahit period in the 14th century, based on a cache of gold ornaments excavated in Bukit Larangan, Fort Canning Hill. In recent times, one of the first major exhibitions organised by the National Heritage Board of Singapore and the Ministry of Culture of the Government of India was 'Alamkara: 5,000 Years of Indian Art' (1994 to 1995) hosted by the former National Museum. It was the largest and the most comprehensive loan of high-quality artefacts to

*“In separateness
lies the world’s greatest
misery; in compassion
lies the world’s
true strength.”*

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA

Built in 1921, Kong
Meng San Phor Kark
See Monastery is the
largest Buddhist site
in Singapore



Seated in Varada
Mudra, the Buddha
delivers the message
of charity, compassion
and sincerity

have ever left India’s shores from the National Museum in New Delhi. The highlight of the exhibition was the precious bone relics of Lord Buddha excavated in Piprawah in Uttar Pradesh, kept in a steatite relic casket uncovered in 1898. The trend of venerating relics became a popular phenomenon and Singapore now has a large temple dedicated to the Tooth Relic of the Buddha.

Singapore hosted the third East Asia Summit in 2007 and the Summit endorsed the proposal to build a new Nalanda University near the original university site. The two countries celebrated 50 years of bilateral relations with an exhibition on ‘Treasures from Asia’s Oldest Museum of Buddhist Art—the Indian Museum, Kolkata’. The exhibition was a visual biography of sacred and sublime examples of art from ancient Buddhist sites including Barhut, Mathura, Gandhara, Sarnath, and Bodh Gaya.

BUDDHISM: INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD



In Dambulla, Sri Lanka, the Golden temple is home to well-preserved caves adorned with ancient Buddhist art, including murals and sculptures

