



# Holy Relics of Lord Buddha

## Why in News?

**Four Holy Relics of Lord Buddha** are being taken from India to Mongolia for an 11-day exposition to coincide with Mongolian **Buddha Purnima** celebrations.

- These relics are to be displayed at the **Batsagaan Temple in Gandan Monastery complex in Ulaanbaatar**.
- The four relics come from among 22 Buddha relics, currently housed at Delhi's National Museum.
  - Together, they are known as the '**Kapilvastu Relics**' since they are from a site in Bihar believed to be the ancient city of Kapilvastu. The site was discovered in 1898.
- **Relics** are sacred objects associated with holy individuals.
  - They may be literal body parts (teeth, hair, bones) or objects which the holy person used or touched.
  - In many traditions, relics are believed to have special powers to heal, grant favors, or exorcise demons.

## What are the Sacred Relics of Buddha?

- At the **age of 80**, according to Buddhist beliefs, **Buddha attained salvation in Uttar Pradesh's Kushinagar** district.
- The **Mallas of Kushinagar** cremated his body with ceremonies befitting a universal king.
- **His relics** from the funeral pyre were collected and divided into **eight shares** to be distributed among the **Ajathasatrus of Magadha, the Licchavis of Vaishali, the Sakyas of Kapilavastu, Mallas of Kushinagar, Bullies of Allakappa, the Mallas of Pava, the Koliyas of Ramagrama and a Brahmana of Vethadipa**.
- The purpose was **to erect stupas over the sacred relics**.
  - **Two more stupas came up - one over the urn** in which the relics had been collected and the **other over the embers**.
  - **Stupas** erected over the **bodily relics of Buddha (Saririka stupas)** are the earliest surviving Buddhist shrines.
  - **Ashoka** (272-232 BC) opened up seven of these eight stupas, and collected major portions of the relics for enshrinement within 84,000 stupas built by him in an effort to popularize Buddhism as well as the cult of the stupas.

## How are the Kapilavastu Relics Discovered?

- The discovery of an **inscribed casket in 1898** at the stupa site in **Piprahwa** (near UP's Siddharthnagar) helped identify the place with the ancient Kapilavastu.
- The inscription on the casket's lid refers to the relics of **Buddha and his community, the Sakya**.
- A further excavation of the stupa by the Archaeological Survey of India in 1971-77 brought to light **two more steatite relic caskets**, containing a total of 22 sacred bone relics, which are now under the care of the National Museum.
- This was followed by the discovery of more than 40 terracotta sealings from different levels and spots in the eastern monastery at Piprahwa, establishing that Piprahwa was the ancient Kapilavastu.

## What is the Security for Travel to Mongolia?

- During the 11-day visit, the relics will be accorded the status of a '**state guest**' in Mongolia and will be taken again at the National Museum, India.
- For the visit, the Indian Air force has made available a special airplane, C-17 **GlobeMaster**, which is among the biggest aircraft available in India.
- In 2015, the **Holy Relics** were placed under the '**AA**' category of [Antiquities and Art Treasures](#) which should not be ordinarily taken out of the country for exhibition, considering their delicate nature.

## Gautam Buddha

- He was born as **Siddhartha Gautama** in circa **563 BCE**, in a royal family in **Lumbini** which is situated near the **Indo-Nepal border**.
- His family belonged to the Sakya clan which ruled from **Kapilvastu**, Lumbini.
- At the age of 29, Gautama left home and rejected his life of riches and **embraced a lifestyle of asceticism** or extreme self-discipline.
- After 49 consecutive days of meditation, Gautam attained Bodhi (**enlightenment**) under a pipal tree at **Bodhgaya, Bihar**.
- Buddha gave his **first sermon** in the village of **Sarnath**, near **Varanasi** in Uttar Pradesh. This event is known as Dharma Chakra Pravartana (**turning of the wheel of law**).
- He **died at the age of 80 in 483 BCE** at **Kushinagara**, Uttar Pradesh. The event is known as **Mahaparinibban or Mahaparinirvana**.
- He is believed to be the **eighth** of the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu (Dashavatar).

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

**Q. Some Buddhist rock-cut caves are called Chaityas, while the others are called Viharas. What is the difference between the two? (2013)**

- (a) Vihara is a place of worship, while Chaitya is the dwelling place of the monks
- (b) Chaitya is a place of worship, while Vihara is the dwelling place of the monks
- (c) Chaitya is the stupa at the far end of the cave, while Vihara is the hall axial to it
- (d) There is no material difference between the two

**Ans: (b)**

**Exp:**

- 'Vihara' is the Sanskrit and Pali term for a Buddhist monastery. It originally means 'a secluded place to walk', and referred to 'dwellings' used by wandering monks during the rainy season.
- A Chaitya is a Buddhist shrine or prayer hall with a Stupa at one end. In modern texts on Indian architecture, the term 'Chaitya-Griha' is often used to denote an assembly or prayer hall that houses a Stupa.
- Therefore, option (b) is the correct answer.

**Source: IE**

