



swagat lead ♦ buddhist conclave



THE NEW BUZZWORD: SPIRITUAL TOURISM



The just-completed three-day International Conclave on Buddhism & Spiritual Tourism in Delhi was a cultural landmark, one of its basic objectives being to acquaint the world more intimately with hundreds of great signposts of Buddhism that exist in India. These destinations are being rapidly embellished with new facilities and infrastructure under a bold initiative of the Tourism ministry. More than 800 dignitaries from 25 countries including political leaders, scholars and Buddhist monks assembled on the occasion from February 17-19, 2004. The Conclave deliberated the relevance of Buddhism in the modern world and rejuvenating the Buddhist Circuit in India. The formal dedication of the Mahabodhi Temple as a World Heritage Site in Bodh Gaya was the grand finale. A major aim of this initiative is to remind the world that India is the vibrant spiritual cradle of Buddhism. A report by **Rajesh Kumar:**

Clockwise from facing page: The Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya; Monks blowing Tibetan instruments during the dedication ceremony; Footprints of the Lord at the Conclave venue



Go ye now, and wander for the gain of the many, for the welfare of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, for the gain and for the welfare of deities and human beings. Preach, Bhikkhus, the doctrine (the Dhamma) that is glorious in the beginning, glorious in the middle, glorious in the end, in the spirit and in the letter, proclaim a consummate, perfect and pure picture of holiness.

—The Buddha

Travel, as a religious activity, mainly in the form of pilgrimage and propagation of beliefs, has been an important aspect of tourism since ancient times. However, the Union Ministry of Tourism and Culture, under the leadership of Jagmohan, has delivered a brand new thrust to the Buddhist Circuit in India. Spiritual tourism is now the buzzword for the ministry. The International Conclave drew monks, Buddhist scholars, political dignitaries and tourism officials. The guest list included: His Holiness the Dalai Lama; the Cambodian princess and Minister for Culture and Fine Arts HRH Norodom



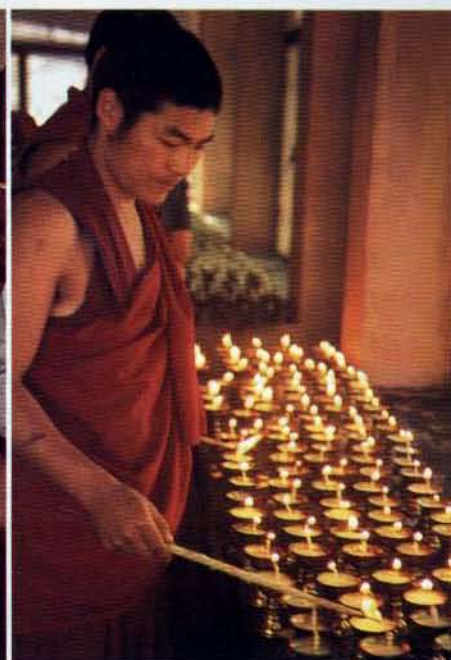
“Spiritual tourism is more about visiting hearts and minds of intellectuals and rich civilisations than just seeing places and their physical dimensions”

—President Abdul Kalam

Buppha Devi; chief of Japan Daijokyu sect Most Rev Y Sugisaki; Singapore's Trade and Tourism Minister George Yeo; wife of Mongolian prime minister Onongiin Tsolmon; Cambodian Minister of Religions and Cults HE

Chea Savoeun and several others from Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Koreas, Malaysia, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, China, Japan, the United States of America and many other countries.

Amidst a thunderous applause from distinguished monks, Buddhist scholars and foreign dignitaries, President Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam began his inaugural speech at Vigyan Bhawan with the chant *Buddham Sharanam Gachhami* and called for universal peace and unity of mind. He urged the Conclave to recommend the establishment of a “University of Universal Unity and Understanding” at Nalanda to cherish the memory of the Buddha. He said: “The world could attain universal brotherhood in the true sense by adopting the way of life shown by the Buddha.” Endorsing the government's thrust on spiritual tourism, the President at the very outset of his address underlined the importance of Buddhism and said: “Spiritual tourism is quite different from merely visiting various places and seeing their physical dimensions. Spiritual tourism means visiting the hearts and minds of the intellectuals in different places



Monks from various countries pray during the dedication ceremony at Bodhi Gaya; lighting of the lamps was part of the celebrations

associated with rich civilisations.”