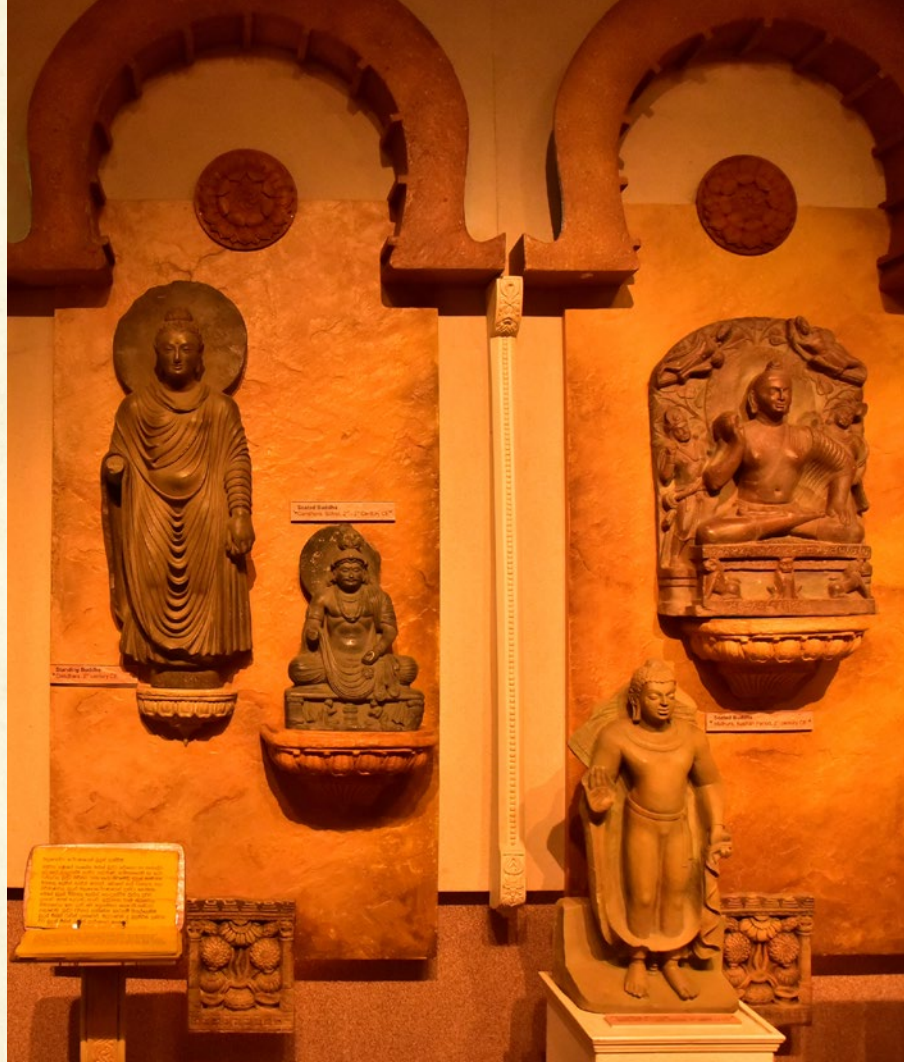


Sri Lanka

According to Buddhist chronicles, in the 3rd century BCE, the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka sent his son, Mahendra (referred to as Arahata Mahinda Thera in Sinhalese tradition), to propagate Buddhism in Sri Lanka. On his arrival, Arahata Mahinda Thera met Sri Lankan King Devanampiya Tissa, who embraced Buddhism and established the Mahavihara Monastery. Later, Emperor Ashoka also sent his daughter, Sanghamitra (referred to as Arahata Sanghamitta Theri in Sinhalese tradition), who arrived with a branch of the Mahabodhi tree from Bodhi Gaya in Bihar, India, under which the Buddha had attained the Enlightenment. The sacred sapling was ceremonially planted in the Royal Park of the Anuradhapura city, and is today referred to as the Jaya Sri Maha Bodhi tree.

Another highly venerated Buddhist heritage of Sri Lanka is the Sacred Tooth Relic of the Buddha, which is enshrined in the temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic in Kandy. According to Sinhalese tradition, in the fourth century CE, King Gunaseeva of Kalinga (present-day Odisha) sent the Sacred Tooth Relic to Sri Lanka through his daughter, Princess Hemamala, and her husband, Prince Dantha, to safeguard it from other rulers.

One of the primary showcases for Buddhism in the island nation, and also a collaborative project between the two countries, is The Indian Gallery at the International Buddhist Museum in the temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic at Kandy, which was inaugurated in 2013.



Symbolic and anthropologic representations of Buddhism at the Indian Gallery, Kandy



Buddhist hand gestures of different mudras are depicted in three-dimensional form around a pillar



The restoration project for Thiruketheeswaram Temple in Mannar has strengthened the ties between India and Sri Lanka

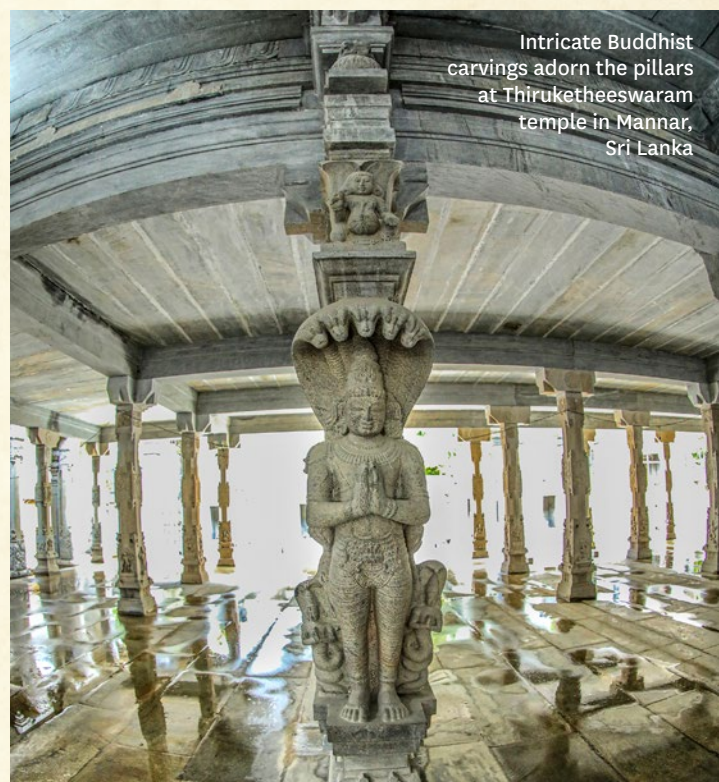
“If you are quiet enough, you will hear the flow of the universe. You will feel its rhythm. Go with this flow. Happiness lies ahead. Meditation is key.”

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA

India and Sri Lanka continue to work together on such estimable projects. In 2012, the then President of Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapaksa, visited Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh and laid the foundation stone for the Sanchi University of Buddhist-Indic Studies, together with the then Prime Minister of Bhutan, Jigme Yoser Thinley. It was launched in 2013.

