Buddha Rashmi: the Light of Vesak

Posted on



The elaborately decorated Beira Lake and the Seema Malakaya of Buddha Rashmi Vesak

The teachings of the Buddha are observed and illustrated on Vesak, which signifies the Birth, Enlightenment and Parinibbāna of the Great Teacher. Buddha Rashmi Vesak, which is the national festival organised by the Gangaramaya Temple and Prime Minister's Office, will this year too lighten up the city of Colombo in vibrant and spiritual illuminations.

Words Udeshi Amarasinghe
Photographs BT Images

Vesak is the most significant full moon Poya day for Buddhists around the world. However, in Sri Lanka, Vesak has a unique identity that can be only witnessed in the island. It is a very special day for Sri Lankan Buddhists where they engage in Prathipaththi and Amisa Pooja. Thus it is a time of great spirituality where people go to the temple to worship and offer flowers to the Buddha, it is a time of compassion and kindness, where devotees strive to live according to the teachings of the Buddha. During this time, Sri Lankans stay away from Lobha (greed), Dvesha (hate) and Moha (ignorance), and discipline their minds to be Alobha, Advesha and Amoha. Vesak is a time of veneration and religious observances where the mind attains a sense of peace and tranquility.

Buddha Rashmi Vesak, which is an extensive zone near the resplendent Beira Lake and Nawam Mawatha is dedicated to showcasing the importance of Vesak to Sri

Lanka, both in terms of spirituality and culturally. An initiative by Venerable Galboda Gnanissara Thero, Chief Incumbent of the Gangaramaya Temple, it is the first and only one of its kind in the country. Held with State patronage Buddha Rashmi Vesak espouses the Dhamma and has instilled a sense of discipline and religiosity in those that venture forth.



Buddha Rashmi Vesak 2017 was inaugurated by Chief Guest Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the presence of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, Ven Galboda Gnanissara Thero, Ven Kirinde Assaji Thero and Minister Sagala Ratnayaka

As Ven Kirinde Assaji Thero of the Gangaramaya Temple explains, the simple ata pattama (octagonal lantern) and thorana (pandol) are not merely colourful items that are thrown away the next day, but are items that symbolise the precepts of Buddhism. To make a lantern one has to have great patience, once created and lit, the lantern could be destroyed in a matter of minutes or by the candle falling over. This depicts the impermanence of life or anitya. Vibrant and beautiful illuminations also indicate the enlightenment in understanding the four noble truths. The thorana (pandol) is created with lights and also depicts stories either a Jathaka Kathawa, Sathara Sangraha Wasthu, Dasa Paramitha or Ashta Loka Dhamma. It is an audio

visual experience where devotees will observe beautiful visuals but also takes away a strong lesson.

Dansal are predominately seen in Sri Lanka, where Buddhists of all walks of life organise either food or beverages that is served free of charge to everyone regardless of religion or race in an act of giving.

Buddha Rashmi Vesak was initiated to encourage all Buddhists and also those from other religions to gather in Colombo to witness the beautiful lanterns and decorations that reflect Vesak and Buddhism. The Gangaramaya Temple has been able to instill a sense of discipline as well as a peaceful and safe environment so that families and visitors from overseas can witness the true essence of Vesak. Refreshments in terms of food and beverages are provided for everyone as well as other facilities so that visitors can experience Vesak in a comfortable environment.

On Poya day, alms are given to 6,000 devotees who are observing sil at the temple thereby enabling them to focus on the religious observances. Large numbers come to worship, offer flowers and light lamps and incense sticks. The entire area is beautifully lit up, not only the streets but also the Beira Lake and the islet in the centre of the lake as well. Seema Malakaya, glows in the decorations of Vesak and is the site of the opening ceremony. Bakthi Gee are performed as night falls and the precincts of Buddha Rashmi Vesak are completely illuminated.

Creative lanterns made by students of Year 10 and 11 from the main schools of Colombo (Buddhist and other religions) will have a theme and a topic that they have studied in school so that it will highlight what they have learnt. Craftsmen and artists from all parts of the country have been given the opportunity to showcase their creations, while all their expenses are covered by the Temple.

Buddha Rashmi Vesak will be held on April 29 to May 2, 2018, from 7pm onwards.

The Armed Forces, Police and CDF too render a massive service to ensure the success of the Vesak zone. The Navy especially, by decorating the Beira Lake as well as showcasing elaborate designs on the water and electrifying the entire area. The Government ministries, departments and also the Municipal Council too partner in this endeavour.

As this is the national Vesak festival, Sacred Relics from various countries previously have been showcased to the public. This year too, Sacred Relics from Pakistan will be a special aspect of the festival. Generally, the exposition is held at Temple Trees.

Last year, the Chief Guest of the Buddha Rashmi Vesak was Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, thus signifying the national importance of the festival. This year too, the Buddha Rashmi Vesak will be held under the patronage of President Maithripala Sirisena as well as Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