Explaining his brand of tourism, Union Minister for Tourism and Culture Jagmohan said: “We do not take tourism and culture in a restricted sense, as mere instruments of our economic development. We consider them as vast avenues of interactions amongst civilisations with a view to creating a world with a better and healthier sense of direction than it has today.”

Lauding India's efforts to promote the Buddhist Circuit and spiritual tourism, His Holiness the Dalai Lama said: “Having taken pilgrimages to various religious traditions, I have realised that spiritual tourism has a significant role to play in fostering inter-religious harmony and understanding.” The exiled spiritual leader called on all those gathered at the Conclave to put more effort to ensure that all major religions in the world harness the human potential for the betterment of humanity and try to reduce conflicts waged in the name of religion.

The formal dedication of the Mahabodhi Temple as a World Heritage Site in Bodh Gaya marked the conclusion of the three-day exercise. Though conferred a United Nations heritage



“We consider tourism and culture as avenues of interactions amongst civilisations with a view to creating a world with a healthier sense of direction”

—Jagmohan

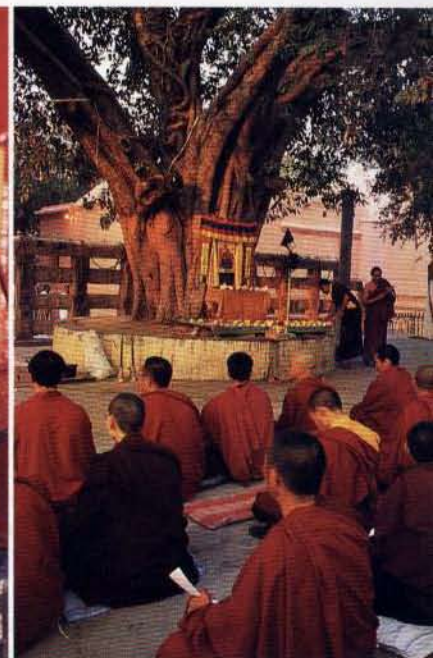
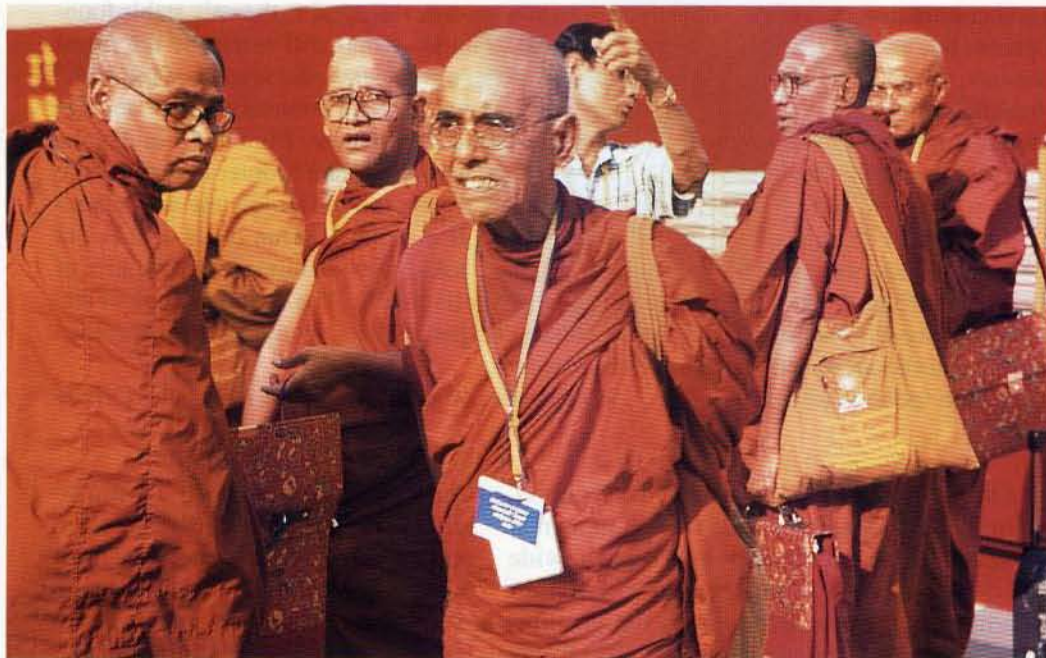
site status in 2002, the 170-ft high temple, which dates from the sixth century, waited all these months for a more appropriate moment like the International Conclave on Buddhism. Several hundred monks in red and saf-