In July 2020, the Government of India declared the airport at Kushinagar (the place of the Buddha’s *Mahaparinibbana*) in Uttar Pradesh, India, an international airport, to allow Buddhist pilgrims to visit the revered site with ease. The inaugural flight to this airport will be from Sri Lanka.

During the Virtual Bilateral Summit held between India and Sri Lanka in September 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a \$15 million grant for maintaining the Buddhist ties between the two countries.



Intricate Buddhist carvings adorn the pillars at Thiruketheeswaram temple in Mannar, Sri Lanka

The illuminated Wat Arun,
or the temple of Dawn,
glows next to the Chao
Phraya River at night





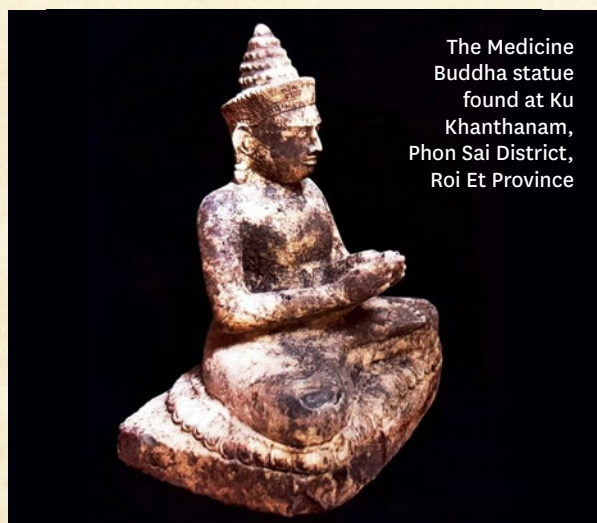
Thailand

Buddhism is believed to have been established in the Southeast Asian peninsula in the 3rd century BCE, when Emperor Ashoka initiated a Buddhist missionary movement by sending nine groups of monks to foreign countries to spread the teachings of Lord Buddha. One of these groups, led by Sona Thera and Uttara Thera, came to a land then known as Suvarnabhūmi, or present-day Southeast Asia, including Thailand.

From the Sukhothai period in the 13th century CE onwards, Thailand has been the land of Theravada Buddhism. The rulers of the early states were devout Buddhists. They built *stūpas*, consecrated images of the Buddha and donated money to monasteries. The Buddhist monarchs of the Chakri Dynasty of the Rattanakosin Period (1782 to the present) have acted as *dharmarājā* (the righteous king) to govern the Thai kingdom. These states followed spiritual and social traditions based on Buddhism and adopted ways of writing and literature, including Pali and Sanskrit, from India. Thai literature



It is believed that the Four Buddha Footprints in Chiang Mai were planted when the Enlightened One travelled there



The Medicine Buddha statue found at Ku Khanthanam, Phon Sai District, Roi Et Province

and mural art have drawn heavily upon the *Sutta Pitaka* and the *Jatakas*. The 'Ye Dhamma', a popular Buddhist verse, was found on some stupas, and in brick and stone inscriptions in Nakhon Pathom Province in Central Thailand.

Mahayana Buddhism arrived through lower Burma and gained influence over the peninsula's southern part—the seat of the Sri Vijaya kingdom. Sri Vijaya monarchs practised both Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism. Thai scholars believe that the Mon kingdom of Dvaravati (c. 6th to the 11th centuries) is likely to have received Buddhist missionaries during this era. Archaeological finds such as Dharma

“All conditioned things are impermanent—when one sees this with wisdom, one turns away from suffering.”

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA

wheels, the Buddha's footprints, crouching deer, the ordination hall depicting a scene from the life of the Buddha (the Past Lives of the Buddha), the Wheel of the Law (*dharmachakra*) made of stone or terracotta and Pali inscriptions in ancient cities like Nakon Pathom point to an early Buddhist presence. The original structure of the ancient Phra Pathom Stupa is believed to be similar in design to the Stupa of Sanchi.

Various Southeast Asian kingdoms that ruled over parts of modern Thailand, such as the Khmer Empire and the Mon Lavo Kingdom, were influenced by Indian Buddhist trends. In the Rattanakosin era (starting 1782), King Phra Buddha Yotfa Chulalok built the temple of the Emerald Buddha in his Grand Palace. An ancient custom observed till date is that the King of Thailand, although protector of all religions, must always be a Buddhist.

