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SAMVAD III

Ulaanbaatar conclave unites Buddhist leaders across Asia



Performers at the opening of Battsagaan Grand Assembly Hall on September 6. Photo: Raymond Lam

A global Hindu-Buddhist Initiative for conflict avoidance and environment consciousness, initiated as part of a series of dialogues for peaceful co-existence, inter-religious understanding and interdependent sustainability was held from September 6-8, 2019 in Ulaanbaatar.

International delegates from Asia and Europe gathered in the Mongolian capital with the aim to create a conducive and compelling eco-system with the objective of emphasizing the importance of dialogue and understanding for avoiding conflicts and bring environment consciousness in global dialogue and restructuring

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50th anniversary celebration of Vishwa Shanti Stupa

The famous Shanti Stupa (Peace Pagoda) built atop the Rajgir hills, surrounded by a forest and accessed both by a ropeway and by foot- will mark its 50th anniversary, later this month on 25 October 2019. The temple was conceptualized and gifted by famous Buddhist philanthropist and monk Nichidatsu Fujii Guruji of Japan.

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The Inner Path Festival

The International Buddhist Confederation (IBC) in collaboration with Inner Path is organizing a Buddhist Film Festival in Delhi from October 10-13, 2019. The festival later moves to Nepal and will be held on October 18-19, 2019.

Four editions of the Festival have been held so far, and audiences have been in-

creasing rapidly. This year it will be held at the National Gallery of Modern Art, over four days.

The Inner Path Festival is the pioneering festival in India of Buddhist philosophy, aesthetics, art, culture and films. Launched in 2013, The Inner Path attempts to take

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Samvad III: Ulaanbaatar conclave unites Buddhist leaders across Asia

of present economic system that is inherently unsustainable and in conflict with nature.

Organized jointly by the Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF), Gandan Tegchenling, Ulaanbaatar's most important Buddhist monastery, and Mongolia's Institute of Strategic Studies, this year's Samvad was held in association with the Japan Foundation, the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC), and the Mongolia-based Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace (ABCP). The occasion was formally titled "Samvad III: Global Buddhist-Hindu Initiative on Conflict Avoidance and Environment Consciousness."

The Samvad series has been ongoing since 2015, when Indian and Japanese prime ministers Narendra Modi and Shinzo Abe began working together to apply the spiritual teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism to address modern-day issues threatening human civilization. The event was also one of national importance for Mongolia. Myanmar was the host to the second Samvad conclave in 2017.

This year's inauguration of Samvad was timed to coincide with the opening of the new Battsagaan Grand Assembly Hall



Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks (pre-recorded) to Samvad delegates inside Battsagaan Grand Assembly Hall on September 6. Photo: Raymond Lam

at Gandan where the consecration of the Buddha Statue and His two chief disciples gifted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Je Tsongkhapa statue gifted by HH the Dalai Lama and the statue of Ondor Gegeen Zanabazar, the 1st BogdJevzundamba of Mongolia gifted by the former President of Mongolia was undertaken.

The Grand Assembly Hall has a multi-purpose structure for religious events on the third floor, exhibition and conference spaces on the second floor, and a reception hall on the ground floor. Many residents from around Ulaanbaatar and beyond attended the inauguration on September 6, with the delegates welcomed by a series

of cultural performances highlighting Mongolian long song, orchestral music, *khoomii* (throat) singing, and folk dancing. Nepalese Buddhist singer and activist Ani Choying Drolma also gave a performance of her distinctive Dharma chanting.

The ceremonial opening of the Grand Assembly Hall's doors was succeeded by a succession of speeches by the religious and political stakeholders of this event. The abbot of Gandan, His Eminence Khamba Lama Gabju Chojjamts Demberel, gave a keynote that was followed by a speech from the prime minister of Mongolia, Khurelsukh Ukhnaa. Swaminathan Gurumurthy, chairman of the VIF and director of the Reserve Bank of India, highlighted the Indian perspective on conflict avoidance and environmental awareness. Both the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and His Holiness the Dalai Lama gave separate, pre-recorded speeches felicitating the conference. The Japanese ambassador to Mongolia, Takaoka Masato, delivered a text address from Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, stressing the common goals, shared values, and democratic ideals of countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

Plenary sessions featured on September 6-7, with papers on the themes of peaceful coexistence, interreligious understanding, and interdependent sustainability. The valedictory session was

held on September 7. Swami Mitrananda presided over the adoption of the "Samvad III - Ulaanbaatar Declaration," before a final word of thanks was given by Dr. Enkhbaigali Byambasuren of the Institute of Strategic Studies.

