



# Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

Certificate Course

On

## Buddhist Studies

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“The whole human race has produced but one such character, such high philosophy, such wide sympathy. This great philosopher, preaching the highest philosophy, yet had the deepest sympathy for the lowest of animals, and never put forth any claims for himself”-Swami Vivekananda.

The life of Buddha is a romantic tale. Buddhist legends recount that, before his advent in this world, Gautama Buddha was a Bodhisattva or Buddha potential in the Tushita heaven. It was at the request of Tushita gods that he agreed to descend to earth to preach the *Dharma* for the salvation of sentient beings.

According to the tradition, Gautama the Buddha was the son of Suddhodana who was the chief of Sakya clan. Siddhartha was born in Lumbini. He was nurtured in the midst of all royal luxuries. Special attention was taken to attract his mind towards the material pleasures as ascetic Asita prophesized that he would be universal teacher. However, his contemplative mind and boundless compassion did not permit him to enjoy the material pleasures of the royal household for long. Brought up in the lap of luxury, receiving an education befitting a prince, he married and had a son named Rahula. However, his contemplative mind did not

permit him to enjoy the mundane pleasures though special care was taken to attract his mind towards worldly pleasures as the sage Asita prophesized that the boy would renounce the household life and be a great teacher. Amidst comfort and prosperity, he realized the universality of sorrow. With the intent of discovering the means of overcoming worldly pleasures, he left his home one night with the charioteer Chandaka whom he sent back with a message to his father and wife. From Rajagriha Siddhartha went in search of spiritual teachers and took instruction from two renowned masters Uddara Kalama and Rudraka Ramaputtha and in a very short time he mastered whatever they had to teach, however, their teaching could not satisfy his quest of mind and left them to find a path of deliverance through his own exertions and came to Uruvilva (later known as Bodhgaya as it was associated with the attainment of Bodhi by Siddhartha). There he selected a spot near the river Niranjana for his meditation.

After six years austerities and meditation he attained bodhi and became supremely enlightened being. He was not born a Buddha but he became a Buddha by his own striving. Then began a ceaseless effort to help mankind for salvation. He preached his first sermon at deer park Sarnath to five mendicant who had left him at Gaya. This event is known as *Dharmachakrapravartanasutta*.

Buddhism or the religion preached by Gautama the Buddha in the sixth century B.C ranks as one of the greatest religions of the world. The teachings of Buddha points to very fundamental truths of life. The teachings of Buddha may be divided into two groups: Philosophical and Moral. Another important theory of the Buddha concerns with the four noble truths. He said earthly existence is full of suffering. Suffering has a cause, Suffering can be eliminated. One must know the right way leading to the cessation of suffering. The right way is the avoidance of two extremes: extreme indulgence and extreme hardships. Piety consists in resorting to a Middle path. By following the noble eight paths (Right views; right intention, right speech; right action; right livelihood; right effort; right mindfulness and right concentration) one can eradicate the suffering or pain. Self discipline was the essence of Buddha's teaching. Throughout his life Buddha emphasized that one should seek deliverance through one's own effort.

*“Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it. Do not believe in anything simply because it is spoken and rumoured by many. Do not believe in anything simply because it is found written in your religious books. Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. Do not believe in traditions because they have been handed down for many generations. But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it.”*

Buddha spent the rest of his life in preaching his religion. His doctrine of compassion, love and harmony drew large adherents. Everywhere he was received with highest esteem. He converted first Five monks at Sarnath and later Yasas, son of a wealthy man, Kasyapas, Nanda, Yaksa Alavaka and many others. His followers were some prominent rulers of his times, such as Bimbisara, Ajatasatru, Prosenjit, etc. The new faith acquired a wide popularity in the lifetime of the Master himself. Buddha performed miracles to convince many adherents. Buddha was not only a preacher but a great organizer too. He left behind him the Buddhist monastic order on a sound footing with a set of rules to be followed by the monks and nuns.

The early centuries of the Christian era were a turning point in the doctrinal development of Buddhism which had grown by this time into a vast religious organization. It split up into as many as eighteen sects. The differences between the various sects became more and more pronounced with the progress of time. By about the first century A.D. two clear-cut ways of Buddhist tradition came to be recognized, namely Hinayana and Mahayana. The Hinayana followed the old Pali/Theravada texts and the Mahayana developed mainly through Sanskrit writings, the philosophy of Buddhism. Bhakti and the Bodhisattva became an essential part of the Mahayana Buddhism. For Centuries Theravada has been the dominant form of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, Burma (Myanmar) and Laos. Mahayana is dominant in China, Japan, Vietnam, Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia and Korea. In recent years, Mahayana also has gained many followers in India. Mahayana is further divided into many sub-schools, such as Pure land and Zen. Pure Land Buddhists accept the basic Buddha's teachings of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path. But the recitation of the name of Amitabha/ Amida is the common practice in Pure Land school.