The temples of Thailand have numerous depictions of Garuda, on whom Lord Vishnu rides. Garuda has been a royal symbol in Thailand since early times. It might be mentioned here that there is a Garuda *dhwaja* (or regal flag on a staff) made in the Bharhut Buddhist *stupa* railings of the 2nd century BCE, from Central India. Garudas also feature prominently in many Buddhist monasteries of the 11th to the 13th centuries CE, across Western Tibet, Ladakh, Lahaul-Spiti and Kinnaur.

The Ramayana, or Ramakien, is the great cultural tradition of Thailand. This epic of ethics is at the heart of the culture of this country, which is ruled by King Rama X at present.



Dvāravatī art from 7th century CE, found at Wat Saneha, is now on display at the National Museum, Bangkok



Located in Lampang today, Wat Pong Sanuk, an iconic Buddhist temple, was built in 680 CE



Wat Tham Pha Daen on Phu Phan Mountain is a temple embellished with carvings depicting the Buddha's birth, the Enlightenment and Nirvana

BUDDHISM: INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

The largest reclining
Buddha in Vietnam,
at Som Rong Pagoda in
Soc Trang Province





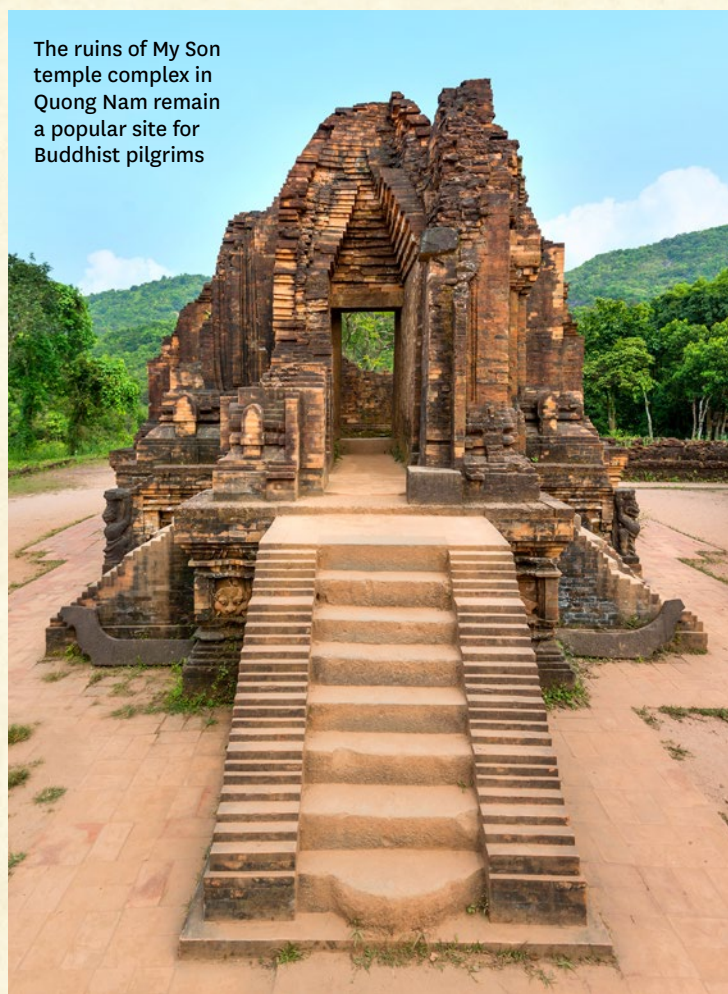
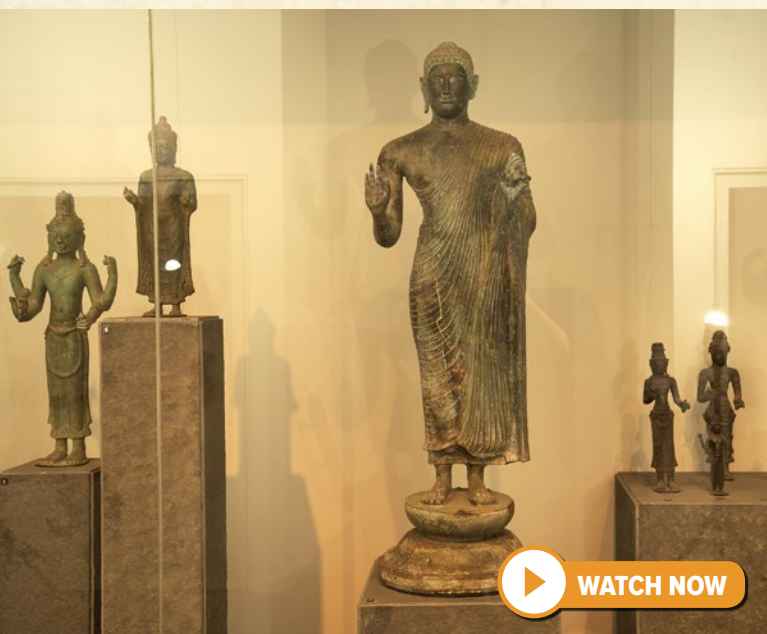
Vietnam