The third day of the conference had fewer official events and consisted of a city tour of local landmarks and monuments. Chief among the sites was the Palace Museum of the Bogd Khan (1869-1924), a Mongolian theocratic and nationalist leader. The delegation

was then taken to the capital's Central Stadium, where this year's Danshig Naadam festival and Khuree Tsam dance was being held. Forgotten for a century, the festival was revived in 2015 and has since then been held annually. The Khuree Tsam (Cham) dance is a taxing and epic ritual demanding an ensemble of song, dance music, decorative art, masks, and spiritual costumes in the service of channeling supernatural forces and offering moral instruction. A spectacular ceremony to burn away negative

energies—the Sor Zalakh—was also held. Finally, the VIF hosted an Indian-style farewell dinner with performances by Mongolian and Indian musicians.

India, Japan and Mongolia, important stakeholders in the Samvad dialogues continue to build on Buddhist cooperation among democratic nations for peace, co-existence and inter-religious understanding.

Inputs from Raymond Lam's article on the event in Mongolia Courtesy-Buddhistdoor Global

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The Inner Path Festival

the resurgence in Buddhist thought to a wider range of urban audiences at a time when violence and strife disrupt the fundamentals of our civilisation and culture. Each edition of the Festival presents to its audience works of visual and performing arts and other forms of creative and cultural expression, philosophy, discourse and discussions related to Buddhism from across the world.

"It gives audiences the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of Buddhism as a belief and a philosophy which can and does enrich their lives," said Aruna Vasudev, the co-founder and Director of the festival.

The four-day Festival comprises around 12-15 feature and documentary films on Buddhism, an art camp, a specially curated art and photography exhibition of works related to Buddhism, a painting demonstration/workshop, a panel discussion with artists and

The Discourse at Inner Path festival will be conducted by

- Ven. Dr. Dhammapiya, Secretary General, IBC
- Most Ven. Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery, HP and member of IBC's Governing Council
- Ven. Gyalten Samten, New Delhi
- Prof. K.T.S. Sarao, Head, Department of Buddhist Studies, Delhi University



BECOMING WHO I WAS
South Korea 2017
Directors: Moon Chang-Yong and Jeon Jin

PAINTING LIFE
India 2018
Director: Bijukumar Damodaran

PROPHECY
Bhutan 2016
Director: Zuri Rinpoche

filmmakers - Indian and international - an opening and closing night performance of dance or music, Discourses by eminent Buddhist practitioners and scholars. In the past we have had discourses by people of such eminence as His Holiness the 12th Kenting Tai Situpa, Geshe Dorji Damdul, Dr. Ravindra Panth, Prof. Lokesh Chandra, Dharmacharya Shantum Seth and Venerable Sumati Sasana.

The key speakers for the sessions on discourse and philosophy are Ven. Dr. Dhammapiya, Secretary General, IBC; Most Ven. Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery, HP and member of IBC's Governing Council; Ven. Gyalten Samten, New Delhi and Prof. K.T.S. Sarao, Head, Department of Buddhist Studies, Delhi University.

Some of the films to be shown are *Becoming who I was* (2017) by South Korean directors Moon Chang-Yong and Jeon Jin, *Painting Life* (2018) from India directed



A THOUSAND MOTHERS
USA 2017, Director: Kim Shelton

by Bijukumar Damodaran, *A Thousand Mothers* (2017) from USA directed by Kim Shelton and *Prophecy* (2016) from Bhutan directed by Zuri Rinpoche.

Aruna Vasudev, the founder and editor of Cinemaya, Cinefan Festival of Asian Cinema, the Founder and now President-Emeritus of NETPAC [Network for the Promotion of Asian Cinema] International as well as of NETPAC India, is the co-founder and the Director of The Inner Path Festival.



Khamba Lama Gabju speaks to a reporter about the conclave and exhibits on September 7. Photo Raymond Lam. Photo: Raymond Lam

Nagarjuna- the Second Buddha

(150-250 AD) and the concept of emptiness

Nagarjuna was the founder of Madhyamaka Buddhism who transformed the understanding of Buddhist traditions for future millennia, but the man remains an enigma. Nagarjuna's visionary interpretation of the concept of the emptiness of all things and his substantial body of Buddhist works earned him the sobriquet of 'The Second Buddha' in the Mahayana tradition, but precious little is known about his actual life.

There are constant contradictions about Nagarjuna's lifespan but the second century AD seems to be widely accepted as the broad period, with the years of his life placed around 150-250 AD. This seems to tally with the life of his foremost disciple, Aryadeva, who was the author of the treatise *Four Hundred Verses* on the actions of a Bodhisattva's yoga. Nagarjuna, together with Aryadeva, is credited with founding the Madhyamaka School of Mahayana Buddhism.

This also means that Tibetan sources that place his emigration from the Andhra region to Nalanda University, in present-day Bihar, are basically accurate. Nagarjuna eventually became the abbot of Nalanda.

