



**DESH  
KAL**

PUBLISHED BY  
BODHI KENDRA  
UNDER THE  
AUSPICES OF  
DESHKAL SOCIETY

**Q1  
2022**

 **DESHKAL SOCIETY**  
Knowledge with Practice

# Reflection and Practice



Q1  
2022

 **DESHKAL SOCIETY**  
Knowledge with Practice

It gives me immense pleasure to bring out the first edition of the Bulletin published by Bodhi Kendra under the auspices of Deshkal Society. It is noteworthy that Deshkal Society has set a noble example, both at Bodhgaya as well as at the national and global levels, through immersing itself in knowledge with praxis over the last two decades. As a result, a positive impact has been created for approximately one lakh children and a thousand educators from about 150 schools in Gaya district including the Bodhgaya region. With its consistent efforts, Deshkal has also succeeded in enabling 20,000 families belonging to Scheduled Castes category to receive entitlements for homestead land. The Society has also been able to develop an ecosystem wherein 500 families belonging to Musahar community have created sustainable livelihoods for themselves under the leadership of their women, through pig farming.



Since the year 2018, the Society took up a long-term programme, namely Bodhgaya Global Dialogues, in partnership with the leading institutions such as Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts [IGNCA] and Indian Council of World Affairs [ICWA] and public sector establishments like Indian Oil and National Thermal Power Corporation [NTPC]. The first edition of Bodhgaya Global Dialogue was held in 2018, and since then the Dialogue continues to be an annual affair with one hiatus in 2021 due to pandemic.

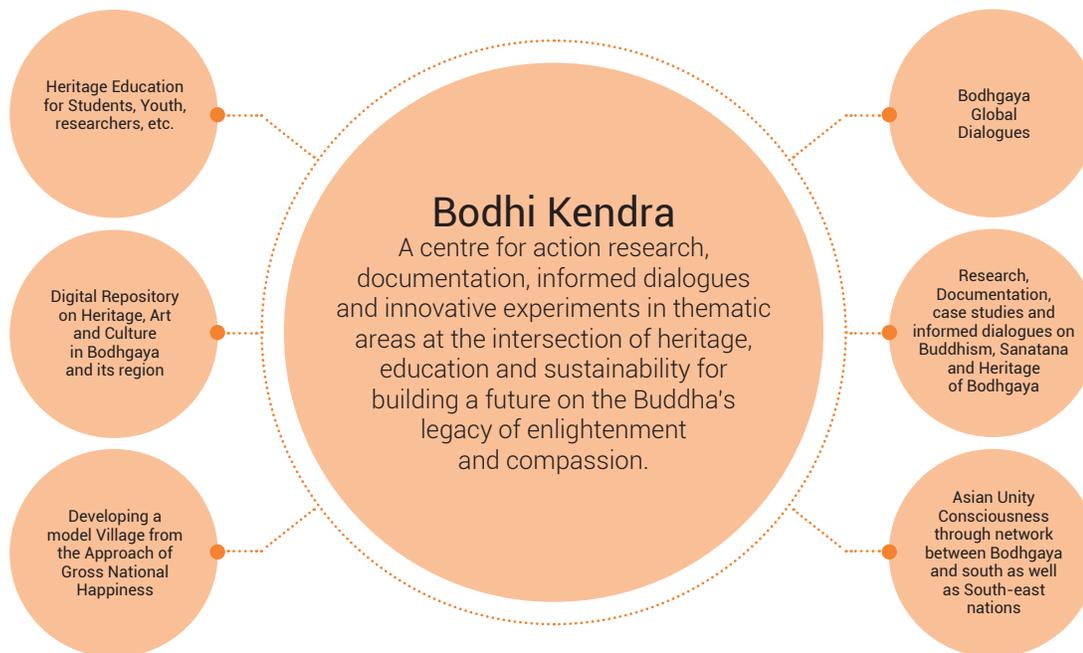
Bodhgaya Global Dialogue draws inspiration from the Buddhist philosophy underlining the four noble truths of Buddhism namely the disease, the cause, the cure, and the medicine. This is reflected in the modern Buddhist philosophy and economics that have created a ground to develop happiness index which deeply influences the current policy discourse for social and economic transformation of ordinary people. Drawing inspiration from this, Deshkal Society has adopted Hathiar village in the Bodhgaya block for its transformation into a model village. Through this transformation, the Society aims to demonstrate impact of multi-stakeholders' engagement on mitigation of human suffering and their role in securing wellbeing of the villagers in order to attain the zenith on the indicators of happiness index. In addition, the Bodhi Kendra has initiated a programme on sewing, designing and embroidery that showcases Buddhist art and sculpture of Bodhgaya. The aim of this programme is to create sustainable livelihoods for rural women and adolescent girls by way of imparting training and building skills in sewing, designing and embroidery.