ron robes, journalists, lensmen and many foreign dignitaries witnessed the dedication ceremony which took place amid chanting of Buddhist mantras and Tibetan scriptures by monks from Pali, the lighting of lamps and the beating of drums accompanied by some Tibetan musical instruments.

It was at the Mahabodhi Temple site that Siddhartha, a wandering prince from a Himalayan kingdom, attained *nirvana* (Enlightenment) and became Buddha (the Enlightened One) about 2,500 years ago while meditating under the Bodhi tree.

Situated on the banks of the Phalgu, a tributary of the Ganges, Bodh Gaya is 13 km from Gaya. The sanctum sanctorum of the Mahabodhi Temple has a huge statue of the Buddha in a sitting posture. It is believed that this black stone statue was gilded by Buddha's followers in 380 AD. The complex is studied with a large number of *stupas*.

It was here that Emperor Asoka, one of the leading followers of the religion, set up a *vajrasan* or throne of polished sandstone in the third century BC to mark the spot where Buddha attained *nirvana*. Later, enclosed by a sandstone railing in the



Delegates at New Delhi railway station ready to leave for the land of Buddha; Evening prayers at the Mahabodhi complex



Incredible heritage

True tourism lies in spiritual, mental and physical rejuvenation, writes Jagmohan

Ancient India possessed a powerful and profound mind which gave us three great thought processes—Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. The physical and spiritual signposts of these are spread all over the world. One of the basic objects of this Conclave is to acquaint the world, more intimately, with thousands of great signposts of Buddhism that exist in our country and are being rapidly equipped with new facilities and infrastructure, with a new sense of mission. We have a definite plan to showcase 'Incredible Buddhist Heritage of Incredible India' (like Ajanta-Ellora, Sarnath, Bodh Gaya and Nalanda) for the world.

Our new initiative aims at creating new hubs in the country and synthesising the elements of tourism, culture, history, heritage and healthy environment so as to create a cohesive pattern which provides to tourists opportunities for physical refreshment, mental rejuvenation, cultural enrichment and spiritual elevation and also for taking "a part of India within them" on their return.

We do not consider tourism and culture as mere instruments of our economic development but as vast avenues of interactions amongst civilisations, with a view to creating a world with a better and healthier sense of direction. The International Conclave attempts to provide a forum for putting our heads together to chart out this healthier sense of direction.

In this regard, the Buddhist thought could clearly be of immense help. Its basic idea is that the world is full of sorrow and the root of this sorrow lies in unfulfilled desires. To attain peace, therefore, all desires for oneself should be stilled, and the larger welfare of the mind should be sought by "being good and doing good". The individuality is a

delusion which should be got rid of. Our fretting selves are not really separate beings but passing ripples on the stream of life, little knots forming and unravelling in the wind-blown mesh of fate. When we begin seeing ourselves as parts of the whole, our personal disappointments vanish. If we have to be at peace with ourselves, we must learn to live not as separate units but as unified components of the entire human race. The goal should be *nirvana*, the stage at which the soul attains total contentment and no longer worries about itself. Happiness is possible neither here, as paganism thinks, nor hereafter, as many religions assert. To assert that "everything is" on this earth is one extreme, and to argue that "nothing exists" is another. The truth lies in the middle. And this Middle Path is eight-fold: Right View, Right Aspiration, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Contemplation.

It is only by following the Middle Path that the world can get rid of its paradoxes and perplexities. Even though the contemporary world has mind-boggling advancement in knowledge and affluence, it has three billion people without access to sanitation, 1.7 billion who drink polluted water and 18 million who die every year due to hunger-related diseases. Even the so-called affluent countries are becoming islands of dehumanised individuals.