Nagarjuna, through the great merit he had earned, fulfilled the superhuman task of living on the ocean bed to teach the Nagas. He made them many offerings and satisfied them on every score. Pleased, the Naga king presented him with the Hundred Thousand Verse, the Prajnaparamita Sutra.

While Nagarjuna is particularly associated with the Prajnaparamita Sutra, he is truly famous for his writings on emptiness. His legendary work is the *Madhyamaka Shastra* (Treatise on the Middle Way), also known as *Mulamadhyamakakarika* (Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way). His theme is the Bodhisattva's path to Buddhahood.

Enlightenment may be achieved by acquiring merit and the perfection of wisdom, meaning knowledge of emptiness. Within the Tibetan tradition especially, Nagarjuna is viewed as the second Buddha.

By the time Nagarjuna had matured as a philosopher, the concept of 'zero' had shaken up all existing metaphysical systems of philosophy. Since the third century BC, the freshly minted concept of zero had been helping to redefine the world. Nagarjuna took the new concept of emptiness, the void, and changed Buddhism.

This is the third in a series on the Great Masters



Naga princesses hold blazing wish-fulfilling jewels. The Dzi stones said to originate from Naga realms, are also depicted

The Tathagata Buddha (the One Who Came and Went) was transformed only because of this nature of interdependence and emptiness of all phenomena. It signified the hope of change and enlightenment for all.

Nagarjuna said that whatever phenomenon arises is empty of eternal essence, and to recognise it as such is the middle path. To realise it, we have to be conscious of how we live, of what we do, of how we interact with each other and with the earth; in short, mindful living.

Nagarjuna gave hope to our perennial quest to understand the world and ourselves. So far, all phenomena had been viewed as being fixed and their inherent substance as stable and unchanging. Good was good and bad was bad; the turbulent suffering of ignorant material life was the opposite of the enlightened spiritual existence and the wheel of samsara, of



Nagarjuna in the Dharmachakra mudra with Manjushri in the clouds

anguish and pain, was the opposite of the bliss of nirvana. He showed us that change and transformation, including enlightenment, is possible because of interdependence. Phenomena are open to change precisely because they lack inherent fixed nature and are, therefore, empty. The very nature of our existence and all the phenomena around us is emptiness and interdependence, which is why the Buddha too was transformed.

His analysis deconstructed the world to show that nothing is incontrovertible, nothing has immutable essence. Instead, everything flows into each other and

Tibetan sources that place his emigration from the Andhra region to Nalanda University, in present-day Bihar, are basically accurate. Nagarjuna eventually became the abbot of Nalanda

existence is interdependence. The kernel of bliss already exists in suffering. Material deprivation can lead to spiritual treasure. Conflict can blossom into friendship. Samsara can flow into nirvana. All conceivable change is indeed our nature and that's where we enter the realm of freedom of individual choice. In fact, it is up to us. Things can go either way, so the direction in which they go can be shaped by our deeds. Realisation depends on what we do and how we exist within the world. The law of karma is operated by us. He showed that Buddhism does not belong merely inside the covers of sacred texts or within the robes of monks and monasteries but on the street and in the minutiae of our daily lives. It is one of the most empowering messages the world has ever heard. The Buddhist must constantly reform himself and transform the world around him. That is the true mission of Buddhism.

We could be transformed if we move purposefully on that path. First, however, we must understand our own nature. The Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama Shakyamuni, had already signalled that he preferred us to spend our valuable time, rationed by life, on self-mastery instead of pondering on ultimate knowledge. He pointedly refused to respond to metaphysical questions about the existence of God and the beginning or end of the world. Instead, he placed emphasis on directing our energy to understanding and curing mental ills, destructive psychological tendencies and attachments.

When a human being is kept constantly on the boil by emotions, where is the need to seek an answer to the end of the world? Until and unless human beings introspect and develop a state of meditative enlightenment, they will be trapped in ignorance and suffering. Knowledge can alleviate suffering, but one has to work for that. The Buddha provided the Four Error (*Catuskoti*) denial method to discourage futile metaphysical meanderings. His response to the question about the beginning of the world was to say: i) the world does not have a beginning ii) it does not have a beginning, iii) It does not have

and not have a beginning, iv) nor does it neither have nor not have a beginning. In effect, he said nothing, neither confirming nor denying the proposition. He recommended to his followers to take no position whatsoever.

The Middle Way is the path between the extremes of sensual pleasure and asceticism. Enlightenment is the state beyond the agitated, dissatisfied mind. It is a state of freedom. What it means is that we can actually take charge of our own lives, instead of being controlled by the environment. At present, most of us, most of the time, live in a state of reaction. Our time and our energies are absorbed by reaction, not action.

