Buddha Purnima

Context

President’s Greetings on The Eve of Buddha Purnima on May 6th

Vesak Day

Vesak Day, spelt “Wesak Day” until the 1970s, commemorates the birth, enlightenment and attainment of nirvana of Siddharta Gautama Shakyamuni (Sakyamuni) Buddha. The day falls on the full moon of the fourth lunar month. It falls on 7th May, 2020.

About Buddhism

- The religion is based upon the teachings, life experiences of its founder Siddhartha Gautam, born in circa 563 BCE.
- He was born into royal family of Sakya clan who ruled from Kapilvastu, in Lumbini which is situated near the Indo-Nepal Border.
- At the age of 29, Gautama left home and rejected his life of riches and embraced a lifestyle of asceticism, or extreme self-discipline.
- After 49 consecutive days of meditation, Gautama attained Bodhi (enlightenment) under a pipal tree at Bodhgaya a village in Bihar.
- Buddha gave his first sermon in the village of Sarnath, near the city of Benares in UP. This event is known as Dharma-Chakra-Pravartana (turning of the wheel of law).
- He died at the age of 80 in 483 BCE at a place called Kushinagara a town in UP. The event is known as Mahaparinibban.

Tenets of Buddhism

- Buddha asked his followers to avoid the two extremes of indulgence in worldly pleasure and the practice of strict abstinence and asceticism.
- He ascribed instead the ’Madhyam Marg’ or the middle path which was to be followed.
- According to him everyone was responsible for their own happiness in life, stressing upon the individualistic component of Buddhism.
- The main teachings of Buddhism are encapsulated in the basic concept of four noble truths or ariya-sachchani and eightfold path or astangika marg.

Four noble truths:

Suffering (dukkha) is the essence of the world.

Every suffering has a cause – Samudya.

Suffering could be extinguished – Nirodha.

It can be achieved by following the Atthanga Magga (Eight Fold Path).

Eight Fold Paths: the path consists of various interconnected activities related to knowledge, conduct, and meditative practices.

1. Right view
Dukkha and its extinction are central to the Buddha’s doctrine. Suffering is not limited to the actual pain but also to the potential to experience these things.

The essence of Buddhism is the attainment of enlightenment. It points to a way of life that avoids self-indulgence and self-denial. There is no supreme god or deity in Buddhism.

The ultimate goal of Buddha’s teaching was the attainment of nibbana which was not a place but an experience, and could be attained in this life.

Buddha also established code of conduct both for the monastic order and the laymen to follow which are also known as the **Five Precepts or Pancasil** and refrain from them.

1. Violence
2. stealing
3. sexual misconduct
4. lying or gossip
5. taking intoxicating substances e.g. drugs or drink

### Major Buddhist Texts

- The Buddha’s teaching was oral. He taught for 45 years, adapting the teaching to suit the group he was addressing.
- The Sangha memorized the teachings, and there were group recitations at festivals and special occasions.
- The teachings were rehearsed and authenticated at the First Council and were divided in Three Pitakas in 483 BC.
- His teachings were written down around 25 B.C.E. in Pali.

### Buddhist Councils

Buddhist Councils marked important turning points in the early Buddhism.

These councils resulted in sectarian clashes and the eventual Great Schism that resulted in the two major schools, Theravada and Mahayana.

In total, 4 major Buddhist councils were convened:

#### First Council

It was held soon after the Mahaparinirvan of the Buddha, around 483 BC under the patronage of King Ajatshatru and was presided by Mahakasyapa, a monk.

The council was held in the Sattapani cave at Rajgriha.
The council was held with the purpose of preserving Buddha’s teachings (Sutta) and rules for disciples. During this council, the teachings of Buddha were divided into three Pitakas.

**Second Council**

It was held in Vaishali, a village in Bihar under the patronage of the king Kalasoka in 383 BC. It was presided by Sabakami.

**Third Council**

It was held in 250 BC in Patliputra under the patronage of Ashoka and was presided by Moggaliputta Tissa.

**Forth Council**

It was held in 72 AD at Kundalvana, Kashmir. It was presided by Vasumitra, while Asvaghosa was his deputy under the patronage of King Kanishka of Kushan Empire.

Buddhism was divided into two sects namely Mahayan and Hinayan.

**Schools of Buddhism**

**Mahayana:**

- It is one of the two main schools of Buddhism.
- The term Mahayana is a Sanskrit word which literally means "Great Vehicle".
- It believes in the heavenliness of Buddha and Idol worship of Buddha and Bodhisattvas embodying Buddha Nature.
- It originated in northern India and Kashmir and then spread east into Central Asia, East Asia and some areas of Southeast Asia.
- Buddhist schools embedded in China, Korea, Tibet and Japan belong to the Mahayana tradition.

**Hinayana**

- Literally Lesser vehicle, also known as Abandoned Vehicle or Defective vehicle. It believes in the original teaching of Buddha or Doctrine of elders.
- It does not believe in Idol worship and tries to attain individual salvation through self discipline and meditation.
- Theravada is a Hinayana sect.

**Theravada**

- It is the most ancient branch of extant Buddhism today.
- It remains closest to the original teachings of the Buddha.
- Theravada Buddhism developed in Sri Lanka and subsequently spread to the rest of Southeast Asia. It is the dominant form of religion in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.

**Vajrayana**
Vajrayana means “The Vehicle of the Thunderbolt”, also known as tantric Buddhism. This Buddhist school developed in India around 900 CE. It is grounded on esoteric elements and very complex set of rituals compared with the rest of the Buddhist schools.

**Zen**

- It is a school of Mahayana Buddhism that originated in China during the Tang dynasty as the Chan school of Chinese Buddhism in and later developed into various schools.
- It spread to Japan in 7th century C.E.
- Meditation is the most distinctive feature of this Buddhist tradition.

**UNESCO’s heritage sites related to Buddhism:**

- Archaeological Site of Nalanda Mahavihara at Nalanda, Bihar
- Buddhist Monuments at Sanchi, MP
- Mahabodhi Temple Complex at Bodh Gaya, Bihar
- Ajanta Caves Aurangabad, Maharashtra