

Bodh Gaya Global Dialogues Seventh Edition: A Resounding Success!

The Seventh Edition of the Bodh Gaya Global Dialogues, held on March 29-30, 2025, at Dr. Ambedkar International Centre, New Delhi, presented by Deshkal Society in association with Indian Council of World Affairs, Dr. Ambedkar International Centre, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and Pravasi Indians brought together an esteemed assembly of scholars, activists, and policymakers to deliberate on pressing socio-cultural, economic, and political issues. This intellectual congregation served as a dynamic platform for critical engagement, fostering meaningful discussions and knowledge exchange. The sessions covered a broad spectrum of themes, with eminent speakers offering their expertise and insights.

The event commenced with an inaugural session graced by distinguished Guests of Honour: His Excellency Major General Vetsop Namgyel, Ambassador of the Royal Bhutanese Embassy (New Delhi); Ambassador Sanjay Kumar Verma, Chairperson of the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (New Delhi); Dr. D. M. Mulay, Author, Diplomat and former Secretary to the Government of India; and Shri Arvind Mohan, President of Deshkal Society.

The session began with a short video presentation showcasing highlights from the previous edition of the dialogues. This was followed by a welcome address by Shri Akash Patil, Director of Dr. Ambedkar International Centre, setting the tone for the discussions. Further, Shri Sanjay Kumar, Secretary of Deshkal Society, provided the contextual framework of the event, emphasizing the importance of inclusive discourse and collaborative knowledge-sharing.

Chaired by Dr. Kusum Kumari, Retired Pro of Munger University, the first session of the event was designed on the theme 'Buddhist Philosophy and the Teaching of Buddhism.' session explored Buddhist philosophy and its teachings. Dr. Snigdha Singh, Professor in the Department of History at Miranda House, University of Delhi, presented a paper on *Empowerment, Ambivalence, and Resistance: Renegotiating Gender Dynamics in Buddhist Jataka Narratives*. Dr. Rituparna Ghosh, Assistant Professor in the Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies at Dhamma Dipa International Buddhist University, Tripura, contributed valuable insights into Buddhist teachings and their contemporary relevance.

The second session of the day based on the theme 'Envisioning the Buddhist Circuits: Locality, Heritage Making, and Sustainability' was chaired by Dr. Pravin Sinha, Development Economist and Member, World Economic Association (New Delhi) and Dr. Arvind K. Mishra, Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University. They respectively focused on the role of literature and heritage in conceptualizing Buddhist circuits and the issues of hyper-individualization and

cultural uprootedness. Further, Dr. Nikhil Raj, Senior Consultant at the World Bank (New Delhi), and Dr. Binodanand Jha, Former Director of the Department of Education, Government of Bihar, provided empirical insights, citing statistical data and economic analyses to highlight challenges and opportunities in Buddhist circuit development.

The third session on ‘Buddhist Monuments, Heritage, and Beyond’ was moderated by Dr. Shashank Shekhar Sinha, Publishing Director at Routledge (South Asia). In this session, Dr. Shikha Jain, Conservation Architect and Heritage Expert, discussed *Conservation and Interpretation of Buddhist Sites: From Monuments to Museums*. Dr. Elora Tribedy, Assistant Professor at the School of Historical Studies, Nalanda University, presented on *Beyond Monuments: Sustaining Heritage through Community in India and Indonesia*. Furthermore, Dr. Abhishek Amar, Associate Professor at Hamilton College, New York, joined virtually to discuss *Archiving the Heritage of Gaya: A Digital Database of a Sacred City*. The session highlighted the challenges of heritage preservation, the interplay between tourism and sustainability, and the spiritual dimensions of Buddhist heritage.

The first day concluded with a mesmerizing cultural evening attended by Hon’ble Dr. Virendra Kumar, Union Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India. Renowned Odissi dancer Ms. Kavita Dwibedi and her troupe performed *Shweta Mukti*, a dance presentation portraying Buddha as the ultimate symbol of enlightenment and liberation for humanity.

