

Significance of NIKINI POYA

Nikini Poya day is significant for many reasons religious, cultural and historical. It is of special importance when considering the perpetuity of the Buddha's dispensation.

- The most significant event that took place on a Nikini Poya day with lasting results benefitting humanity was the convening of the First Buddhist Council (*sanghāyanā*) by Arahant Mahākassapa Maha Thera three months after the *Parinibbana* of the Buddha,
 - What triggered the First Council was a statement by a Bhikkhu Subhadda (an elder who had become a monk later in life). He was consoling the grieving bhikkhus by saying that instead they should rejoice at the Buddha's demise because they are rid now of the watchful eyes of their Master; and there is no one to pester them by saying 'This is allowable for you, this is not allowable for you.'
 - Arahant Mahākassapa Maha Thera when he heard of this disrespectful statement, realized the urgency to take suitable action. He immediately decided to convene a meeting of the Elders to collect, rehearse, codify and preserve the teachings (*Dhamma*) and the rules of discipline (*vinaya*). These were propounded from time to time by the Buddha during the 45 years from the day of enlightenment until his passing away.
 - The First Council that commenced on the Nikini Full Moon Poya Day, under the patronage of King Ajatasattu and presided over by the Arahant Mahakassapa Mahā



Thera was held in a pavilion erected in front of the Sattapanni Cave entrance on Mount Vebhara in Rajagaha.

- Five hundred Arahants participated, including the Arahants Ananda, Anuruddha, and Upali.

Thus, the initial step towards ensuring the long-term preservation of the Pariyatti Dhamma (the doctrinal teachings) was taken on a Nikini Poya day.

- Arahant Mahākassapa Maha Thera initially selected 499 Arahants for the *Sanghāyanā*. He kept one vacancy for Venerable Ananda Maha Thera, who was called the ‘Treasurer of the Dhamma’ (*dhammabhāṇḍāgārika*), but has not yet attained Arahantship. *It was on the night of Nikini Poya day that Venerable Ananda Maha Thera became an Arahant to become eligible to attend the first Buddhist Council.*
- The observance of ‘*Vas*’ (Rain Retreat) is compulsory for all higher ordained (*upasampadā*) monks. According to the *vinaya* rules, *vas* or rains retreat has to be

Saptapanni Caves

observed by *upasampadā* bhikkhus or bhikkhunis on the day after the full moon day of the month of Esala, If for some reason it is not possible to observe *vas* on that day, provision is there in the vinaya rules, for the rains retreat to be observed on the day after the Nikini Poya day. The two are distinguished by the two terms *pera vas* (early rains retreat) and *pasu vas* (late rains retreat). *The Nikini Full Moon Poya holds significance as the last designated day for observing the late rains retreat (pasu vas).*

- The Buddha was residing at the Jetavana Monastery in Savatthi spending the 14th *Vassāna* season and one morning a thought arose in his mind thus: “The states that ripen in deliverance have ripened in Rahula. Suppose I were to lead him on further to the destruction of the taints (*āsavas*).” The Buddha and Venerable Rahula went together to the Blind Men’s Grove (*Andha Vana*) soon after the morning meal. There the Buddha explained to Venerable Rahula, who was now 18 years of age, the impermanence of all compounded things and hence, there is nothing that one could grasp as ‘This is I, mine,

and myself". Venerable Rahula, who was listening attentively to the Buddha attained Arahantship. (*Cūla Rāhulovāda Sutta* (Majjhima Nikāya, Sutta 147) Hence, it is significant that it was on a Nikini Poya Day that Venerable Rahula attained Arahantship.

- Nikini Poya is of great cultural significance, too, because the final *Randoli Perahera* (Golden Palanquin Procession) of the Kandy Esala Perahera takes place



on the Nikini Full Moon Poya Day. The Daladā Perahāra, which has paraded the streets for nine days, concludes with the Day Procession held following the *Diya Kāpīma* (water-cutting) ceremony.

Accordingly, Nikini Full Moon Poya Day is a major observance day that marks the first Buddhist Council, the attainment of Arahantship by Venerables Ananda Maha Thera and Rahula Thera, and the last day for observing the rains retreat that is compulsory for all upasampadā monks. It is also of cultural significance to Sri Lankans because it marks the end of the Esala Perahāra of the Temple of the Tooth.

Nūṇasiha