This Bulletin, which will be available in print as well as on digital platforms, will not only articulate the key activities of Bodhi Kendra but will also shed light on it being a significant voice in the fields of arts, history, culture and heritage of Bodhgaya and its region, in the public as well as policy domains. This Bulletin will also highlight the success stories of social transformation brought about among the marginalized and oppressed communities, especially the SC and the disadvantaged communities in the Bodhgaya region, through interventions in education, skill development, and health.

In presentation of the first edition of the Bulletin, we are reminded of Buddha's saying "Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared."

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# Bodhi Kendra: A Centre for Praxis



## Bodhi Kendra: A living, dynamic and multifaceted institution

The inauguration of the Bodhi Kendra based in Bodhgaya under the auspices of Deshkal Society was held on 26th December 2021 in virtual mode. Shri Ram Bahadur Rai, Hon'ble President, Indira Gandhi National Centre of the Arts graced the occasion and delivered the inaugural speech highlighting the local, national and international significance of Bodhi Kendra and Bodhgaya.

As Guests of Honour, Ven. Dr. Dhammapiya, Hon'ble Secretary General, International Buddhist Confederation, New Delhi, Shri Kiran Lama, Secretary General, All India Buddhist Mahasangha, Bodhgaya, Shri Arvind Mohan, Vice President, Deshkal Society and Shri Rai Madan Kishore, Former Special Secretary to Government of Bihar shared their reflective remarks and appreciated the five-year plan of action for the multiple activities of Bodhi Kendra.

The specific activities of Bodhi Kendra are action research, documentation, informed dialogues and innovative experiments at the grassroots level in thematic areas at the intersection of heritage, education and sustainability for building a future on the Buddha's legacy of enlightenment and compassion. On this occasion, the Kendra adopted a model village for demonstrating inclusive development and sustainability that is derived from the Gross National Happiness based on the philosophy of Buddhism and Buddhist Economics.

In the beginning, Shri Sanjay Kumar demonstrated the blueprint of the Centre and highlighted the historical context which emerged through the processes and achievements in the work of Deshkal Society in the Bodhgaya region over the last two decades.

It is indeed a privilege that Dr. Sachchidanand Joshi, Hon'ble Member Secretary, summed up the deliberations and shared about key salient strategic actions for achieving the goals of the Kendra.

Shri Jay Prakash, Programme Coordinator, Deshkal Society extended the vote of thanks to the dignitaries, Guests of Honour and distinguished participants of this programme. To conclude, he urged for consistent support and cooperation of all in order to attain the objectives of Bodhi Kendra and expressed his earnest hope that the Kendra would be receiving the same.

The YouTube video link: [youtu.be/CAhQ1B0dxTY](https://youtu.be/CAhQ1B0dxTY) may be clicked for further learning about the reflective remarks of the distinguished guests invited on the occasion of the online inauguration of the Bodhi Kendra.

# A Model Village: Hathiar



**B**odhi Kendra under the auspices of Deshkal Society has announced the adoption of the village Hathiar of Bodhgaya block in order to demonstrate the multi-stakeholders’ engagement on mitigation of human suffering and securing wellbeing of the villagers. A step taken ahead in this direction calls for bringing in the concerns and issues of the people, especially the marginalized and oppressed communities who are at the centre of the thoughts, experiences and practices. The goal of the model village is derived from the core values of the philosophical traditions of Buddhism and Buddhist Economics.

The demography and the parameters of the human development of this village is reflected in the Census data of 2011. This village primarily consists of Scheduled Castes population which is approximately 50 percent of the village population. It is noteworthy that the sizable population among the Scheduled

Castes is constituted by the Musahar community often referred to as Dalits among Dalits. Being at the bottom ring of society in the Gangetic plains and known to be the descendants of a Chhota Nagpur tribe, the Musahars are scattered all over the paddy-growing plains, providing the so-called unskilled labour.

In the social background of this village, almost 90 percent of the adult population is engaged in informal sector labour which is characterised primarily by daily wage earners having a sizable section of women and this informal sector labour market is the key source of their livelihoods. It is a matter of deep concern that 50 percent of the population is still illiterate whereas the national average literacy percentage is 72 percent.

There are broad indicators of the socio economic and educational profile of the village. The census data shows that despite the village being the integral

part of Bodhgaya—which has the UNESCO world heritage site at the top of the Buddhist circuits—this village continues to fall under the category of underdeveloped and has been lagging behind on several counts of the human development indicators. This is one of the reasons, Bodhi Kendra has adopted this village for demonstrating mitigation of human suffering and securing wellbeing of the villagers.

If this generous and noble mission succeeds, this perspective will certainly connect to the realization of the four noble truths of the disease, the cause, the cure and the medicine at the ground level through its practice that emanates from Buddhist philosophical traditions and Buddhist Economics. This will serve as an exemplar in true sense for the realisation of enlightenment in Bodhgaya particularly and world at large.

# Improving Land Governance through Digital Literacy and Community Organizing

Can digital literacy training and village-level community mobilization improve the effects of technology on governance? The present study explores this question through a mixed-methods randomized controlled trial [RCT] of a program designed to improve the knowledge of Bihar's land rights e-governance system. Many of the results pertain more broadly to the intersection of digital literacy, e-governance, and social protection.

