



**Research Unit**  
Press Information Bureau  
Government of India

## **International Abhidhamma Divas**

(Ministry of Culture)

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### **Introduction**

India, the birthplace of Buddhism, holds an enduring spiritual legacy as the land where Gautam Buddha attained enlightenment and shared teachings that continue to shape human understanding.

The country's historical and cultural connection to Buddhism is reflected through the veneration of sacred sites, including Bodh Gaya, where Buddha achieved Nirvana. These sites are not merely places of worship but living symbols of the Buddha's journey toward liberation, inviting seekers to walk the same path of introspection and peace.

Central to Buddha's teachings is the Abhidhamma, a profound philosophical component that extends beyond ethical conduct into the realms of mental discipline and self-awareness.

### **International Abhidhamma Divas**

International Abhidhamma Divas, observed globally, celebrate this philosophical cornerstone, recognizing its timeless relevance in guiding ethical conduct and mental discipline. The occasion underscores the enduring bond between Buddhism and India, where Buddha's teachings continue to inspire not only spiritual seekers but also those pursuing a life of mindfulness and inner peace. The Divas serves as a reminder of India's unique role in preserving and promoting the legacy of Buddhism to the world, a bridge between ancient wisdom and contemporary spiritual practices.

## Historical Background and Significance

Abhidhamma Divas commemorates the day when Lord Buddha descended from the celestial realm, *Tāvatiṃsa-devaloka*, to *Sankassiya* (now Sankisa Basantapur) in Uttar Pradesh. The Asokan Elephant Pillar, a historical marker at the site, marks this significant event. According to Theravāda Buddhist texts, Lord Buddha spent three months teaching the Abhidhamma to the deities in Tāvatiṃsa, including his mother. The celebration of Abhidhamma Divas coincides with the end of the first Rainy Retreat (Vassa) and the Pavāraṇā festival, a time when monks and nuns conclude their retreat period with a ceremony.<sup>1</sup>

## Teachings of Abhidhamma

The Abhidhamma, or "Higher Teaching" of the Buddha, presents a deep analysis of mind and matter, elucidating the intricate processes of birth, death, and mental phenomena. Unlike the conventional teachings in the Sutta Piṇaka, which use everyday terms, the Abhidhamma employs abstract and analytical methods to explore reality. It serves as a guide to achieving insight and liberation by providing a detailed framework for understanding the nature of existence.



Traditionally, it is believed that Buddha first taught the Abhidhamma to the gods in the *Tavatimsa* heaven, including his mother, and later conveyed these teachings to his disciple *Sariputta*, who expanded upon them in the six core books of the Abhidhamma *Piṇaka*. These texts cover various topics, such as moral and mental states, aggregates, causal relationships, and the path to

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.ibcworld.org/docs/event\\_files/latest\\_events\\_08112023.pdf](https://www.ibcworld.org/docs/event_files/latest_events_08112023.pdf)

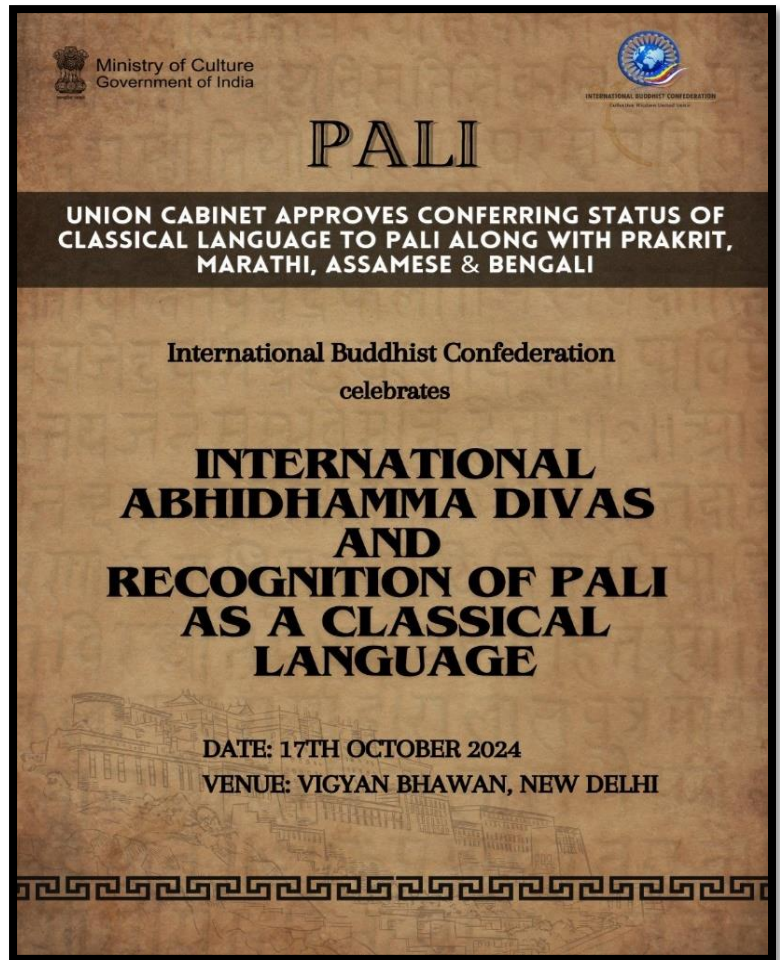
emancipation, forming a comprehensive system for understanding the mind and achieving spiritual growth.