For removing the ever-increasing dark shadows cast over the horizon by the current paradoxes and perplexities, Buddha shows the light. Edmond Holmes has rightly underlined: "The ideas of Buddha are eminently congenial to the scientific tone of western thought; and a day will come when the Conception of Life which they embody will be accepted in the west as the sanest and truest conception that the mind of man has yet devised and as the only stable foundation on which to build—what will surely be the fittest monument to Buddha's greatness—the science of the soul."

In India, physical and spiritual remnants of this "science of the soul" are found everywhere, from Tabo to Ajanta. Reflecting on the latter, Sir William Monier observed: "To me the Sanctuary of Ajanta is quite simply the ante-chamber of Heaven. And if it is not Heaven itself, that is but because all great art holds in its manifestations the hint of something greater yet Beyond.... The colour, the colour and again the colour of Ajanta! Who can mistake these golden shrines for caves?"

—The writer is Union Minister for Tourism & Culture

first century BC, part of this *vajrasan* has withstood the ravages of time. Apart from this, Bodh Gaya has several points of interest.

Increasing materialism has brought in its share of problems in

modern times. In this context, Buddham Sharanam comes as a great solace. Precisely for this, a wide spectrum of celebrities—martial art biggy late Bruce Lee, Italian footballer Roberto Baggio, Ford Motors

Chairman William Ford Jr, multi-millionaire Laurence Rockefeller, pop star Tina Turner, India's tabla maestro Zakir Hussain, Hollywood stars Richard Gere, Harrison Ford, Oliver Stone all

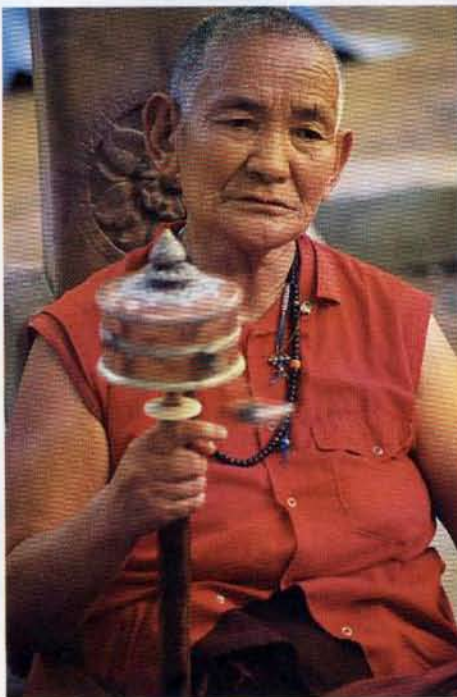


Photographs: Speaking Picture

Jagmohan with Bihar Tourism Minister at dedication ceremony; **Below:** A monk with prayer wheel at the temple

have embraced this religion.

The Mongolian prime minister's wife, Tsolmon, who flew here to represent her country at the Conclave, said: "In a globalising world, Buddhism stands for human values and world peace... Lots of material development is happening in Mongolia and spiritual guidance makes a huge difference to create awareness about the importance of love and tolerance." Speaking on Buddhism and World Peace, His Excellency Drabi Lopen Kinley Gyeltshen of Bhutan said: "Buddhism is responsible for the growth in our gross national happiness." M.V. Bhikkuni Dhammananda, who represented Thailand at the international deliberations, said: "Thailand owes a great deal



to the evolved philosophy of Buddhism, a precious gift from India."

Rathi Vinay Jha, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, said: "It's history and heritage, art and music, culture and colours, people and natural beauty that make India truly incredible."

However, plans are on to connect major Buddhist pilgrimage sites like Rajgir, Nalanda, Lumbini and Kushinagar through road links and equip them with modern infrastructural facilities. The ministries of Tourism and Civil Aviation have made an international airport operational at Bodh Gaya, making the most sacred place more accessible for millions of Buddhists and making connectivity to other Buddhist

"Spiritual tourism has a significant role to play in fostering inter-religious harmony" —The Dalai Lama





Religion of the 21st century

Non-violence and protection of environment are our key concerns, says The Dalai Lama

In the 20th century, great changes took place as a result of experiments and developments in a broad range of human activities—in the economic, political and the scientific spheres. As a consequence, we developed a far greater appreciation of the importance of freedom and the contributions of individual and private enterprises in improving the economy. It also brought a fresh recognition of halting the production and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In the beginning of the 20th century, there was a misconception that material development and physical satisfaction would bring happiness. However, closing years of the century brought awareness that material growth alone was insufficient. Also, there emerged a recognition that a change in motivation and mental attitude was important to bring happiness and overcome suffering. There was greater realisation to employ non-violent ways, work for peace and protect the natural environment.