Across much of the world, governments are turning to information and communication technology [ICT] to improve governance. The idea is that, by developing software platforms and accompanying administrative system that enables the citizens to file claims, government transparency and accountability will increase. This should in turn pressure front-line government employees to implement government policies as efficiently as possible, and provide a conduit for citizens to provide feedback for the government. Policies

using ICT to improve governance and service delivery are broadly referred to as e-governance.

Yet the functioning of e-governance depends critically on digital literacy among citizens. In India, many of the citizens who are most in need of equitable access to government entitlement lack the education required to make use of technology in claiming their rights. Given already tight government capacity, widespread digital literacy training has not arisen as a viable option on the policy agenda. Furthermore, even where citizens do have the digital skills to access digital literacy platforms, open questions remain on the extent to which these citizens will engage in self-advocacy, particularly in the absence of supportive networks. How can development practitioners address this issue?

The intervention that we study combines digital literacy training with community organizing in Bihar. The program—e-Adhikaar [a Hindi name that can be

translated as “e-Rights”]—focuses on the land sector, a sector that is critical to livelihood in Bihar given that the overwhelming majority of the state's poor households live in rural areas and depend heavily on agricultural income.

The program consists of two components:

## COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

Field organizers travel to program villages, hold public meetings, inform village residents of their land rights and the existing e-governance platforms, and offer to provide assistance in forming a community-based organization [CBO] for digital literacy training and advocacy surrounding land e-governance. Within villages that accept the offer, the field organizers then recruit members and train them on grassroots organizational operating procedures. Additionally, they train members on advocacy strategies like following up with government officials through group trips to local government offices and filing Freedom of Information Act petitions.

We aim to provide relevant insights both to grassroots development agencies as they seek to assist citizens in engaging with e-governance platforms, and to the Government of Bihar as it continues toward its longterm goal of improving governance and social entitlements.

### DIGITAL LITERACY TRAINING

In addition to training CBO members on grassroots organization and advocacy strategies, the field organizers train the CBO members on a range of digital literacy skills as well as on how to use the Government of Bihar's e-governance platforms. CBO members then assist eligible households in the community with their land-related e-governance claims.

In order to test the effectiveness of this program, we selected 90 villages from two districts in Bihar: Gaya in the south and Purnia in the north. Given that these two districts are about as different from one another as two districts within Bihar can be, results that apply to both of these cases are likely to apply across much of the state. We conducted a baseline survey in late 2019 to provide a detailed portrait of participating households' socioeconomic status and livelihood situations. Following the survey, we randomized villages into two experimental groups: a "treatment" group that received the e-Adhikaar program and a control group that does not. In late 2020, we conducted a followup survey that allowed us to estimate the effects of the program on digital literacy, use of e-governance platforms, access to entitlements, agricultural investment, and overall livelihood.

In addition to the quantitative surveys, we conducted 14 semi-structured interviews and many more informal discussions through the course of qualitative fieldwork. Focus group discussions

were initially planned, but could not be completed as a result of social distancing considerations.

Although analysis is ongoing and preliminary, some results are clear. First, Internet use is widespread within study villages, and most respondents' households have at least one member who has daily access to the Internet. The Internet was almost always accessed through mobile phones, with reports of network reliability varying across villages. An important dimension of Internet knowledge for practitioners to keep in mind is the generational divide—it is typically the younger generations who uses Internet the most.

Participants considered land rights to be essential for their livelihoods and daily lives, and most knew about and had accessed Bihar's land rights information system. They found the interface to be accessible and easy to use, but overall views of the policy were harder to discern since land data for several of the villages had still not been uploaded and there were some reports of inaccuracies in land data that had already been uploaded. Given the newness of the system, none of the participants had filed claims through it. The most common type of land-related issue was overlapping claims.

Because of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the intervention's treatment intensity was substantially limited by the fact that much of it had to be conducted via Whats-app. Additionally, government offices and operations

faced unprecedented challenges and bottlenecks, such that claims relating to land and social entitlement were held up. As a result, it was difficult for the RCT to pick up significant effects on filing claims. However, the study did have positive and significantly significant impacts on the number of times respondents reported having used the internet, as well as several civic outcomes among others. Additional results are forthcoming.

We expect this study to provide important policy implications in several ways. For one, a robust body of economic literature exists studying the effects and debating the relative merits of e-governance. Within the current political climate in Bihar and India more broadly, the question of whether to take up e-governance strategies has already been answered: e-governance programs are spreading widely and there appears to be little chance that this trend will dissipate anytime soon.

The policy-relevant question then becomes not whether e-governance works, but how to best optimize it for the poor. Such a research program is only beginning to emerge, and this project is the first randomized study in our knowledge to evaluate such a program in India. We aim to provide relevant insights both to grassroots development agencies as they seek to assist citizens in engaging with e-governance platforms, and to the Government of Bihar as it continues toward its longterm goal of improving governance and social entitlements.