Nagarjuna talked precisely about the lack of autonomous existence of phenomena. Everything depends upon everything else, which in turn depends upon other phenomena. It means that our lives unfold in the context of nature and society. Within that context, we are free to choose our attitudes and deeds, our karma, accumulating meritorious karma or harmful and negative karma. Thus, our fate is in our hands, and so we can transform ourselves. The nature of buddhahood is given to all, but realisation depends upon our efforts. The Buddhist vow to avoid suffering is not an ascetic shrinking from the world but a pledge to seek out the nirvana that already exists within this world. Suffering and peace, both are possibilities that lie before us, and the outcome depends on our actions and interaction. Merit and wisdom can lead to enlightenment.

This is an immensely liberating message, even for the twenty-first century. Everyone is engaged in the quest for happiness and if we reach beyond our conditioned minds, moulded by our circumstances, we can attain the silence within which the true reality is revealed to us.

*Excerpts from Nagarjuna- the Second Buddha by Mohini Kent, Global Envoy IBC; Series Editor (Books on the Great Masters) Aruna Vasudev
Publisher: Wisdom Tree*

HH the Dalai Lama on Nagarjuna

“Nagarjuna is someone for whom I have immense admiration. As soon as I wake up in the morning, I recite a verse he wrote in praise of the Buddha and his explanation of emptiness. In the Buddhist tradition, the Buddha taught us to test and verify his teaching through reason and analysis, and that is what Nagarjuna and other masters of the ancient Nalanda University have done. This scientific approach is a unique feature of the Buddhist tradition.

Nagarjuna made clear that while the teachings found in the Sanskrit Mahayana tradition are more profound than the teachings found in the Pali tradition, they do not contradict the Pali teachings. The Mahayana scriptures elaborate on themes presented and first developed in the earlier teachings of the Buddha, giving deeper and more detailed explanations of the ideas they contained. He explained that the reason we seek to understand the complex explanations of *sunyata* (*shoonyata*) or emptiness (void) is to understand reality and to eliminate wrong views and distorted ways of thinking. Wrong view here relates to the second of the Four Noble Truths, the origin of suffering. Once we begin to understand wisdom and eliminate wrong view, we may glimpse that achieving liberation actually is possible.



The Buddha emphasized the development of wisdom as the remedy for overcoming ignorance. And what is wisdom? It is understanding of ultimate reality, of reality as it is. Ignorance pervades all our perceptions and in order to overcome it we cultivate an understanding of emptiness and dependent origination. Nagarjuna referred to these teachings as being like treasure. The explanation of how things arise in dependence on causes and conditions may also arouse in us a deep concern for others, which we call compassion. And compassion teaches us the value of non-harming, non-violence, which is a fitting panacea for the ills and sorrows of the world.

Indian civilisation has given rise to a long series of great thinkers and teachers endowed with both human intelligence and a sense of responsibility towards the community. The leading India nuclear physicist Raja Ramanna once told me that he had read one of Nagarjuna's texts and was amazed and proud to find an account that accords with much of what quantum physics is saying today. Similarly, ancient Indian texts are a treasure trove of knowledge about the mind and its working. I believe they still have relevance today in the twenty-first century.

Because India and her people have, from ancient times cherished a rich and sophisticated philosophy of non-violence at the core of their heart, tolerance and pluralism have also flourished. These values, elaborated on by masters like Nagarjuna, continue to have great importance in the world we live in today and it is my conviction that India should take a stronger lead in presenting them to the world.”

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON SCHOLARSHIPS FOR STUDYING BUDDHISM IN INDIA

ICCR supports IBC efforts



Participants at the concluding session of the Symposium, New Delhi, July 21, 2019.

The IBC organized a two-day International Symposium on Scholarships for studying Buddhism in India on 20-21 July, 2019 in New Delhi. The scholarships will be available to foreign students for Buddhist studies in India. Based on the inputs received from the participating universities and the delegates, the IBC in consultation with an expert committee especially formed for this purpose is presently working out the detailed procedure and modalities of the scholarship scheme, including the shortlisting of prospective universities, the courses and the number of slots to be offered. The IBC scholarship programme will begin from the academic session 2020-21. In the first phase of the scheme, the scholarship will be open to some focused countries of South and South East Asian Buddhist nations, including Bhutan, Nepal and Mongolia.

The Director General of ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relations), Mr Akhilesh Mishra brought some good news for the participants when he said that the Council “would be willing to consider enhancing the number of scholarships for studying Buddhism and was open to exploring other instruments for promoting interactions and exchanges among Buddhist scholars and researches.

In his address as the Chief Guest, Mr Mishra said ICCR “attached the highest priority to promoting and nurturing relations with other countries in the field of education and intellectual, and academic exchanges. Annually, ICCR offers about 4,000 scholarships for foreign students to pursue higher studies in Indian Universities.