Just when we have entered the 21st century, we are able to see the importance of changing our mindset and know the potential of internal development by nurturing the ideals of non-violence and peace. Various religious heads should rather engage in a common effort to contribute to the welfare of humankind.

Here, the 2,500-year-old Buddha Dhamma in particular

has a special role to play, more so because Buddhism propounds the concept of inter-dependence, which is in keeping with the fundamentals of modern science.

There are Buddhist traditions that look to Pali scriptures as their source and those that look up to the Sanskrit scriptures. The latter tradition reached its zenith at the ancient University of Nalanda, where literature and understanding of philosophy and logic were profoundly refined by Buddhist scholars. The Sanskrit tradition is a crucial part of our Buddhist heritage. Until relatively recently there has been a lack of contact and interaction among Buddhists. In future we need to encourage and foster an exchange of knowledge and experience among our different traditions and improve communications amongst us.

When I was young and studying in Tibet, like every Tibetan I regarded India as the Aryabhumi (the Holy Land), the very source of our Buddhist religion and culture. Like every devout Buddhist, I associated Bodh Gaya with the highest achievements of the spiritual path, the Buddha's attainment of *nirvana* (Perfect Enlightenment). This was the place I longed to visit. Fortunately, an opportunity arose in 1956 when I got an invitation from the Mahabodhi Society to attend the Buddha Jayanti.

When I saw the seat of Enlightenment, I was profoundly moved. Reflecting on Shakyamuni Buddha's great accomplishment in this place, I also could not but remember his overwhelming kindness to all sentient beings.

After Bodh Gaya, I have travelled far more extensively. Having taken pilgrimages to various religious traditions, I have realised that spiritual tourism has a significant role to play in fostering inter-religious harmony and understanding. I firmly believe that we need to put more effort to ensure that all major religions harness the potential for the betterment of humanity and to save the planet, while we try to reduce conflicts waged in the name of religion.

—From his address to International conclave on Buddhism

sites possible. HUDCO, Tourism & Culture Ministry's consultant for various projects in the Buddhist Circuit, has begun to prepare a development plan for Bodh Gaya—a small obscure town—which has become the cynosure of the Buddhist community after the inclusion of the Mahabodhi Temple in the list of the World Heritage Sites.

For developing the Buddhist Circuit in a planned and scientific manner, various studies pertaining to

“It's history and heritage, art and music, culture and colours, and people of diverse races that make India truly incredible”

—Rathi Vinay Jha





Day of "experiential tourism"

The alert traveller looks for an experience that will enhance the quality of his life, writes Amitabh Kant

Why does Buddhism and the spiritual acquire significance? Why have an International Conclave on Buddhism? Whichever way we look at it, the future of tourism lies in regional and short-haul tourism. And one of the answers lies in Buddhist tourism.

The International Seminar on Buddhism focussed attention on the relevance of Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy in the modern world. It brought centre stage the issues and prospects relating to Buddhist pilgrimage to India. The objective of the conclave was to highlight every aspect of Buddhism, its architectural heritage, its literary wealth and above all its humane philosophy with prime focus on the sacred sites associated with the life of Lord Buddha.

The conclave sought to showcase the Buddhist heritage of India before the world, particularly countries having significant Buddhist population and also to establish the prominent position of India in the Buddhist Religious Tourism circuit. The Conclave has attracted a great response from across the world with more than 800 delegates from over 25 countries. The Conclave was followed by a Dedication Ceremony of the Mahabodhi Temple, recently declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. The ceremony was held at Bodh Gaya, the holiest of sites where Gautam Buddha attained Enlightenment.