## FACE TO FACE

# Sunita Dwivedi in conversation with Sanjay Kumar

**How did you develop an interest in the Buddhist Circuits in India particularly and South Asia and Central Asia in general?**

I have spent my childhood among the Buddhist ruins of Kushinagar. The image of the Ramabhar stupa and the Reclining Buddha colossi has stayed with me throughout my life. When I was travelling across India, I hoped a little to publish my book on the Buddhist Heritage. In fact, I

did not expect to collect enough material for a book. But when it was published by Rupa and did well in the domestic and international markets, my dreams grew bigger and then I wanted to extend my journey across Central Asia and China.

**You had begun your career as a journalist. Could you please share your experiences and observation in both professional fields, as a journalist as well as a traveller of Buddhist circuits?**

As a journalist working for the Times of India and later Hindustan Times, I was interested in feature writing. I would often go to remote places in search of interesting stories. It was during one of these trips that I happened to be at Kausambi near Allahabad. Here, I met the villagers who were surreptitiously selling antiquities found at the Buddhist site. At another place, I found the heritage site submerged in knee deep water and a coating of green algae around the image

My travels are a humble effort towards recreating a journey on the Buddha's trail along the ancient trade routes of Asia where splendid cities of the Buddha arose as a result of propagation of Buddhist thought from as early as the 3rd century BCE when the Mauryan emperor Asoka's missionaries undertook yatras across the Indian sub-continent and Greek kingdoms and during subsequent centuries of the Indo-Greek and Kushan rule.

of Buddha. These images disturbed me so much that I started travelling to many sites in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar just to check on their condition. That is how my first book took shape.

Travelling for me was always like romance – new places, new people, new stories. New landscape unfolding before my eyes while driving on highways was like a new vision of life.

#### **How do you assess your scholarly work as a traveller?**

My travels to many Buddhist sites have highlighted the condition of many sites that are crumbling and merging into the earth. It could be a very important document for the protection of heritage sites many of which are neglected, lost in wilderness, some completely wiped out. Sometimes the fantastic description of sites that we read in history and art books do not match with the actual condition on the ground. Only some sites that have been designated as UNESCO heritage sites or those catering to tourism have been looked after and beautified by state tourism departments.

#### **It is noteworthy that historically the Buddhist sites were constructed by the monks and pilgrims. In this background, how do you locate yourself in the field of exploration, documentation and knowledge generation about the Buddhist sites?**

The ancient Buddhist ruins all over Asia today remind us of the glory and the heritage of India. They stand as symbols of peace and scholarship.

My travels are a humble effort towards recreating a journey on the Buddha's trail along the ancient trade routes of Asia where splendid cities of the Buddha arose as a result of propagation of Buddhist thought from as early as the 3rd century BCE when the Mauryan emperor Asoka's missionaries undertook yatras across the Indian sub-continent and Greek kingdoms and during subsequent centuries of the Indo-Greek and Kushan rule.

My travels are also aimed at experiencing first-hand connectivity of the Buddhist sites falling along the great route running from Bangladesh through northern India and the foothills of the Himalayas into Pakistan and Afghanistan through Central Asia and China.

My work also involves a study of the present condition of the sites and comparing it with the description given by ancient travellers. It discusses how to reach the sites, whether a particular site is accessible and whether it actually exists on ground or has decayed and been demolished, encroached upon or appropriated. Many times, I have also highlighted at various forums, the encroachment and appropriation and neglect of the Buddhist sites by the authorities and the Archaeological Survey of India.

#### **You have been a prolific author in this area. Would you like to talk about all your book publications in the sequence of their appearance?**

My tetralogy on Buddhist heritage of Asia published by Rupa Publications, New Delhi includes *Buddhist Heritage Sites of India* [2006, reprint 2017], *In Quest of the Buddha – A Journey on the Silk Road* [2009], *Buddha in Central Asia* [2014], and *Buddha in Gandhara* [2020].

My forthcoming book *Buddhist Heritage of Bangladesh* will be published this year, once again by the esteemed Rupa Publications. Quite a lot of work on the draft manuscript on Bangladesh heritage has been done during my last visit to Bangladesh in 2017.

#### **Which book do you think is the best among all?**

My greatest efforts have gone into my book on the Buddhist heritage cities of the Chinese Silk Road titled *In Quest of the Buddha – A Journey on the Silk Road*. This is because it involved travelling to the difficult and remote regions in Xinjiang province of the Gobi and the Taklamakan deserts. The publication too was beautiful as the publisher Mr. Kapish Mehra decided to use more than a hundred colour photos of sites.

I would like to be identified as a woman traveller who has not let the travails of a journey through difficult terrain to dampen her spirit and excitement or will, to meet the Buddha in the deserts and caves, along river valleys and high cliffs along the Asian Silk Road.