“I am glad to share that this year ICCR has included in the scheme two Premier Buddhist Institutions – Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies (CIHTS), Sarnath and Central Institute of Buddhist Studies, Leh.” Adding that they looked forward to receiving scholars for Buddhist studies in these institutions.

He described the International

Symposium on Scholarship an excellent initiative by IBC for encouraging interaction among Buddhist universities, monasteries and Institutions of India and Buddhist countries.

The subject was of special interest to him as he was from Varanasi and had grown up under the shadow of Dhamekh Stupa in Sarnath. Mr. Mishra, though a Masters in Mechanical Engineering is a career diplomat and speaks Spanish, Italian and Nepalese, and among Indian languages he knows Hindi and Sanskrit, besides English.

In an address where he extensively quoted from Sanskrit verses to expound on Buddhism, Buddhist philosophy and its message, he stated: Compared to many other world religions, बुद्धधम्म (Buddhism) is quite ancient – but पुराणमित्ये साधु सर्व- just because something is ancient it doesn't become great. The great significance of Buddhism lies in its essential message which is ever-fresh, timeless in relevance.

It does not encourage blind faith, but rational understanding through reasoning, argumentation and debate. The very foundation of ‘Buddha Dhamma’ is

the quest for knowledge:

बुद्धं तद् यच्च बोद्धव्यम् यच्च नान्येन बुद्ध्येत
शत्रुवत् च जिताः कलेशाः तेन बुद्धं वदन्ति माम् |

This Pursuit of knowledge is for the removal of suffering from the lives of all beings:

जगत् हिताय बुद्धो हि बोध माप्नोति शाश्वतम् |
अत एव च जीवनाम् सर्वेषाम् तु हिते रतः |

Buddhism is very modern in outlook, and quite mathematical in precision. Suffering is caused by attachment (राग, रति, काम) or aversion (hatred, envy द्वेष) – due to ignorance and confusion about the fundamental nature of the reality. So liberation from suffering requires insight and proper understanding of the nature of the reality (शून्यता) – all phenomenon are impermanent (अनित्य), without essence and self-less (अनात्म, शून्य) and interdependent in cause-effect dynamic (प्रतीत्य समुत्पाद) |

The causes of suffering (दुःख), attachment and aversion (राग – द्वेष) originate in individual's own mind –

Anything said or done with evil thought causes suffering, anything said or done with content, happy, positive mind gives happiness. So control of own mind and thought is key to happiness and removal of hatred –

Also, hatred can't be eradicated by hatred, it can only be removed by love, kindness, compassion and friendship –

Buddha taught us to fight "hatred" as the enemy –

मुख्यं दंडादिकं हित्वा प्रेरके यदि कुप्यति
द्वेषेण प्रेरितः सोऽपि द्वेषे दोषोस्तु मे वरम् |



Chief Guest, Mr. Akhilesh Mishra, Director General, ICCR, lighting the lamp: (L to R) Mr. Malay K Sinha, Director General, IBC, Rev. Bhante B. Sri Saranankara Nayaka MahaThera, Chief Adhikarana Sangha Nayaka of Malaysia and President, IBC, Ven. Dr. Dhammapiya, Secretary General, IBC, Ven. Lama Lobzang, Working President IBC, Most Ven. Dr. Pallekande Rathanasara Maha Thero, Sri Lanka, President, IBC and Prof. Dr. Christie Yu-Ling Chang, Director, Taipei, Taiwan, President, IBC.

When you are hit by a stick, you fight not with the stick, but the one using the stick; but since it is hatred which is causing the person to use the stick, you should fight at the hatred, not the person.
सुसुखं वत जीवेम वेरिनेसु अवेरिने |

There is no other, effective, pragmatic way to eliminate your enemies –
क्रियतो मारयिष्यामि दुर्जनान् गगनोपमाम्
मारिते क्रोधचिन्ते तु मारिता सर्वेशत्रुवः ||

Where is the amount of leather to cover the entire earth so that your feet are protected from thorns? Just covering your feet with shoes has the same effect as covering the entire earth!

He goes on to say: Buddhism placed

ultimate responsibility on the individuals themselves; no one else can make another person pure or impure.

Man himself is one's protector. One will have to travel oneself to reach the destination; can't depend on someone else to travel. Individual can never escape the consequences of his actions –

Right knowledge, right conduct – अष्टांग मार्ग - is the way to live in peace & harmony and liberation. Just rituals, prayers and temple visits will not help.

Contrary to misperception in some people, Buddhism is not a pessimistic philosophy, but actually an optimistic and positive approach to life and human existence –

It is never too late to make amends of past-mistakes through good deeds. If someone overcomes his past bad deeds by subsequent good deeds he begins to shine like the moon coming out of the cloud.