The Tourism Ministry's attempt has been to create and develop integrated tourism circuits based on India's unique civilisation, heritage and culture. The government is focussing on improving and developing the existing facilities to world class standards. The Department of Tourism is upgrading the infrastructure at the Buddhist pilgrim centres in order to attract global Buddhist traffic. Special attention

has been given for an integrated development of the Buddhist circuits.

In the eastern region, a travel circuit of Buddhist pilgrimage places is being developed. The circuit consists of the most significant Buddhist pilgrim centers: Bodh Gaya, Rajgir, Nalanda and Varanasi. The focus has been on the development of tourism and road infrastructures and creating a unique spiritual experience. In the northern region a Buddhist Monastic circuit in the Himalayas is being developed. Two routes have been identified connecting to Leh. These are:

Route I: Chandigarh-Bilaspur-Kullu-Manali-Rohtang La-Keylong-Sarchu-Upshi-Leh.

Route II: Shimla-Sangla-Kaza-Chatru-Keylong-Sarchu-Yashi-Leh.

The Central circuit—which is a heritage, nature and wildlife circuit—also connects Sanchi and the surrounding Buddhist areas. The circuit thus identified for development is Gwalior-Shivpuri-Chanderi-Orcha-Khajuraho-Jhansi-Bhopal-Sanchi and the surrounding Buddhist areas—Bhimbetka-Pachmarhi-Kanha-Jabalpur (Bedaghat).

One of the most vivid stories ever told on Buddhism lies etched in stone. The 29 caves at Ajanta and 34 at Ellora are the finest specimen of the cave-temple structure. The Ajanta caves provided the canvas for innumerable paintings and images of the Buddha. The caves of Ellora carried on the legacy of Ajanta and were subject to Buddhist influence. The Department of Tourism has taken up the Ajanta and Ellora Conservation and Tourism Development Project with assistance of the Japan Bank of International Cooperation. Phase I of the project which was completed in March 2002 at Rs 127.50 crore consisted of improvement of roads, afforestation and fibre optic illumination. Phase II is estimated to cost Rs 299.02 crore and aims at the improvement of infrastructure, conservation and preservation of monuments and natural resources in the Ajanta-Ellora region and the Aurangabad division.