**Who constitute your audience in India and international market?**

I think all those who love travelling and are heritage lovers will be interested in my books. Rupa Publications, who are responsible for domestic and international marketing, will perhaps be able to answer this better.

**What has been the source of inspiration for writing and collecting materials of these books?**

The travels undertaken by Chinese and Korean pilgrims to India, between the 4th and 8th century CE, inspired me greatly. The pilgrims travelled along terrible deserts, mountains and rough seas to worship at the Buddhist sites all along the Asian trade routes that was the Silk Road.

My sources of inspiration have been great archaeologists like Alexander Cunningham and Debala Mitra.

**You have established a new tradition of documentation, analysis and publication on various Buddhist sites. What is your plan ahead?**

Well, I am now working on the Buddhist heritage of Bangladesh and hope to complete the manuscript and publish it during the next two years. I have already visited the heritage sites once before [in 2017] and plan to go there again this year [2022]. My work involves tracking the Buddhist heritage of our eastern neighbour starting from the northern regions of Rajshahi right up to Chittagong Hill Tracts and Cox Bazar.

**Being a traveller, you are not only documenting and publishing books on the Buddhist circuits but also observing the culture, religion and heritage of the inhabitants of the sites. Which site and which country has been most pleasant and joyful?**

The most joyful city was certainly one in Afghanistan – Bamiyan, the glory of Buddha. Bamiyan has stayed with me because of its wondrous beauty and architectural wealth. Even though the Buddha colossus are lost to the Taliban, there is much to see in the thousands of caves along the Bamiyan, Kakrak and Foladi valleys in Bamiyan.

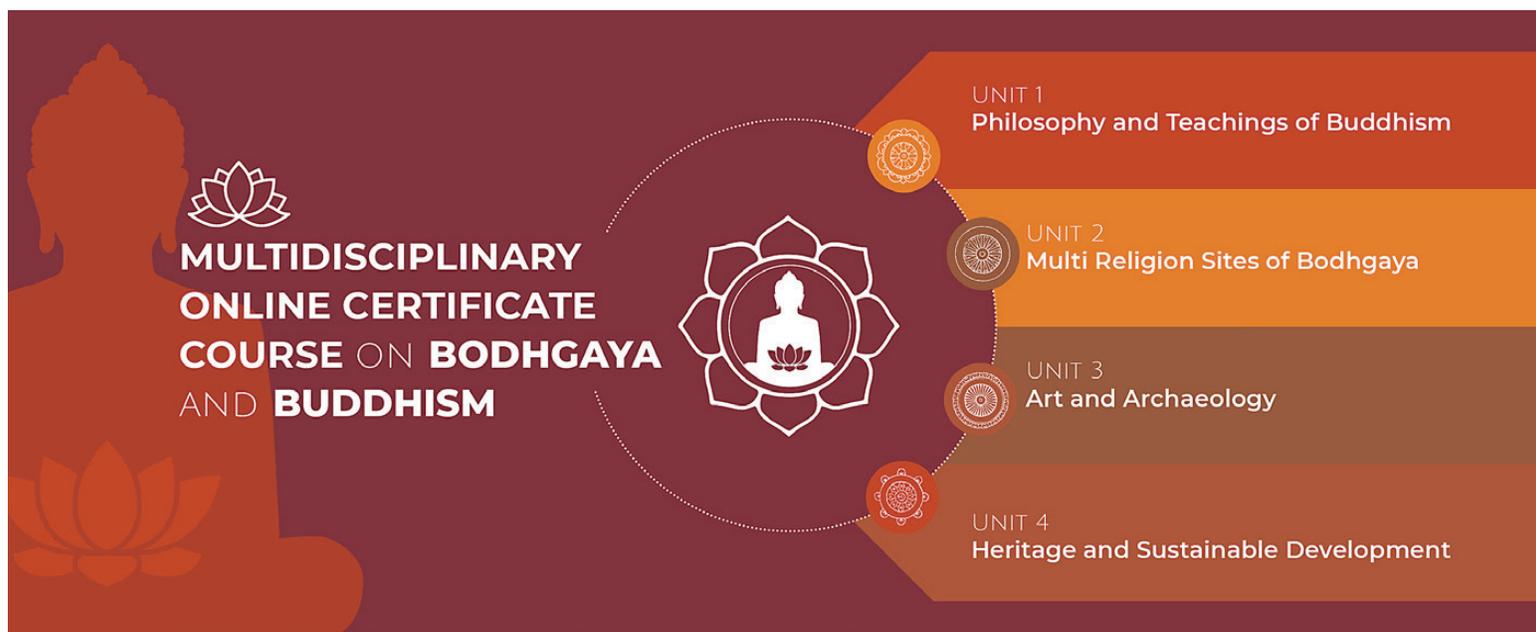
Bamiyan's unparalleled beauty amid snow covered peaks of the Hindukush, serpentine glacial streams and lush forests set it apart from other Buddhist heritage sites of Asia. Not surprisingly, this land with its lovely weather amidst an enchanting landscape of sky touching cliffs, gurgling rivers and dense forests became a resting place for traders and travellers on the great Indian route, the Bengal-Balkh Highway that joined the valley of the river Ganga with the Amudarya or the Oxus.