It is important to note that Buddha was born as Siddhartha, an ordinary human being. But through efforts he acquired बुद्धत्व and सर्वशुद्ध स्वभाव – and practiced compassion for all beings, without any distinction. This is the only way to gain lasting peace and tranquility:

In conclusion, he states, the "study of Buddha Dhamma should be for all, not just for Buddhist scholars or monks.

Why study Buddhism in India

In India, the land of Buddha (आर्यभूमि), you get not just academic knowledge but profound spiritual experience – opportunity to live in places associated with Buddha's life and relive the memory of Buddha's life. Buddhist literature – in Pali, Sanskrit – contain homegrown native thoughts organically rooted in the Indian soil. Many unique concepts, epithets of Buddhism can only be understood by familiarizing with the Indian context.

In India, Buddhism is part of multi-cultural, multi-religious society. This makes Indian – Buddhism experience conducive to interfaith dialogue, and promotion of inter-religious understanding and world peace.

– Mr Akhilesh Mishra, Director General of ICCR

Buddhism in Russia

Buddhism in Russia came through Mongolia during the second half of the 16th century, though Buddhism spread from Tibet to Mongolia in the beginning of the 13th century, says Prof Victoria Demenova, Director of the Art History, Culture Studies and Design Department at the Ural Federal University of Russia; however, it was only in the second half of the 16th century that it became the state religion of the Mongol Princes.

At a lecture on 'Buddhist Collections in Russian Museums' in Delhi at INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage), in late September, Prof Demenova dwelling on the history said "the Eastern religion now formed an integral part of our country. Buddhism is an important subject for researchers and art collectors."

Buddhism is one of the three official religions in Russia. The official Russian religions include Orthodox Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. Orthodox Christianity is certainly the most widespread and old religious tradition; however, Buddhism has over four centuries of history in Russia. Until the end of the twentieth century, out of about 150 ethnic groups living in Russia, three were officially recognized as Buddhist.

These were the Buryats, the Kalmyks and the Tuvans. From these three-Kalmyks were the first to become a part of the Russian Empire. They were the descendants of the Oirats who moved from Western Mongolia to the steppes of the Lower Volga region in early 17th century.

Today, this area is known as the Republic of Kalmykia.

The Kalmyks officially converted to Buddhism around late 16th century, although by that time they were already familiar with Buddhism for three hundred years. As a result, when Kalmyks became a part of the Russian Empire, they were already Buddhists.

The second Buddhist people were Buryats. Their territories were gradually absorbed by the Russian Empire in the mid-17th century. Today this is a territory

of the Republic of Buryatia. Even at that time, Russian diplomats passing through these territories on their way to China noticed that Buryats had portable prayer houses called *dugans*, which were later replaced by the temples. However, Buddhism began to spread actively among Buryats only during the first three decades of the eighteenth century.

Finally, Tuva (the present day Republic of Tuva) became a part of Russia (then USSR) only in 1944. Before this, from 1921 to 1943, it was independent after being earlier a vassal territory of China. The ancestors of Tuvans were already familiar with Buddhism during the early medieval period, when their land formed a part of Uyghur Khaganate (8th-10th centuries); however, Tuvans themselves converted to Buddhism only in the latter part of the 18th century.



Prof. Victoria Demenova

By the early 20th century, they already had monasteries and a systems for training and schooling for the monks. The Tuvans became the third ethnic group within Russia officially recognized as Buddhists. All of them belonged to the Gelug School.

By the early 18th century, Buryatia already had eleven *dugan* temples where prayers were held. In 1712, around 150 Mongolian and Tibetan lamas arrived in the region. However, **Tsongol Datsan** – the first permanent Buddhist monastery in Transbaikalian region – was built only in the mid-18th century. In 1741, Empress

Elizaveta Petrovna signed a decree officially accepting Buddhism as the Buryat religion: in 1991, the Republic of Buryatia commemorated their 250th anniversary of this Decree.

Another famous Russia Empress, Catherine the Great, established by her Supreme Decree the position of Pandit Khambo Lama, head of Russian Buddhists in Eastern Siberia and Transbaikalian region. Catherine the Great was recognized as one of the incarnations of White Tara.

In 1764, head lama of Tsongol datsan was officially recognized as the Chief Lama of Transbaikalian Buryats, receiving a title of Pandito Khambo-Lama ("The Learned High Priest"). This confirmed Buryatia Buddhists's special position regarding Tibet and Mongolia, although spiritual authority of Tibetan Dalai Lamas has always been recognized by Buryat lamas and worshippers.

By the early 20th century, Buryatia had 47 monasteries and over 10,000 lamas. The major datsans were: Tsongol, Gusi-noozersky (Tamchin), Aginsky, Anninsky, Atsagat, Egituy and Tsugol datsans.

Buddhism played an enormous role in the development of Buryat national culture. Datsans hosted faculties that taught philosophy, logic, medicine, Tantra and so on; they printed religious, scholarly and popular didactic literature; they had workshops where painters, woodcutters, sculptors, scribes and many others worked.