The seven treatises of the Abhidhamma Piñaka, notably the *Paññhāna*, delve into causal relations with unparalleled depth, showcasing the Buddha's profound insight. The meticulous analysis provided by these texts has made the Abhidhamma an essential tool for practitioners seeking to develop insight and grasp the essence of Buddha's teachings.<sup>2</sup>

## Modern Observance and Celebrations

On October 17, 2024, Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi will come alive with the celebration of International Abhidhamma Divas, hosted by the Ministry of Culture in collaboration with the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC). The event will hold a special significance this year, following the recent recognition of Pali as a classical language by the Indian government, alongside four other languages. This milestone adds a deeper resonance to the festivities, as the original teachings of the Abhidhamma are preserved in the Pali language, emphasizing its historical and cultural importance.

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi will lead the auspicious day's proceedings. He will share his reflections on the enduring relevance of



<sup>2</sup> <https://www.buddhistlibrary.org/en/albums/asst/ebook/abhidhamma.pdf>

Abhidhamma Divas and the role of Pali in preserving Buddha Dhamma. His address will highlight the government's initiatives to promote India's rich Buddhist heritage and efforts to ensure the conservation of this ancient wisdom.

**The celebration will attract around 1,000 participants**, including ambassadors and high commissioners from over ten nations, renowned monks, and scholars from 14 countries. Their presence underscores the event's international dimension and the global appeal of Buddhist teachings. The involvement of young scholars and experts on Buddha Dhamma from Indian universities is particularly noteworthy, pointing to a growing engagement among the youth in Buddhism's philosophical and spiritual teachings.

The program features a technical session with a Dhamma discourse by Most Ven. Panyarakkhita, Chairman of Mahabodhi Maitri Mahamandal, Arunachal Pradesh. Additionally, two academic sessions will delve into the themes of "**The Significance of Abhidhamma in the 21st Century**" and "**The Origin of Pali Language and its Role in Contemporary Times**," featuring papers from distinguished scholars. These discussions explored how ancient wisdom can address modern challenges, fostering a deeper understanding of Buddhism's place in today's world.

The International Abhidhamma Divas 2024 promises to be a confluence of cultures, traditions, and academic insights. It celebrates the timeless teachings of Lord Buddha while emphasising the significance of preserving Pali as a cultural treasure.<sup>3</sup>

## **Classical Status to Pali language**

Pali, recently recognised as a Classical Language by the Government of India, highlights its literary significance in the context of Buddhism and Jainism. This ancient language, woven from various dialects, served as a sacred medium for delivering Lord Buddha's teachings around 500 B.C. The entire body of Buddhist canonical literature is written in Pali, most notably the Tipitaka or "Threefold Basket," which comprises:

1. **Vinaya Pitaka:** Outlines monastic rules for ethical conduct and community living.
2. **Sutta Pitaka:** A collection of the Buddha's speeches and dialogues, rich in wisdom.

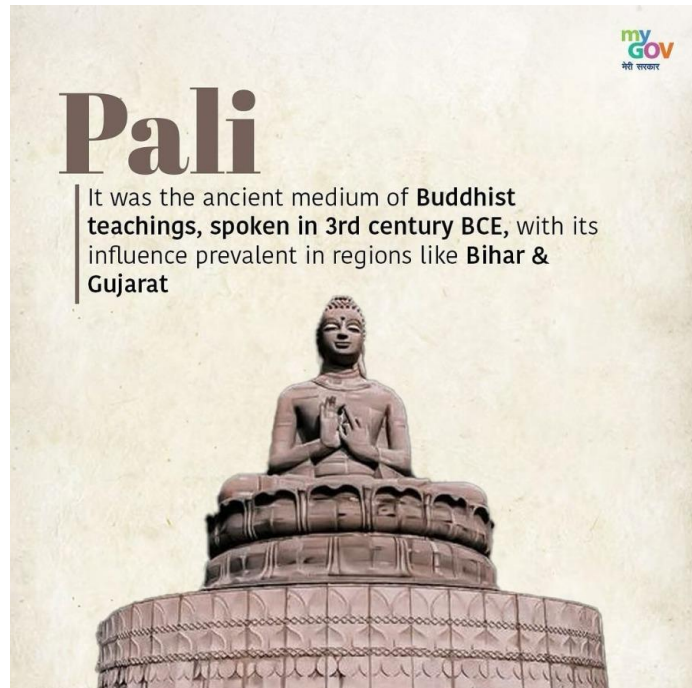
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<sup>3</sup> <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2064995>

3. **Abhidhamma Pitaka:** Explores topics like ethics and psychology, analyzing the mind and reality.

In addition to these canonical texts, Pali literature features the Jataka Kathas, stories of the Buddha's previous lives that reflect shared moral values among the Indian populace.

The conferral of Classical Language status to Pali paves the way for its revival, enabling government initiatives to promote its study in educational institutions and preserve its literary heritage. These efforts will enhance research on Pali's historical significance, contributing to its revitalisation and ensuring its continued relevance in India's linguistic landscape. This recognition not only honours Pali's historical importance but also encourages a deeper engagement with the spiritual and philosophical insights embedded within its texts.<sup>4</sup>



## Conclusion

The International Abhidhamma Divas, coinciding with the recognition of Pali as a classical language, represents a significant stride in India's efforts to preserve and promote Buddhism's rich legacy. By granting classical status to Pali, India acknowledges its historical significance and ensures that the profound wisdom of Buddhist scriptures continues to inspire future generations.

This celebration aligns with India's broader mission to revive interest in Buddhism. It fosters scholarly exchanges and global engagement while reinforcing the nation's role as a key center for

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<sup>4</sup> <https://pib.gov.in/PressNoteDetails.aspx?NotelD=153241&ModuleId=3&reg=3&lang=1>

Buddhist studies. Through such initiatives, India nurtures a deeper appreciation for the enduring teachings of Lord Buddha.

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