



History 101

Buddha

Gautama Buddha, also known as Siddhārtha Gautama, was an ascetic and sage on whose teachings Buddhism was founded. He is believed to have lived and taught mostly in the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent sometime between the sixth and fourth centuries BC.

Gautama taught a Middle Way between sensual indulgence and the severe asceticism found in the śramaṇa movement common in his region. He later taught throughout other regions of eastern India such as Magadha and Kosala.

Gautama is the primary figure in Buddhism. He is recognized by Buddhists as an enlightened or divine teacher who attained full Buddhahood, and shared his insights to help sentient beings end rebirth and suffering. Accounts of his life, discourses, and monastic rules are believed by Buddhists to have been summarized after his death and memorized by his followers. Various collections of teachings attributed to him were passed down by oral tradition and first committed to writing about 400 years later.

The evidence of the early texts suggests that Siddhārtha Gautama was born into the Shakya clan, a community that was on the periphery, both geographically and culturally, of the eastern Indian subcontinent in the 5th century BC. It was either a small republic, in which case his father was an elected chieftain, or an oligarchy, in which case his father was an oligarch. According to the Buddhist tradition, Gautama was born in Lumbini, now in modern-day Nepal, and raised in the Shakya capital of Kapilvastu, which may have been in either present day Tilaurakot, Nepal or Piprahwa, India. He obtained his enlightenment in Bodh Gaya, gave his first sermon in Sarnath, and died in Kushinagar.

No written records about Gautama have been found from his lifetime or some centuries thereafter. One Edict of Asoka, who reigned from circa 269 BC to 232 BC, commemorates the Emperor's pilgrimage to the Buddha's birthplace in Lumbini. Another one of his edicts mentions several Dhamma texts, establishing the existence of a written Buddhist tradition at least by the time of the Maurya era and which may be the precursors of the Pāli Canon. The oldest surviving Buddhist manuscripts are the Gandhāran Buddhist texts, reported to have been found in or around Haḍḍa near Jalalabad in eastern Afghanistan and now preserved in the British Library. They are written in the Gāndhārī language using the Kharosthi script on twenty-seven birch bark manuscripts and date from the first century BC to the third century AD. After his death, Buddha's cremation relics were divided amongst 8 royal families and his disciples; centuries later they would be enshrined by King Ashoka into 84,000 stupas. Many supernatural legends surround the history of alleged relics. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gautama_Buddha]