**How would you like to be known by the posterity?**

I would like to be identified as a woman traveller who has not let the travails of a journey through difficult terrain to dampen her spirit and excitement or will, to meet the Buddha in the deserts and caves, along river valleys and high cliffs along the Asian Silk Road.

ONLINE COURSE

# Certificate Course on Bodhgaya and Buddhism



**MULTIDISCIPLINARY  
ONLINE CERTIFICATE  
COURSE ON BODHGAYA  
AND BUDDHISM**

**UNIT 1  
Philosophy and Teachings of Buddhism**

**UNIT 2  
Multi Religion Sites of Bodhgaya**

**UNIT 3  
Art and Archaeology**

**UNIT 4  
Heritage and Sustainable Development**

The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, International Buddhist Confederation and Deshkal Society launched an online course on multifaceted aspects of Bodhgaya and the Philosophy and Teachings of Buddhism <https://onlinecourse.deshkalindia.com/course/>. This course emerged through the ongoing programme of Bodhgaya Global Dialogues—thus far held in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2022—which brings together the diverse resources of Bodhgaya.

The course enables one to better understand the Buddhist philosophies such as Sanatan Dharma and also closely examines the multi-religious and multicultural sites of Bodhgaya, its heritage, art, sculpture and history. Bodhgaya is a home to over 80 Buddhist monasteries throughout the world, with Thailand, Bhutan, Japan, Sri Lanka and Vietnam being some of the focal areas of the course.

This course was launched in the first week of August, 2021. The first batch was completed successfully in December, 2021. The efficacious participants of the course received the certificates during the 4th Edition of the Bodhgaya Global Dialogues held on 25th, 26th and 27th March, 2022 in Bodhgaya. The second batch began in the first week of February, 2022 and consisted of 22 registered participants from India and abroad. The nature of the registered participants belonged to diverse background ranging from the corporate to researchers including Buddhist practitioners.

#### **EDUCATIONAL APPROACH**

The course brings together the information from a variety of disciplines – religion, heritage, art and history – to highlight the various findings and perspectives regarding the different facets of Bodhgaya’s past and present while also delving into the philosophy and teachings of Buddhism. The interdisciplinary, multi-



instructor-based course provides an introduction to Bodhgaya and Buddhism within the context of its development in India and around the world, particularly in South East Asia.

Whether one is new to the study of Bodhgaya and Buddhism or have been studying it or practicing it for years, this course provides you with the opportunity to become acquainted with the multi-faceted aspects of Bodhgaya and the variety of Buddhist philosophies and teachings while also encouraging everyone to think about them in refined ways.

Through a combination of carefully selected readings, both scriptural and informational, as well as exposure to various forms of Buddhist practices such as arts, devotional acts and literary works, the participants of the course learn to interpret and reflect upon the teachings of Buddha to their own life and deepen their understanding of Buddhism.

The diverse and highly qualified programme faculty presents a variety of intellectual and historical viewpoints, creating a stimulating milieu in which genuine inquiry can occur. Participants are fortified to examine their own cultural and intellectual assumptions as they pursue this study in a challenging and supportive environment.

In this fully online course module, the participants are expected to watch video lectures, join interactive video sessions with faculty and participate in the discussion forums.

## TESTIMONIALS BY THE COURSE PARTICIPANTS

### **Yoko Kitaguchi**

International Social Worker from Kyoto, Japan

The course has enriched me with knowledge about Buddhism and with insights into the cultures and multiple layers of archaeology and history of Bodhgaya. It has also further sparked my interest to visit India. The lectures were rich with information and pictures. I wish I had been there in India to experience the things discussed during lectures myself, but looking at the pictures helped me to get a glimpse of what is being explained. I particularly enjoyed the philosophies of Buddhism. Being raised in a Japanese family, I was familiar with some Buddhist rituals, but not the actual philosophy behind it. Therefore, it was a great opportunity for learning and reflection for me. I also enjoyed realising the different interpretations and practices of Buddhism. I would have appreciated more if there were sessions where participants could interact with each other.