As a result, Buddhist monasteries literally became the main spiritual and cultural centres of traditional Buryat society. The educational work of Buryat datsans is very well known: 29 of them had their own printing houses (or, rather, print shops), where woodblocks were used to manually print Buddhist works in Tibetan and Mongolian languages, both for monks and for the lay public.

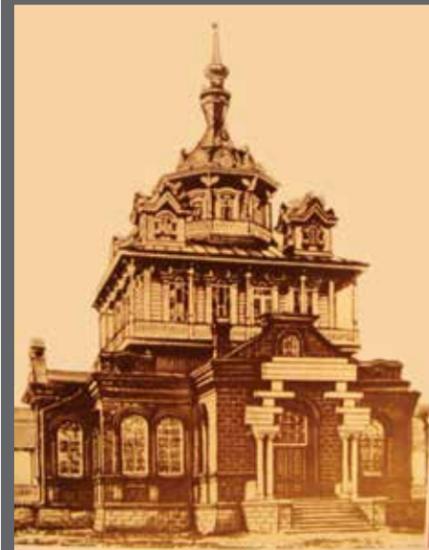
The latter half of the nineteenth century saw the rise of Buryat national school of architecture, painting and sculpture. Following the Tibetan canon, Buryat masters created outstanding works in

each of these art forms – precisely because they infused them with the spirit and style of their local traditions. The greatest examples of Buryat school of architecture is the temple complex of Gusinoozyorsky (Tamchinsky) datsan.

The best examples of icon painting are thanikas by lama Osor Budayev

In sculpture, there are wooden figures representing members of Buddhist pantheon and portraits of outstanding lamas made by Orongoi masters from Yangazhinsky datsan. Master Tsybikov was the greatest artist of Yangazhinsky datsan. He lived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (1877-1934). A large album devoted to the works of Sanzhi-Tsybik Tsybikov, was published several years ago. This master is considered the founder of the first Buryatan professional art school.

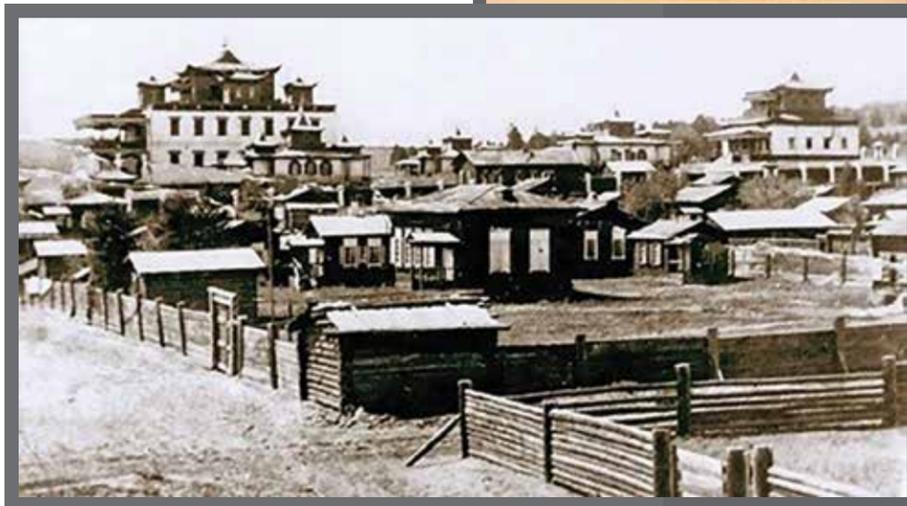
Woodworking was a long-established traditional craft among the Buryats; they were all-round masters, using wood for cutting, building and paintings. But the Buddhist art and culture brought to the Buryats the new ideas of the beauty of deities. Tsybikov school, which mostly produced wooden and papier-mache sculpture, developed a uniform style. Its works are marked by an unusual type of beauty: a mixture of European and Asian features. We can observe the influence of Mongolian Dzanabadzar school in the



← Republic of Kalmykia in XIX century. Kalmyks officially converted to Buddhism during the late sixteenth century, although Buddhism was known among them for three centuries before this date. As a result, when Kalmyks became a part of the Russian Empire, they were already Buddhists.

wide shoulders of deities; some details belong to the Dolonnor School (Inner Mongolia) – but overall, this is an original style of wooden sculpture painted in warm natural colours.

