

## **Circular-one**

### **INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR**

on

### **Reflections & Revival of Buddhism in**

### **South and South-East Asia in Modern Times**

**31<sup>st</sup> March-2<sup>nd</sup> April, 2012**

**Proposed by:**

**Department of History  
Center of Excellence  
Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith, Varanasi**

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The Department of History, Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith, Varanasi proposes to organize a three days international seminar on the “Reflections & Revival of Buddhism in South and South-East Asia in Modern Times” in February/March, 2012 under the auspices of ‘Center of Excellence’ awarded by the Government of Uttar Pradesh. As the studies on Buddhism and Buddhist movements in present times have attracted the attention of scholars in a big way in India and elsewhere at the world level, it will be worth to invite opinions of various scholars and hold discussion on the subjects related to it in a seminar of no less than an international dimension. Thus, this international seminar has been planned to request some scholars of the world and from within the country to share a common platform with specific **objective** of-

- a. Academic exercise for understanding the trends of Buddhism in the region of South and South-East Asia in particular in present times.
- b. Discussing the ways of genuine happiness for the humanity in general in the light of Buddhist ideals and its relevance today.

### **Theme of the Seminar**

#### **Buddhism in Retrospect**

Maxmuller, famous German indologist, has rightly said in the context of the rise of Buddhism in certain historical background that Lord Buddha preached that very gospel of

truth which thousands and millions wished to listen to, and this was, in fact, the secret of the spread of Buddhism in those old days. Govind Chand Pande explaining it further in terms of the historical and social background of the birth of Buddhism suggests that as per the material explanation while the cause of the changes in the spirit of mankind should be searched in the social conditions, seeing from the spiritual angle alone a revolutionary spirit is a result of an independent growth of knowledge or super human instinct. None of the above contentions could be shirked aside altogether, as both of these are mutually relative, because, if there is always a need of new inventions and its driving spirit behind a material and social change, similarly, no spiritual seed can flower into a strong historical tradition without congenial social conditions. Hence, the rise and growth of Buddhism and contemporary social conditions should be reasoned as complimentary to each-other. Further, it is argued that the Sramana movement was a world renouncing ascetic movement- classless and casteless. In its essential idea and spirit it has no special affinity with the attitude and interest of any particular social class. The adoption of the ascetic idea requires a firm faith in spiritual happiness and as firm a despair of material life..... It is easy to know how the age of Buddha provided both necessary conditions of the rise of Buddhism. It was an age of great spiritual vitality, when the clash of rival schools and sects and basic points of view fed the flame of spiritual quest. At the same time it was an age of frequent and bloody wars and much economic change. These circumstances must have created a feeling of distress and despair in the minds of many. Thus, when the circumstances were ripe the old seed of a continuing ascetic tradition from remote proto-historic times found a suitable soil and burst into flower.

However, just the ascetical bias of the early Buddhist movement could not be conclusive for this spirit to develop into a large movement, and it were, of course, the lay worshippers hailing from all the walks of worldly life who helped it grow and spread far and wide and made it a force to reckon with for centuries together. Herein lies the real strength of Buddhism which meant leaving enough scope for material or worldly activities with a humane face and essential restraints, fulfilling both spiritual and material desire of the majority of humanity.

### **Present Scenario**

Keeping this in retrospect, it becomes even more curious how the modern world is responding to this highly venerated tradition, particularly, in the region of its origin and mainstay for a long-long time, i.e. South & South-East Asia, as the humanity in the countries in the Far-East and South and South-East Asia have remained fastened to Buddhist faith and have also been responsible for its survival till today.

The whole world was shocked and stunned when Talibanis blasted the age-old huge statue of Buddha in Bamiyan, Afghanistan some years ago. Stunned! not simply because it were a piece of world heritage, but also because this act reflected a typical medieval intolerance on

the part of the so called (Islamic) fundamentalists even against an isolated and abandoned marble of peace which in no way affected the political or economic motives of the demolishers. Nevertheless, disapproving this barbaric act the world community in the name of UNESCO came forward immediately to restore the heritage as much possible. Even more important is an indication of refocusing upon that brilliant tradition of peaceful world movement named Buddhism which hardly has a blot on its head of any aggression or war by its authors or patrons for the sake of its expansion. As against all the bigger streams of religions practiced today which, in spite of all the holy preaching in their original gospel, owed much to their political and military patrons for their expansion during medieval and modern age, Buddhism reached everywhere with only folded hands with an appeal of universal brotherhood. Its followers have rarely been troublesome for other cultural or religious communities and, at times, have suffered a lot at the hands of unfavourable or oppressive rulers or regimes. A clear example of this are Tibetan Buddhists who have been pushed out of their habitat and are forced to carry their nationhood and culture away from their own land. Some recent examples of sufferings of Buddhists in Vietnam, Myanmar and Cambodia are also worth referring in this context.

Withstanding all this unpleasant happenings Buddhism now seems to attract the attention of the world community in many ways. If the images and idols of Buddha are now decorating private drawing rooms, art galleries, waiting lounges of hotels and airports and public parks worldwide, they at the same time, carry the message of peace to the whole humanity of the world. Keeping aside the purely Islamic zone completely how far the western world is intellectually and spiritually receptive of the Buddhist ideals and Buddhism is to be understood differently, but, as far as South Asia and South-East Asia are concerned Buddhism is making its presence/reappearance felt more emphatically in many different ways and for reasons more than one, viz. philosophical, spiritual, moral, cultural, international, political and also perhaps economic. This trait is manifest in- patronization of Buddhist institutions, monasteries, Buddhist educational and cultural centers, erection and construction of new 'viharas' and temples, international/foreign funding particularly by Far-Eastern and South-East Asian countries, refocusing Buddhist studies, intellectual leanings towards Buddhist philosophy, 'Dalit' movement in India, Tibetan movement, Buddhist pilgrimage and visits of non-Buddhist pilgrims to the Buddhist sacred spots and 'tirthas' and reform movements within certain Buddhist denominations and rise of new Buddhist sects in the Buddhist countries like Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar and so on.

### **Areas and Topics for Discussion**

Keeping the above mentioned aspects in view the following areas have been underlined to facilitate the discussions in the seminar:

- (i) Role of States/Governments.

- (ii) Contribution of Buddhism in moral and spiritual development.
- (iii) Areas of Buddhist Studies, Intellectual exercises.
- (iv) Buddhist temples and monasteries and their missionary activities.
- (v) Buddhist Educational and Cultural centers.
- (vi) Funding for promotion of Buddhist centers and its impact.
- (vii) Contribution of Buddhism in material uplift of communities and places.
- (viii) Neo-Buddhist movements: Dalit movement.
- (ix) Relevance of Buddhism in addressing socio-political challenges in India.
- (x) Tibetan Buddhist: Movement and Dilemma.
- (xi) Reform movements within Buddhist denominations and new Buddhist sects.

We would welcome the Research Papers/Articles on the above themes in time. Since we plan to publish pre-seminar abstracts and detail papers in the proceedings, both the soft and hard copies of abstracts and full papers should reach the undersigned (Add. given below) not later than 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2011 and 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2012 respectively. Your cooperation is highly solicited for the convenience of the organizers and for making this academic pursuit worthwhile.

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**Note:** Detail programme of the Seminar will soon be following in Circular-Two.