### **Suraj Sinha**

Bihar Administrative Service, Patna

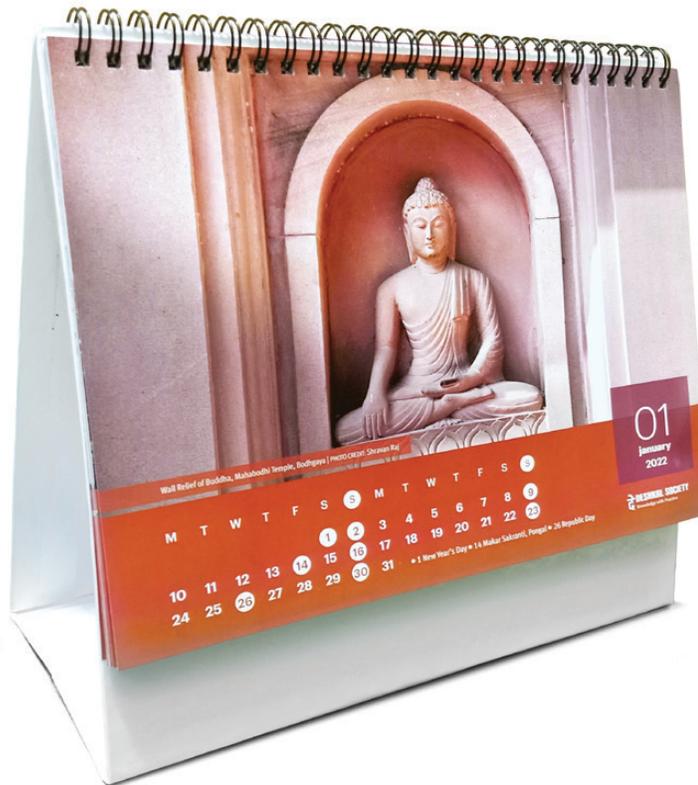
A window to glimpse journey from Siddhartha to Buddha. Curiosity to know Buddhism is thrilled with echoing chants at monasteries by calm and composed monks. Buddhism by definition is a religion. But in actual practice, it resembles philosophy and psychology more than a religion. During the insightful, interactive session, I came to realise Buddhism is essentially a set of tools developed over thousands of years in India and throughout Asia. This course has introduced to us what Buddhism is, how it can help us develop happiness, contentment, equanimity, peace, and love so that we can deal with modern challenges effectively, and generally enrich our experience as a human being. I have now spent thousands of hours working at Bodhgaya as an administrator. After joining in this course, I am in a unique position to communicate the importance of this holy place nurtured in the lap of rich cultural tradition of Magadh.

# Desktop Calendar on Bodhgaya and Buddhism

**B**odhi Kendra, Deshkal Society released a desktop calendar for 2022, which incorporated an array of pictorial images of Buddhist sculptures and Bodhgaya statues. These carefully curated images depict the seated Buddha sculptures, Buddhist wall reliefs, the Mahabodhi temple, Japanese temple, Thai temple and other such remarkable elements from the Buddhist iconography seen around of the heritage city of Bodhgaya.

The desktop calendar presents a glimpse of the Buddhist cultural heritage, art and architecture of Bodhgaya with the aim of dissemination of Buddhist ideas and exploration its relation with Bodhgaya. The photographs for the calendar were selected from the digital repository of Deshkal Society on Bodhgaya and Buddhism.

It is an honour that the graphic designer and architect Brijender S. Dua designed the calendar. Though this distinct calendar has been published for the first time, Bodhi Kendra, Deshkal Society looks forward to bring out such special calendars every coming year. It is pertinent to mention that Deshkal Society had the privilege of receiving the support and guidance from the designer in the aesthetical design of the calendar.



The desktop calendar presents a glimpse of the Buddhist cultural heritage, art and architecture of Bodhgaya with the aim of dissemination of Buddhist ideas and exploration its relation with Bodhgaya.

# The Marginalized Self: Tales of Resistance of a Community

Edited by Rahul Ghai, Arvind K. Mishra and Sanjay Kumar  
Primus Books, Delhi, 2020

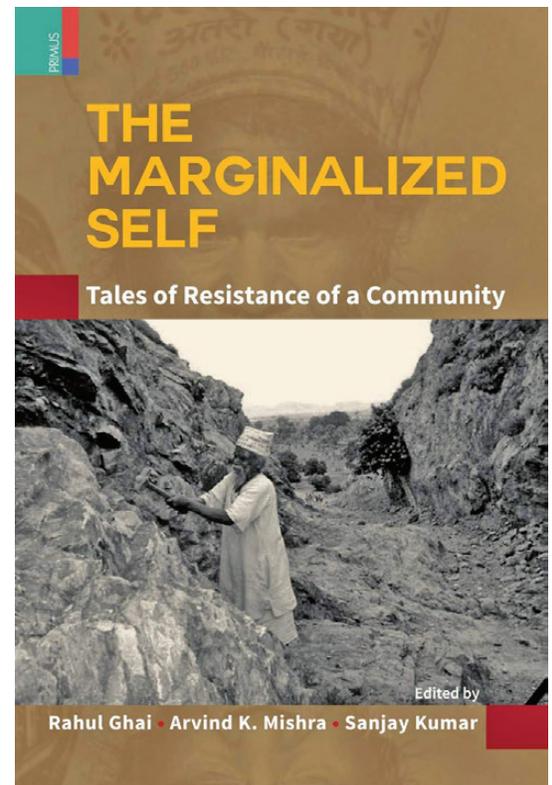
Review by Salil Misra, Historian, Ambedkar University Delhi

**M**arginality as a part of social condition has had a long history in human life. Marginality as discourse is relatively recent, not more than two centuries old. The dominant pattern of the discourse has shifted along with the changes in the orientation of social science itself. As the 19th century telescope of social science was replaced by the 20th century microscope, one question on marginality acquired a new salience: is it possible to combine economic integration with cultural autonomy of the marginalized groups? In other words, do the marginalized groups have the option of achieving affluence without paying the price of cultural submergence? The dilemma is not easily resolved, either for the marginalized groups or for the social scientists. This dilemma is also at the centre of this important volume on the Musahar community of Bihar.