The second day began with a Special Session on ‘India-Vietnam Relations: Exploring and Building on the Buddhism Connect and Emerging Areas of Cooperation.’ Chaired by Shri Ranjit Rae, Former Indian Ambassador to Hungary, Vietnam, and Nepal, and moderated by Shri Sanjeev Kumar, Professor of Political Science at Zakir Husain Delhi College, University of Delhi, this session examined India-Vietnam relations through the lens of Buddhism. Dr. Baladas Ghoshal, Former Professor of Southeast Asia and South-West Pacific Studies at JNU, explored *Vietnam’s Place in India’s Civilizational Interactions, People-to-People Relations, and Strategic Outlook*. Dr. Thich Hanh Chanh, Independent Scholar, examined *The Role of Buddhist Heritage in Strengthening India-Vietnam Relations*. Dr. Dhruvajyoti Bhattacharjee, Research Fellow at the ICWA, spoke on *Bringing Buddhism Back as a Pillar of India’s Diplomatic Culture*. Dr. Sonu Trivedi, Associate Professor at Zakir Husain College, University of Delhi, discussed *India-Vietnam: Intersections of History, Culture, and Buddhist Traditions*.

This was followed by a quick Q&A session with the audience and a book presentation by Dr. Bhattacharjee to Shri Sanjay Kumar on behalf of the Indian Council of World Affairs.

Thereafter, acclaimed filmmaker and art historian Benoy K. Behl graced the occasion with the screening of his 24-minute documentary *Sacred Buddhist Dance*. Introduced by Smt. Sujata Chatterjee, the screening was followed by an engaging audience interaction, offering deeper insights into the symbolism, meditative essence, and historical significance of Buddhist dance traditions.

The following session delved in a book discussion on the second volume of 'The Kalacakra Tantra: Translation, Annotation, and Commentary.' This discussion featured Shri Neeraj Kumar, author of *The Kalacakra Tantra*, along with esteemed scholars: Prof. Madhu Khanna, Founder of the Tantra Foundation, Adele Tomlin, Buddhist Scholar, and Dr. Abira Bhattacharya, Assistant Curator in the Department of Anthropology, National Museum Delhi. Along with dialogue on the chapters and narration of the book, the scholars also delved into the vastness of Tantra philosophy and its presence in everyday life.

In the following session 'Traveling in the Footsteps of Buddha,' Silk Road traveller and author Ms. Sunita Dwivedi shared her experiences in conversation with Shri Uday Sahay, Chairman of SAUV Communications (New Delhi), offering a first-hand account of Buddhist heritage across Asia.

The event culminated in a thought-provoking Valedictory Session centered on the theme 'Buddha and Dr. Ambedkar: Questions of Human Liberation.' This session underscored the profound philosophical and socio-political intersections between Buddhism and Dr. Ambedkar's vision of social justice, highlighting their shared commitment to human dignity and emancipation. Shri Ram Bahadur Rai, President of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, delivered the Valedictory Address, offering deep insights into the transformative potential of Ambedkarite and Buddhist thought in shaping a more equitable society. Dr. Manindra Nath Thakur, Associate Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, eloquently introduced the theme, setting the stage for an engaging discussion on the relevance of these ideologies in contemporary times. The session was further graced by the presence of the Guest of Honour, Shri Sasmit Patra, Hon'ble Member of the Rajya Sabha, whose candid interaction with the audience reinforced the urgency of continuing the discourse on human rights and social equity. As the session progressed, Shri Sanjay Kumar, Secretary of the Deshkal Society, provided valuable reflections on the way forward, presenting key recommendations for

ssustained dialogue and action. The event concluded with a heartfelt vote of thanks delivered by Dr. Shruti, author, translator, and research scholar from the University of Delhi, acknowledging the collective efforts of speakers, organizers, and participants in fostering a meaningful intellectual exchange.

The Seventh Edition of the Bodh Gaya Global Dialogues fostered critical discourse, offering nuanced insights into contemporary challenges. It encouraged continued engagement among academia, policymakers, and activists, reinforcing the need for collaborative efforts toward a more just and inclusive society, inspired by the teachings of Buddha and the vision of Dr. Ambedkar.