BUDDHISM, INDIA'S GIFT TO THE WORLD

Some say Buddhism entered Vietnam from India as early as the third or the 2nd century BCE. Whichever the point of entrance might be, it is today the single largest organised religion in Vietnam and practising Buddhists are found everywhere in the country.

To strengthen its deep cultural ties and to help conserve and restore the Cham monuments at the My Son temple complex in Quang Nam province in Vietnam, India offered its Archaeological Survey of India to carry out the restoration work. The temple complex was built in the 9th century CE during the reign of King Indravarman II, who also built the famous Đồng Dươn (Dong DOUNG) Buddhist

A rare 8th-century Buddha statue at the Vietnamese Museum of History in Ho Chi Minh City



*“Following the Noble Path
is like entering a dark room with
a light in the hand; the darkness will
all be cleared away, and the room
will be filled with light.”*

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA

The Da Nang-based Museum of Cham Sculpture houses 47 sandstone artefacts from the excavations in Phong Le village



Monastery in Quang Nam Province. French experts had discovered the temple complex in a dilapidated condition around 1903-04. It was further destroyed during World War II, the two Indo-China wars and political disturbances over time in Vietnam.

The Đồng Dương (Dong Dzung) architectural style of the late ninth century is reflected in the temples; this style is named after the Vietnamese town that occupies the site of the ninth-century city and Buddhist monastery of Indrapura. The archaeological site of the monastery has been largely destroyed; French scholars of the early twentieth century were only able to create diagrams of its layout. The Archaeological Survey of India's conservation work on the three groups of temples (A, H, K) has transformed My Son temple complex into a major tourist attraction in Vietnam.

The project began in 2017, and interestingly, during the restoration work on the Group temples, the ASI team recovered a 1,100-year-old sandstone Shiva Linga, a monolithic structure with decorative patterns of immense cultural value. Before this, six other Shiva Lingas had also been recovered in the temple complex.

The stunning Golden Buddha statue, also known as Thien vien Van Hanh, in Dalat city



A mural in the Ajanta Caves in Maharashtra, the Miracle at Shravasti, depicts the moment when the Buddha emitted fire and water simultaneously, illuminating the cosmos



*The
Buddha's
Life
Lessons*

The harbinger of peace

*Should a person do good
Let him do it again and again
Let him find pleasure therein
For blissful is the accumulation of good*

This verse from the Dhammapada or The Buddha's Path of Wisdom—a collection of the Buddha's teachings compiled in verse in Pali—as translated by the monk and renowned writer, Acharya Buddharakkhita (1922-2013), can be seen as a distillation of the Buddha's teachings. It talks of the essential need to do something for the good of the body politik and then do it repeatedly so that the resultant good can be repeated. And the reason for doing it, to experience the bliss of the accumulation of good in the universe, is the essence of the Noble Eightfold Path. The simplicity of the Noble Eightfold Path is that there is never any need for debate on what to do: Just do the right thing.

By the 8th to 9th century BCE, the concepts of *samsara* (cycle of life), *maya* (illusions) and *mithya* (lies), had been elucidated in the Upanishads, the oldest treatises of Brahmanic knowledge. The ones who were able to look beyond the realm of the material world and unveil the eternal truths were known as the Enlightened Ones or Tirthankaras or Victors over the Fear of Death.

Carved out of stone, this sculpture in the Kuda Buddhist Caves, Maharashtra, shows the Buddha seated on a lotus





*“Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all
mind-wrought. If with an impure mind a person speaks or acts
suffering follows him like the wheel that follows the foot of the ox.”*

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA

The simplicity of the Buddha's teachings has kept him as relevant today as when he first started preaching after attaining Enlightenment in the 5th century BCE. The root of all suffering is desire and letting go of desire will release you from the cycle of birth, suffering and death. This becomes even more relevant in today's pandemic-ridden world where death and suffering have come to the forefront. The teaching is

simple, even though following it might seem difficult at first because human beings, by nature, desire to hold on to worldly or material possessions.