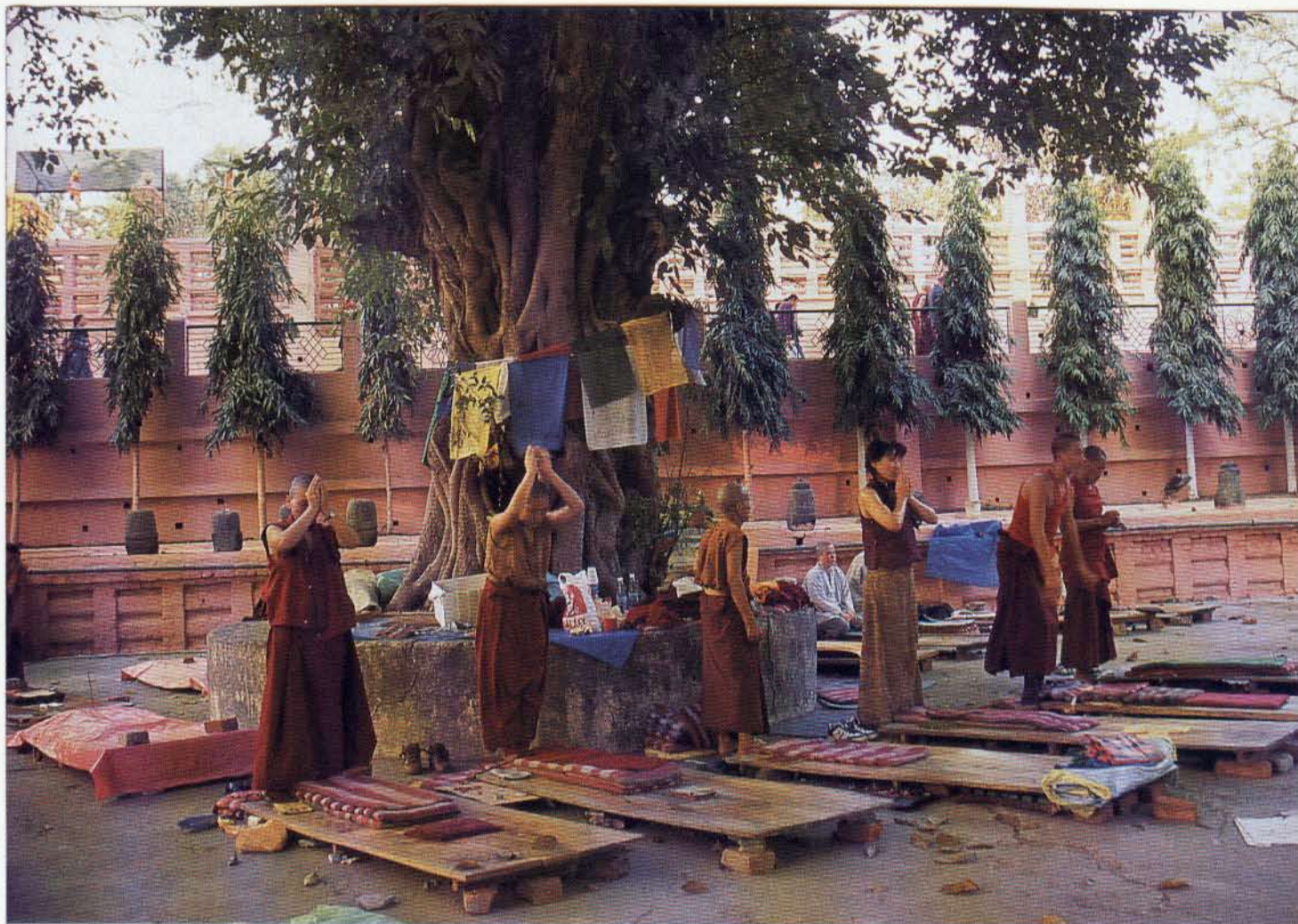
The world of tourism is moving away from the three S's of sun, sand and sea to experiential tourism. The alert independent traveller is looking for an experience which will enhance and enrich the quality of his life. The spread of Buddhism and spiritual tourism will fulfill this objective.

—The writer is Joint Secretary & CMD ITDC

physical and geo-hydrological characteristics, housing characteristics, conditions of infrastructural services, spatial development, activity pattern, economic base and employment pattern of the inhabitants of the town have already been done by HUDCO.

"These studies have helped us make an assessment of the city, data collection and interaction with various stakeholders. Accordingly, the heritage area, which consists of sacred, buffer and peripheral zones, has been delineated. The delineation is based

on the location of the heritage resources as identified by archaeologists, scholars and historians in Bodh Gaya," says R.K. Safaya, HUDCO's chief (Design & Development). The 'core zone' would essentially be a calm, serene and a traffic-free zone.



Foreign devotees performing rituals in Mahabodhi complex; **Below:** A dance performance during the Conclave

This would be achieved by pedestrianisation of the area and creation of a green area with minimum displacement and relocation. The 'buffer zone' would cover a minimum area required for preserving the sanctity and serenity of the 'core zone'. The 'peripheral zone' would be the area where new development initiatives would be taken up. The zoning land use regulations and the building by-laws are being worked out. "The development plan is aimed at the creation of a serene, calm, verdant environment which drew Lord Buddha to this place. The plan gives due consideration to the interests of the locals without undermining conservation issues. The draft report will be submitted by March-end and



implemented expeditiously," says Amitabh Kant, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism.

However, a lot remains to be desired. Though a certain section of work has already been done, results will be visible after some time. Promising more infrastructural support and facilities to Bihar to develop its tourism sector, Jagmohan urged the state government to lend a helping hand. He said: "Problems of robberies, kidnappings and law and order, which deter our foreign tourists from visiting this Buddhist monument, can be handled by the state alone." He continued: "Our New Initiative aims at creating new hubs all over the country and synthesising the elements of tourism, culture, history, heritage and healthy



"Buddhism is responsible for the growth in our gross national happiness" —His Excellency Kinley Gyeltshen of Bhutan

A modern vision

The rationalities in Buddhist thought explain its increasing popularity, writes Amitabh Kant

OBhikkhus! There are two extremes that should be avoided by a recluse. Indulgence in sensual pleasures—this is base and profitless, and addiction to self-mortification—this is painful and ignoble. Abandoning both the extremes, the Tathagata has comprehended the Middle Path which promotes sight, knowledge, peace, wisdom, enlightenment and *Nirvana*.