The volume has a generic theoretical component and a specific empirical component about the Musahar community. The Introduction to the volume informs us: 'The Musahars are classified as SCs in Bihar and number around 1.4 million, accounting for almost 2.5 per cent of the total population of the state. Predominantly engaged in agricultural labour and casual labour at the brick kilns, the Musahars are mostly settled in the districts of Gaya, Nadwa, Munger, Bhagalpur, Purnea, Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga, Saran and Champaran. Apart from Bihar, the Musahars are also found in the neighbouring states of Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and Bengal.' [p. 10]

The specific empirical essays [Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 by Badri Narayan, Rafiul Ahmed, Sanjay Kumar and Arvind Kumar Mishra, respectively] have taken up specific issues relating to the economic and cultural life of the community. Chapter three highlights how the community has used its own cultural resources for effective social and political mobilization. Chapter five is a story of how change in the food preference of the upper castes towards pork has created economic and social opportunities for the pig rearing sections of the Musahar community. Chapter four talks about how cultural assumptions of the social and political elites often come in the way of successful implementation of welfare schemes meant for the marginalized groups such as the Musahars. Chapter six takes up the concrete life stories of the important leaders of the Musahar community [Dashrath Manjhi, Bhagwati Devi and Baleshwar Prasad] and the actual transformation of a Musahar settlement [Bapugram, pp. 141-44], brought about by the community with its own hard work. The concrete stories narrated in the chapter feed into larger generalizations pertaining to the complex relationship between the mainstream and the margins, the attempts at appropriation from the apex and resistance from the margins.

The big question is: why is it that the struggles of the marginalized groups for cultural freedom, social dignity, political empowerment and economic increments tend to soon reach a dead end



## BOOK DETAILS

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Modernity does, however, offer compensation. It engenders mobility – social, economic and above all occupational. This mobility undercuts the foundations of rank and status and paves the ground for egalitarianism. The egalitarianism of the western world is rooted as much in economic growth as in mobility.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Rahul Ghai** is Associate Professor, School of Development Studies, IIHMR University, Jaipur. His broad areas of work are understanding marginality and human well-being in a transforming India. **Arvind Kumar Mishra** is Assistant Professor, Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, JNU, New Delhi. His prime interest is in social psychology, marginality and alternative development. **Sanjay Kumar** is a researcher, development practitioner and founder of the Deshkal Society, Delhi. He specializes in apprehending marginality, change and development of oppressed and marginalized communities in India.

or a ceiling in transitional societies such as India? Why is it that all the legitimate economic, socio-cultural and political aspirations often tend to cut across rather than facilitate one another? India's record in this respect – though possibly better than some of the other developing countries – remains quite patchy. Many of the aspirations – political empowerment, cultural freedom and economic betterment – do not push each other up. Often one comes at the expense of the other, or also obstructs the other.

This is a supremely important question. The volume under review does not directly answer it but provides some data which should enable us to engage with the question. A clue to the answer may be found in the following matrix: Marginality under modern conditions is fundamentally different from traditional marginality. The traditional marginality was accompanied by entrenched hierarchy and segregation. The segregation was reinforced above all by culture and thus was not so painful for marginalized groups. The isolation fed into cultural freedom. Modernity destroys segregation and substantially alters hierarchy. It also erodes the cosiness of cultural cocoons and makes life really painful for marginalized groups.

Modernity does, however, offer compensation. It engenders mobility – social, economic and above all occupational. This mobility undercuts the foundations of rank and status and paves the ground for egalitarianism. The

egalitarianism of the western world is rooted as much in economic growth as in mobility.

India, for various historical reasons, experienced not just 'arrested economic development' but also 'restricted mobility'. The tidal wave of modern economic growth was simply not powerful enough to demolish structures of rank and status. As a result, the restricted mobility has turned into a system of 'rotation'. This system is marked by a rotation of social personnel in a basically unchanging social order. Rotation without mobility ensures that the circle does not enlarge [or enlarges ever so slowly] to reach out to the margins. The social structure is able to successfully accommodate incremental changes without the risk of breaking down. The interlocking circle of economy, polity and culture thus remains closed without the possibility of an exit route. This scenario necessitates struggles by marginalized groups but also ensures that these struggles remain at best only partially successful. The groups at the margins are thus doomed to struggle sometimes for inclusion and sometimes against it. The volume under review has highlighted, through its case studies, the enormously complicated nature of the struggles of the marginalized communities and their predicament.



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