Another reason for the wide popularity of Buddhism and its teachings is its inclusiveness. Even in the decades immediately after the Buddha attained Nirvana, people from all walks of life and all strata of society joined the movement.

Mural depicting
Tantric Buddhism
adorn the walls of Hemis
Monastery in Ladakh



According to history, Emperor Ashoka converted to Buddhism after he saw the devastation wreaked by war. According to the Jataka tales, Amrapali, a courtesan in the kingdom of Vaishali, also became a follower of the Buddha after hearing one of his sermons. His own son, wife and even cousins became his followers.

Over the years, Buddhism did go through

changes. Apart from the *Mahayana* or Greater Vehicle and *Hinayana* or Lesser Vehicle, also known as *Theravada*, there is also the *Vajrayana* school of thought. *Theravada* can be traced back to the early days of Buddhism. Central texts of the school are written in Pali, which was the language of the populace during the Buddha's lifetime. Theravada monks seek

*“Earnestness is the path of immortality (Nirvana),
thoughtlessness the path of death. Those who are in earnest do not
die, those who are thoughtless are as if dead already.”*

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA



The Gon-Nila-Phuk caves of Saspol in Ladakh, are home to Buddhist wall paintings dating to the 10th century CE

The Reclining Buddha of Nanzo-in Temple in Fukuoka, Japan, depicts the Buddha attaining Nirvana



The first monastery in Tibet built by King Trisong Deutsen in 763 CE, the Samye Monastery, reflects Indian influence on Tibetan architecture





Enlightenment for *Nirvana* and Salvation. The Mahayana school of Buddhism, which developed in India around the 1st century BCE, uses Sanskrit, the language of the elite, and its followers seek liberation for all. Its doctrine centres on compassion and wisdom. It considers the Buddha's teachings sacrosanct and permanent, and uses Tantra techniques to attain the Enlightenment swiftly. Today, many more schools are prevalent such as the Zen, Nichiren, Shingon, Pure Land and Tendai.



An 18th-century painting depicts Amitayus or the Amitabha Buddha, the Buddha of Eternal Life, in Sukhavati (or the Pure Land)

Zen Buddhism is a combination of the Mahayana school from India and the Tao school from China. The Sanskrit word *Dhyan* or concentration became Ch'an in Chinese, which, in turn, became Zen in Japanese. This form of Buddhism was taken to China from India by monk Bodhidharma in the 6th century CE. From China, it spread to Korea in the 7th century CE and Japan in the 12th century CE. In the twentieth century, it became popular in the West. Hakuin Ekaku (1686-1769),

*“Let a wise man blow off the impurities of his self,
as a smith blows off the impurities of silver one by one, little
by little, and from time to time.”*

— GAUTAMA BUDDHA

one of the most famous exponents of Japanese Zen Buddhism, described the essence of it succinctly:

*All beings by nature are Buddhas,
as ice by nature is water.
Apart from water, there is no ice;
apart from beings, no Buddhas.*