Thus spoke the Buddha at Sarnath in his first sermon, the *Dharmachakrapravartana* or Turning of the Wheel of Law, which put forth the Middle Way, the Four Noble Truths and the Eight-fold Path.

The message of the Buddha spread rapidly. The Buddha preached that the way to salvation was not dependent on God or Divine Grace but on understanding the way things really are. It is essentially concerned with man, or rather with all living beings caught between desire and craving.

There are only about five million Buddhists in India, but the religion is important and there are many reminders of its historic role. Strictly speaking, Buddhism is not a religion since it is not centred on a god, but rather a system of philosophy and a code of morality. Buddhists believe that the achievement of enlightenment is the goal of every being, so eventually we will all reach "Buddhahood."

In India, Buddhism developed rapidly when it was embraced by the great Emperor Asoka in the 3rd century BC. He sent out Buddhist missions abroad and his son is said to have carried Buddhism to Sri Lanka.

Although Buddhism was to gain favour after the kings of Tibet invaded Ladakh in the 8th and 9th centuries, it took many generations for Buddhism to capture the local imagination. The sage Naropa is said to have founded one of the earliest *gompas* at Lamayuru, high above the Indus.

During the 11th century, Buddhist monks began migrating over the Himalayas in search of patronage. The artistic designs in *gompas* such as Alchi, dating from the 11th century, provide some of the best surviving examples of Buddhist art of this period. From now on the movement and inspiration of Buddhist thought started getting initiated from the far side of the Himalayas.

One of the greatest influences came from Tibet in the 14th century when the saint Tsongkhapa founded the Gelupka order. In Ladakh, the *gompas* of Tikse, Likir and Stakna were founded by this order in the early half of the 15th century. It was headed by the Dalai Lama, and even today, the 14th Dalai Lama undertakes regular visits to the *gompas* in Ladakh and Zaskar.

Although Buddhism spread throughout Asia, it remained virtually unknown in the West until modern times.

Why has Buddhism proved so popular in the West in recent times? The reasons for this are complex and have as much to do with the cultural history of the West as with the

attractions of Buddhism. Various western 'readings' of Buddhism have been popular from time to time, although often these tell more about changing fashions in the West than they do about Buddhism. One of the most popular Western interpretations of Buddhism is as a rational philosophy, and materialistic developments in the West have

created a climate which is favourable to Buddhism. The dominant cultural influences in the West since the Enlightenment in the 18th century have been science and secular liberation. Buddhism's rational philosophy seems compatible with both of these, at least to a greater extent than has been the case with orthodox Western religion.

There seem few Buddhist doctrines which are in direct conflict with science. Recent discoveries in quantum physics suggest that science is slowly coming to a view of reality not unlike that described in Buddhist philosophy. Books such as Frijof Capra's *The Tao of Physics* (1976) have revealed interesting parallels between the conceptual worlds of theoretical physics and eastern thought.

The fact that Buddhism imposes few confessional, ritual, or other requirements on its followers makes it easy to follow.

It would be inadequate to define Buddhism simply as a philosophy, a way of life or a code of ethics. It includes all these things and sometimes seems to present itself predominantly in one of these modes. However, this depends largely on the perspective from which it is being viewed.

—The writer is Joint Secretary & CMD ITDC

The fact that Buddhism imposes few confessional and ritual rules makes it easy for its followers

environment so as to create a cohesive pattern—a pattern which provides to our tourists opportunities for physical refreshment, mental rejuvenation, cultural enrichment and spiritual elevation and also for

taking 'a part of India within them' on their return."

The tourism officials and tour and travel operators believe the World Heritage Site tag attached to the most sacred Buddhist shrine would draw new funds

and greater attention, making it a major tourist and pilgrim centre. There is even a glimmer of hope that the Mahabodhi Temple will eventually get fame that the Vatican and the Mecca have amongst Christians and Muslims. **AI**