



Indian Buddhist Revival

In 1956, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, statesman and legal scholar, accepted Buddhism by taking refuge and the five precepts from the great Burmese (Arakanese) monk, Ven. Chandramani Mahasthavira, with more than five hundred thousand untouchable and lower caste Indians joining him.

Since 1992, under the leadership of Ven. Bhante Ananda Mahathero and Ven. Bhadant Arya Nagarjuna Shurei Sasai, millions of Indians have embraced Buddhism and added their voices to the call to return the Mahabodhi Vihara to Buddhist hands.

Please join us in urging the Government of India to change the discriminatory and ill-considered BodhGaya Temple Act of 1949 and to return the Mahabodhi Vihara to Buddhists.

The return of Buddhist control over the Mahabodhi Vihara is long overdue!

For more information, contact:

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RETURN THE MAHABODHI VIHARA TO BUDDHIST CONTROL



REVISE THE BODHGAYA TEMPLE ACT OF 1949

**TO
ALL BUDDHISTS
AND
THOSE WHO PRIZE JUSTICE AND FAIRNESS**

Please join us in appealing to the Government of India for the immediate restoration of the Buddhists' right to manage our own revered Mahabodhi Vihara in Buddhagaya.

Background

The great Mahabodhi Vihara (literally, "The Great Awakening Temple") is an ancient Buddhist temple in BuddhaGaya, 115 km from Patna in the Indian state of Bihar. Established by the Emperor Ashoka, the Mahabodhi Vihara marks the place where the former Prince Siddhartha Gotama, attained Supreme Enlightenment more than 2500 years ago.

Traditionally, the Mahabodhi Vihara has been and still is the most sacred pilgrimage place for the Buddhists of the world. Every year, millions of people travel from the far corners of the globe to worship and to pay their respects to the Teacher.

During the 12th century, BuddhaGaya and the surrounding countryside were invaded by Muslim armies, and the Mahabodhi Vihara fell into disrepair. In the 16th century, a wandering Hindu sadhu established a shrine near the Mahabodhi Vihara, and the Mahanth, as he was called, became the chief landlord of the area, even claiming ownership of the Mahabodhi Temple and its environs.

Between the 16th and 18th centuries, the kings of Burma sent delegations with ample funds for the excavation and restoration of the Mahavihara. Many British administrators were also instrumental in the restoration. We can never forget Alexander Cunningham, Edwin Arnold, Hamilton Buchanan, Rajendralal Mitra, and many others who rediscovered Buddhist history in India and worked to protect and to preserve our noble Buddhist heritage.

In 1891, the Sri Lankan Buddhist, Anagarika Dharmapala, visited the Vihara as a pilgrim and was shocked by the pitiful situation he found. Distressed that worshipers' generous offerings were expropriated by the Mahanth, while virtually nothing was being done for the care or upkeep of the Mahabodhi Vihara itself, he vowed to free the temple from the Mahanth's clutches. To accomplish this he initiated an international campaign to reestablish Buddhist control over the Vihara.

Buddhists from all over the world began to demand

that the sacred shrine must be under the control of Buddhists only. Dharmapala's actions so infuriated the Mahanth that he even ordered physical attacks on the Sri Lankan. Despite all attempts at intimidation, Dharmapala was undeterred.

Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, and the Indian National Congress promised the Buddhists at the Gaya Conference in 1922 that the Mahabodhi Vihara would be handed over to Buddhists after Independence, but, even now, that promise remains unfulfilled.

After much struggle, the international campaign did end the Hindu Mahanth's absolute control, but only by giving the state government of Bihar authority over the temple.

The Bodhgaya Temple Act of 1949 set up a Committee consisting of nine members, four Hindus, four Buddhists and an ex-officio chairman, the District Magistrate of Gaya District. The act explicitly provides that the chairman must himself be a Hindu. Thus the majority of the committee are required to be Hindus, unsympathetic and even hostile to the wishes and



needs of this most revered of Buddhist temples!

- ◆ The Act goes against India's magnificent secular constitution.
- ◆ The Act clearly discriminates against Buddhists. The most sacred places for Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Jews, and Sikhs are managed entirely by their own religious leaders. Only Buddhists are denied this right.
- ◆ Under the Act, Buddhists must accept decisions made by members of a hostile and rival faith.
- ◆ Aggressive Hinduism is a dangerous threat in Indian politics, with Hindu chauvanists attempting to promote the lie that the Buddha was merely an incarnation of Vishnu.
- ◆ The Act encourages corruption and abuse.

Corruption

The millions of pilgrims who visit Buddhagaya annually donate millions of dollars for the upkeep of the temple and the support of the monks staying there. Because, under the Act, there is neither oversight nor transparency, members of the Committee have expropriated vast sums from these donations for their personal use.

Although UNESCO recognized the tremendous importance of the Mahabodhi Vihara by making Buddhagaya a World Heritage Site in June 2002, the specific suggestions and requirements for such an important site have not been implemented.

In 2006, a branch of the Bodhi tree was actually cut off in secret and sold to wealthy buyers in Thailand with the full complicity of senior members of the temple's management committee! Shortly thereafter, Bhikkhu Bodhipala, the chief monk of the Vihara, resigned.

The Government of Bihar has delayed the appointment of a new Committee, with the Gaya District Magistrate now the sole administrator responsible for the temple. This seems to be an attempt to exclude Buddhists from involvement in the administration of their own temple!