

2. Abhidhamma Divas

The International Buddhist Confederation (IBC), in collaboration with Gautam Buddha University (GBU), Antarrashtriya Baudh Shodh Sansthan and the Ministry of Culture celebrated International Abhidhamma Day.

Abhidhamma Divas – Celebrating the Higher Teachings of the Buddha Background and Historical Significance

Abhidhamma Divas commemorates a profound event in Buddhist tradition — the day when Lord Buddha descended from the celestial realm of Tāvatiṃsa-devaloka to the earthly plane at Sankassiya (now Sankisa Basantapur in Uttar Pradesh). According to Theravāda Buddhist scriptures, the Buddha had ascended to Tāvatiṃsa heaven to teach the Abhidhamma (Higher Doctrine) to his late mother, Māyādevī, and other celestial beings. After spending three months imparting this deep philosophical wisdom to the deities, the Buddha returned to earth, marking a symbolic moment of enlightenment shared with both celestial and human realms. The site of this divine descent, Sankassiya, is today marked by the Asokan Elephant Pillar, established by Emperor Ashoka as a historical and spiritual tribute to this sacred occurrence.

Spiritual and Cultural Context

India's Connection to Buddhism – India, as the birthplace of Buddhism, holds a profound spiritual and cultural bond with the teachings of Gautama Buddha. Sacred sites such as Lumbini (birthplace), Bodhi Gaya (enlightenment), Sarnath (first sermon), and Kushinagar (Mahaparinirvana) chart the Buddha's spiritual journey and continue to inspire millions across the world. These sacred spaces represent not just historical locations but living embodiments of universal values — compassion, mindfulness, peace, and self-realization. The Abhidhamma, as a part of this continuum, deepens the philosophical understanding of these values, extending Buddhism's relevance from ancient times to the modern world.

International Abhidhamma Divas – A Global Celebration

Purpose and Message – International Abhidhamma Divas is celebrated globally to honor the timeless wisdom of the Abhidhamma — the analytical and philosophical dimension of the Buddha's teachings. It serves as a day to reflect on the mental discipline, ethical conduct, and spiritual insight that the Abhidhamma emphasizes. The observance underscores India's central role in preserving and promoting Buddhist philosophy and its continuity as a bridge between ancient wisdom and contemporary spiritual practices.

Modern Relevance – The teachings of the Abhidhamma resonate strongly with modern fields such as psychology, neuroscience, and mindfulness-based therapies, which similarly explore the nature of consciousness and mental well-being. Thus, the celebration symbolizes the integration of spiritual insight with scientific inquiry, promoting global harmony and intellectual exploration.

Teachings of the Abhidhamma – The Higher Doctrine

Nature and Essence – The term “Abhidhamma” literally means “Higher Teaching” or “Higher Doctrine”, representing the most philosophically profound and analytically refined layer of Buddhist literature. While the Sutta Piṭaka conveys teachings through narratives, dialogues, and ethical precepts, the Abhidhamma Piṭaka adopts a systematic and scientific approach to understanding the mind (nāma) and matter (rūpa).

Analytical Framework – The Abhidhamma classifies and examines the constituents of experience through four key concepts –

1. **Citta (Consciousness)** – The awareness or knowing aspect of the mind.
2. **Cetasika (Mental Factors)** – The psychological components that accompany consciousness, such as perception, feeling, and volition.
3. **Rūpa (Materiality)** – The physical or material phenomena that interact with mental processes.
4. **Nibbāna (Liberation)** – The unconditioned state representing the cessation of suffering and ultimate spiritual freedom.

These analyses are not abstract philosophy but practical tools for self-observation and mental purification, leading to insight (vipassanā) and enlightenment.

Structure of the Abhidhamma Piṭaka



The Abhidhamma Piṭaka, the third division of the Tipiṭaka (Pali Canon), comprises seven treatises, each addressing a specific dimension of mental and physical phenomena –

1. **Dhammasaṅgaṇī** – Enumeration of phenomena (a detailed list of mental and physical states).
2. **Vibhaṅga** – The Book of Analysis (expounds categories introduced in the Dhammasaṅgaṇī).
3. **Dhātukathā** – Discussion of elements (examines relationships among mental, physical, and ethical elements).
4. **Puggalapaññatti** – Description of individuals (classifies types of persons).
5. **Kathāvatthu** – Points of controversy (refutes doctrinal misconceptions).
6. **Yamaka** – The Book of Pairs (examines logic and cause-effect relationships).
7. **Paññhāna** – The Book of Relations (deep analysis of conditional relations between phenomena).

Among these, the Paññhāna is considered the most profound, as it meticulously explains the interdependent causality (paticcasamuppāda) underlying existence.

Historical Attribution – Though taught by the Buddha in Tāvātimsa heaven, the Abhidhamma was systematized and elaborated by his chief

disciple, Sāriputta, ensuring its preservation within the Theravāda tradition.

Government Support and Preservation Efforts

Recognition of the Pali Language – The Government of India has recognized Pali as a Classical Language, acknowledging its immense historical and literary importance, especially for Buddhist and Jain traditions. Originating around 500 B.C., Pali evolved from ancient Indo-Aryan dialects and became the primary medium for transmitting the Buddha's discourses and canonical teachings.

Components of the Pali Canon (Tipiṭaka) –

The Tipiṭaka (Three Baskets) forms the sacred corpus of Theravāda Buddhism –

1. **Vinaya Piṭaka** – Contains the rules of monastic discipline, guiding ethical and communal harmony among monks and nuns.
2. **Sutta Piṭaka** – Encompasses the Buddha's sermons and dialogues, rich in moral, philosophical, and spiritual insights for both laypeople and monastics.
3. **Abhidhamma Piṭaka** – Focuses on deep psychological, ethical, and metaphysical analysis, serving as the foundation for Buddhist philosophy and contemplative practice.

Cultural Preservation and Education

Through institutions like Nava Nalanda Mahavihara (Nalanda, Bihar) and Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies (Sarnath), the Indian government promotes Pali studies and Buddhist research. Efforts include digitization of manuscripts, organization of international Buddhist conclaves, and support for academic exchange with Southeast Asian countries. These initiatives reinforce India's position as the spiritual custodian of Buddhist heritage.

The Legacy of Pali Literature

Moral and Cultural Reflections – Pali literature extends beyond doctrinal works to include Jātaka Tales, which narrate the Buddha's previous lives. These stories are imbued with ethical values such as compassion, generosity, patience, and truthfulness, reflecting moral ideals shared widely among ancient Indian communities. Such narratives continue to inspire moral education and intercultural dialogue across South and Southeast Asia.

Conclusion – The Living Relevance of the Abhidhamma

Abhidhamma Divas is not only a commemoration of a sacred event but also a celebration of human consciousness, wisdom, and ethical living. The Abhidhamma's analytical precision and introspective depth make it relevant even in the age of neuroscience and cognitive psychology, as it offers insights into mental processes and the cultivation of mindfulness. By celebrating this day, India reaffirms its commitment to preserving Buddhist thought and sharing its universal message of peace, introspection, and liberation with the world.

Source - <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2176023#-~-text=Abhidhamma%20Day%20commemorates%20the%20occasion,with%20his%20disciple%20Arahant%20Sariputta.>

