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Where are Buddhists Found?

Origin

Siddhartha Gautama was born a Hindu prince in Northern India c563 Before Common Era (BCE). Left princely life at age 29 for a pilgrimage to reach **Nibbana/Nirvana/Enlightenment** (Pali/Sanskrit/English). Accomplished by age 35, became known thereafter by others as **Buddho/Buddha/Awakened One** (Pali/Sanskrit/English).

Taught over 45+ years and bodily died in his 80s, c483 BCE.

Other names include **Siddhartha** (one who accomplishes goals), **Gautama Buddha** (Gautama is the family name), **Buddha Sakyamuni** (Buddha of the Sakya Lineage) or the **historical Buddha** (present and 3rd Buddha in a long cycle of past and future Buddhas). This era is said to be about 5,000 years.

Predecessor Buddha is Kassapa/Kāśyapa (Pali/Sanskrit). Successor Buddha is Metteya/Maitreya (Pali/Sanskrit).

Historically

During, after and since the Buddha is Buddhism. About 250 years later, during the reign of the Emperor Ashoka, (289-232 BCE), Buddhism began to spread throughout India. Ashoka also asked monastics to take the Dhamma/Dharma (Pali/Sanskrit) to other countries: South-East to Sri Lanka, north towards Nepal and Tibet and west towards the kingdoms of the Greek Empire. As it took root in different countries, Buddhism adapted to different cultures without sacrificing its basic principles. This resulted in development of different forms, or schools of Buddhism.

Theravada Buddhism

In the countries to the South and South-East of India, people practise a form of Buddhism known as **Theravada/School of the Elders or First Ones** (Pali/Eng). The yellow-robed monks of this school study and teach the **Bodhi-Dhamma/Buddha's Teachings** (Pali/Eng). They regard the monastic life and **Pali** scriptural language as very important and stress that living by the **Vinaya/Monastic Rule** (Pali/Eng) is the best way to become Enlightened. Many boys or girls follow the monastic life for a time as part of their upbringing. The lay people follow the Buddha's teaching and help the monks by giving them money, food and robes.

Mahayana Buddhism

Mahayana/Great Way (Sanskrit/Eng), not greater because it is better, but greater because there are a greater number of teachings. The people in countries to North and North-East of India follow this form of Buddhism using the scriptural language of **Sanskrit**. There are many different 'schools' of Mahayana Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism emphasises the importance of compassion. It has as its ideal the **Bodhisattva** – one who strives to help all beings to gain Enlightenment for themselves. Buddhism spread to China at the beginning of Common Era (CE) and to Japan about 500 years later. The Pure Land schools are based on devotion to Buddha Amitabha. The Zen school of Buddhism lays stress on meditation as the way to gain Enlightenment.



Vajrayana Buddhism

Vajrayana literally means the ‘Thunderbolt Way’, ‘Diamond Way’ or ‘Lightening Way’, depending on time, place and audience of translation. This form of Buddhism spread from India to Tibet around 700 CE. Ritual and proximity to an experienced teacher plays a particularly important role. Many Tibetans chant mantras or special sacred phrases as they go about their daily lives. Tibetan monks and nuns wear maroon robes.

Buddhism in Australia

Buddhism was introduced to **Australia** principally through localised gold rushes in mid-1800s CE. Becoming wider known in Australia from about 1950 CE. Most of the major Buddhist traditions are now being practised including those who came to Buddhism for reasons other than birth or birthplace.

At Census 2021:

- **Australia’s** Buddhist population was 2.4% (2016: 2.4%; 2011: 3.1% and 2006: 2.1%).
- **Victoria’s** Buddhist population was 3.1% (2016: 3.1%; 2011: 4.6% and 2006: 3.9%) – causing official State ranking of fifth largest religion.
- In Victorian **Local Government Areas** (LGAs), Buddhist representation varies widely. For example, with much higher representation in **Greater Melbourne** 3.9% (2016: 3.8%) than **Regional Victoria** 0.9% (2016: 0.8%), and **Greater Dandenong** 15.9% (2016: 14.8%) than **Port Phillip** 1.7% (2016: 1.8%).

(Information obtained from a range of sources including *BCV Discovering Buddha (2018 edition)* and State and Federal Governments. Australian Census data is compiled of extracts from (a) State of Victoria, Multicultural Affairs and Social Cohesion Division’s Victoria’s diverse population: 2016 Census; (b) .id and (c) Victorian Multicultural Commission’s Population Diversity in Local Councils in Victoria: 2006 Census)