The majority of works by Buryat masters are housed by the National Museum of the Republic of Buryatia. Description of Buryatia Buddhist collection was a long-time project of Svetlana Batyurovna Bardaleeva; the first book about thanka collection was written by Professor Badmazhapov in the 1990s. Later, many scholars worked, researched and studied Buryatan painting and its characteristic features. For a long time, Buryat style was confused with the Chinese thanikas of late 19th and early 20th century. But today, thanks to the efforts of many researchers – among them Yulia Igorevna Elikhina, chief custodian of Tibetan and Khotan collections in the Hermitage museum – we can say that Buryat painting is distinguished by the large figures of deities and a characteristic natural range of colours: all colours are very natural (synthetic pigments were not available in Buryatia at the time), while the Chinese works of the same period use a vibrant emerald-green colour.



Tsongolsky datsan "Baldan Breybun" (the first Buryat datsan in the Russian Empire. Year of its official recognition - 1741 when Buddhism in Russia was recognized as one of the state religions. It is located in the territory of Kyakhtinsky District of the Republic Buryatia

50th anniversary celebration of Vishwa Shanti Stupa to be a grand affair

The famous Shanti Stupa (Peace Pagoda) built atop the Rajgir hills, surrounded by a forest and accessed both by a ropeway and by foot- will mark its 50th anniversary, later this month on 25 October 2019.

The temple was conceptualized and gifted by famous Buddhist philanthropist and monk Nichidatsu Fujii Guruji of Japan. It was inaugurated by the then President VV Giri in 1969. Though the Stupa's foundation stone was laid four years earlier in 1965 by the then President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. The site also includes a Nipponzan Myohoji temple.

It was the former Foreign Secretary, Mr Lalit Mansingh's cousin the well-known artist Padmashri Upendra Maharathi, a Buddhist who migrated from Orissa to settle down in Bodhgaya, with Anagarika Dharmapala restored the Mahabodhi Temple as a revered place of worship for the Buddhists.

He set up the Mahabodhi Society in India and subsequently with his spiritual Guru- Fujii Guruji whom he had met in Japan, he assisted in the identification of Rajgir for the Shanti Stupa. Today, his daughter, Mahasweta Maharathi is taking a lead on the anniversary celebrations of the Shanti Stupa.

The importance of this hill is because of the Griddhakuta, or Vulture's Peak (it is so named because the rocks on the hillside resemble a sitting vulture with its wings folded) where the Buddha is believed to have preached the Lotus Sutra. It was here that Gautama Buddha spent several months meditating and preaching. He also delivered some of his famous sermons and initiated king Bimbisara of Magadha and countless others to Buddhism.

Explaining the significance of the Peace Pagodas, Mr Mansingh said these were built as a symbol of peace in Japanese cities at the end of World War 11, including Hiroshima and Nagasaki where



The Shanti Stupa- Peace Pagoda



Monks in meditation at the Vulture's Peak where the Shakyamuni preached the Lotus Sutra

the atomic bombs took the lives of over 150,000 people. By 2000, eighty Peace Pagodas had been built around the world in Europe, Asia, and the United States.

A Peace Pagoda is a Buddhist stupa, it is designed to provide a focus for people towards peaceful co-existence- of all races and creeds, and to help unite them in their search for world peace. Most (though not all) peace pagodas have been built under the guidance of Nichidatsu Fujii (1885-1985). Fujii was greatly inspired by his meeting with Mahatma Gandhi

in 1931 and decided to devote his life to promoting non-violence. In 1947, he began constructing Peace Pagodas as shrines to world peace.

Original paintings by Padmashri Upendra Maharathi are to be found inside the monastery in the complex. The museum Upendra Maharathi Shilp Anusandhan Sansthan has some of his priceless collections of art, documents, stone carvings, wood crafting, weaving, paintings and a host of other artefacts that testify to the ancient and rich heritage of Bihar.



Maha Bodhi Temple, Bodh Gaya

The International Buddhist Confederation (IBC) is a Buddhist umbrella body that serves as a common platform for Buddhists worldwide. It currently has a membership comprising more than 300 organisations, both monastic and lay, in 39 countries.

Headquartered in New Delhi, the IBC is the outcome of the historic Global Buddhist Congregation held in November 2011 in New Delhi, wherein 900 delegates from all over the world, representing the entire Buddhist world, resolved to form an umbrella Buddhist world body based in India, the land of Buddha's enlightened awakening and origins of Buddha dharma. The leadership of the IBC comprises the supreme religious Buddhist hierarchy of all traditions and countries as Patrons and members of our Supreme Dhamma Council.

As per its motto, "Collective Wisdom, United Voice", the IBC provides a common platform to all followers of the Buddha Dharma worldwide to address issues that are of both Buddhist and global concerns.

Mission

To gather the collective wisdom of Buddhists around the world to speak with a united Buddhist voice; to make Buddhist values part of global engagement while working to preserve and promote Buddhist heritage, traditions and practices.



INTERNATIONAL BUDDHIST CONFEDERATION

Collective Wisdom United Voice

Editor: Vichitra Sharma • **Editing & Design:** Bushchat Media