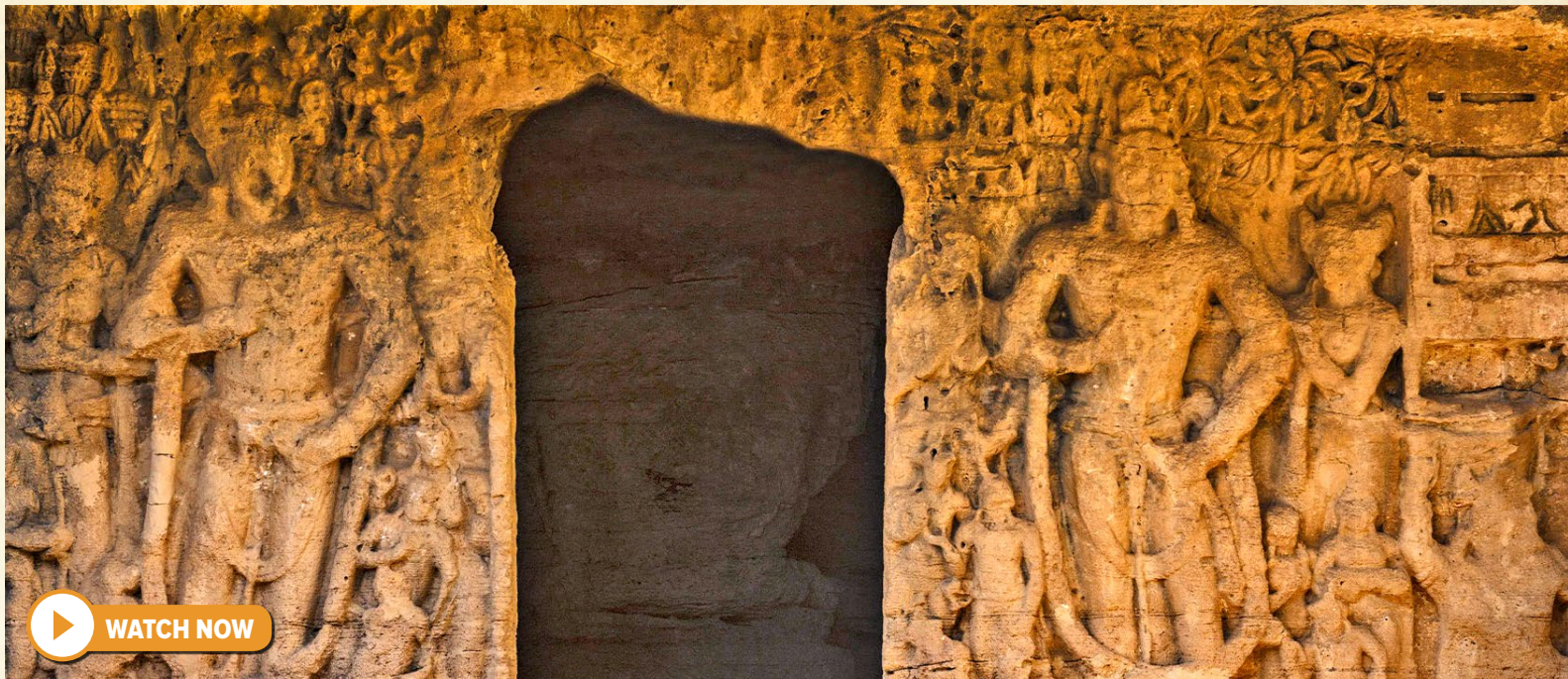
Zen Buddhism directs people inward, seeking Enlightenment from within. The way to do this is to control the mind through meditation.

Pure Land Buddhism began in India in the second century BCE though, today, it is most popular in China, where it spread in the second century CE, and in Japan where it reached in the 6th century CE. It teaches that the way to attain Enlightenment is through faith and trust in the saviour, Amitabha Buddha, which is the path to the Pure Land, a kind of paradise. Honen (1133-1212) increased the popularity of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan by simplifying the Buddha's teachings and offering chanting as a way to reach the Pure Land.

The genesis of Pure Land Buddhism lies in the story of a king who was so deeply affected by the suffering in this world that he gave up his kingdom and became a monk called Dharmakara. He wanted to create a



The first temple
dedicated to
Theravada Buddhism
in Rajgir, Bihar



The 4th-century Khambhalida Caves in Gujarat, feature a *chaitya-griha* (a shrine) at the centre

world that would be free of all limitations. He meditated for a long time and the knowledge he gained was put down as 48 vows. After attaining the Enlightenment, he became the Amitabha Buddha. His idea of paradise was called Sukhavati or Pure Land.

Nichiren Buddhism was born in medieval Japan when a monk, Nichiren Daishonin (1222-1282), tried to reform Buddhism for what he considered a degraded age. He based his teachings on Buddhism's basic tenets of Buddhism, Dharmam and Sangham but made the chant *Nam Myoho Renge Kyo* an important part of the route to the Enlightenment, empowerment and inner

transformation. It is still popular in India, Japan, and the West, especially in the urban centres. In India, many celebrities including TV personalities and Bollywood actors are followers of Buddhism.

The Dalai Lama, the leader of Tibetan Buddhism, is probably the most well-known face of Buddhism. He is a respected representative of Tibetan Buddhism, a form of the Vajrayana school though it includes teachings from the Mahayana school with Tantric and shamanic elements. Tibetan Buddhism is practised in Bhutan and Tibet, though now most of its followers live outside their homeland, mainly in India.



A Public Diplomacy initiative of
THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
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