

Siddhartha
siddhartha gautama
in the small city



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Siddhartha Gautama, also known as the Buddha, is considered as the founder of Buddhism. He was the founder and leader of a group of wanderers called Sramanas in East India between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE (Warder, 2000). Siddhartha Gautama was considered to be an enlightened teacher who reached full “Buddhahood” and shared his insights to help others. Most teachings attributed to him were passed down by word of mouth and only written down as the Pali Canon around 400 years later.

Gautama is an important figure because he was the founder of a religion that has around 535 million followers. (Harvey, 5) There are many uncertainties about the Buddha’s life including his birth, family, physical characteristics, and conflicting biographies. Scholars have had to sift through myths and facts to piece together who the Buddha really was. Contemporary scholars base their knowledge about Buddha’s early life from Buddhist tradition and texts.

According to the tradition, the Buddha was born Siddhartha Gautama in the small city state known as Kapilavastu (Warder, 2000). This information has been accepted as the birthplace of Buddha even though there is no official documentation or record of Gautama being born there. Scholars accept this location because the Jataka tales, the stories of the former lives of the Buddha, claim that Gautama was born in Lumbini, a residential location in Kapilavastu. In the 3rd century BCE, Emperor Ashoka determined that Lumbini was Gautama’s birthplace and installed a pillar there with the inscription saying: “Where the Buddha was born” (Gethin 1998). There are a lot of stories about the birth of Buddha of which the authenticity is doubted. The Buddhist tradition says that on the night that Siddhartha was conceived,

his mother dreamt about six white elephants piercing into her side.

Siddhartha is said to have been born ten months after she had this dream.

The tradition goes on to say that local Brahmins interpreted the queen's dream and prophesied that Siddhartha would either be a very great king or a very holy religious leader. The Buddha's birth is also claimed to have made the world start shaking. According to legends, the world trembled twelve times, the rivers stopped flowing, flowers started raining from the sky, and a lotus sprung where his body first touched the earth (Herold 1992). The scholars tend to accept this as part of the tradition but there is no record of either the dream or earthquakes and other mystical events occurring.

Another controversy comes from the tradition's accounts of the title of ? uddhodana, the Buddha's father, was. Early accounts of the tradition have him as a ruler and a hereditary monarch of the city state. Many scholars believe that ? uddhodana was actually the elected chief of a tribe that was confederate to the other governments of the time.

This information has been broken down in the Pali Canon, which is the oral passing on of Buddhist traditions, and the Buddhacarita, which is the first biographical poem written about Siddhartha Gautama. Because no written records were made during his life and for some centuries afterward, scholars are hesitant to make unqualified claims about the historical facts of the Buddha's life. Most accept that he lived, taught and founded a monastic order during the Mahajanapada era during the reign of Bimbisara, and died during the early years of the reign of Ajatasatru. The times of Gautama's birth and death are uncertain and are up for debate between scholars.

Historians from the early 20th century dated Gautama's life to have been from 563 BCE to 483 BCE (Cousins 1996).

More recent scholars have claimed that the Buddha died between 411 and 400 BCE. These alternative have not been accepted by all historians but both sides have definite opinions that the date of Siddhartha Gautama's death was within 20 years either side of 400 BCE. After his death, the tradition claims that the Buddha's cremation relics were divided amongst the 8 royal families and his loyal followers. Centuries later these relics would be enshrined by King Ashoka into 84, 000 stupas (Lopez Jr 1994).

Many supernatural legends surround the history of alleged relics as they accompanied the spread of Buddhism and gave legitimacy to rulers.