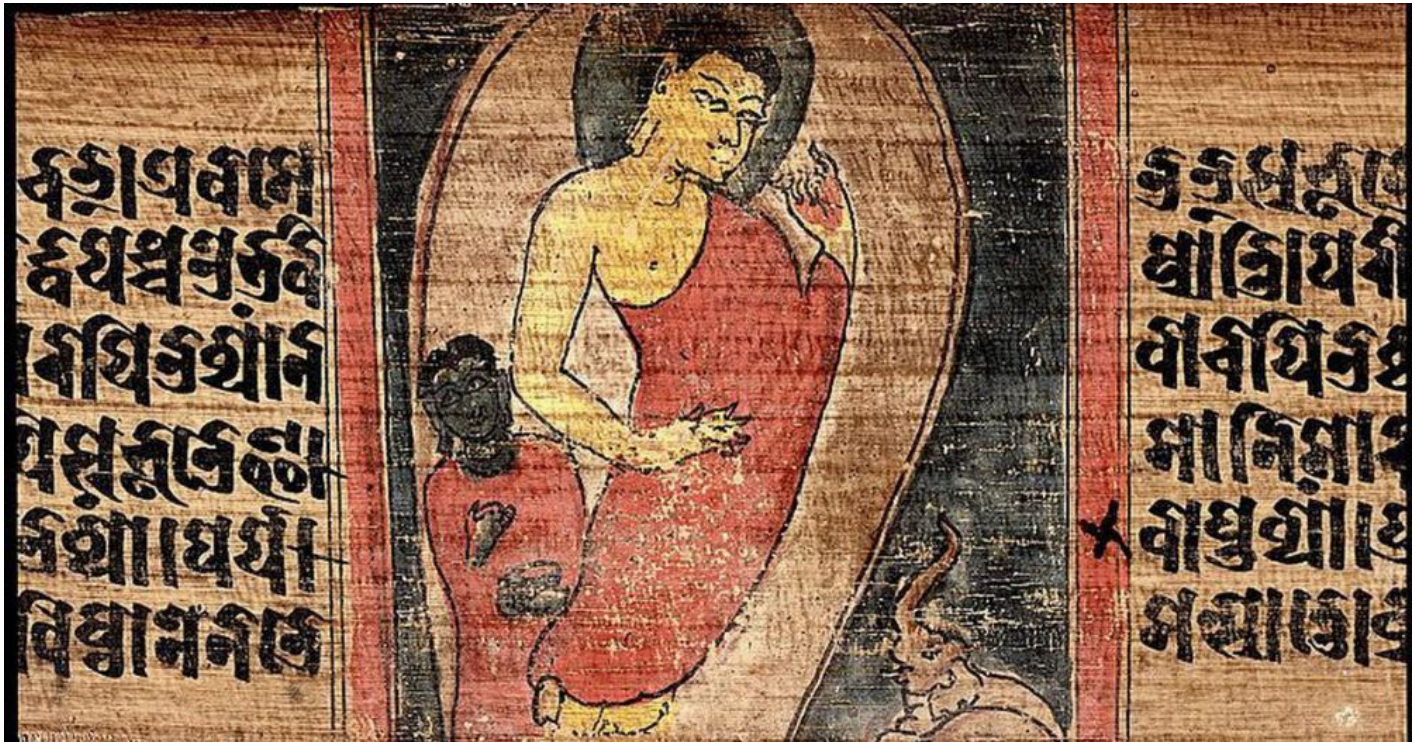


Buddhist Literature

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Buddhist Literature

Buddhist literature comprises one of the earliest collections of organized and written literary works in Indian history. The earliest systematic and most complete collection of early Buddhist sacred literature is the **Pali Tripitakas** (**Sutta Pitaka**, **Vinaya Pitaka**, **Abhidhamma Pitaka**).

- Its arrangement reflects the importance that the early followers attached to monastic life to the discourses of the Buddha, and subsequently to the interest in scholasticism.
- The Buddhist texts were majorly **composed by learned monks**.
- The Buddhist literature covers a wide variety of themes, including the history of Buddha's teachings, his life, his followers and the Sangha.
- Those intended both for the monks and the lay community.
- The earliest Buddhist works were written in **Pali**, which was spoken in **Magadha and South Bihar**.

Types of Buddhist Literature

The Buddhist works can be divided into the canonical and the non-canonical.

Canonical literature

The canonical literature is best represented by the “**Tripitakas**”, that is, three baskets - Vinaya Pitaka, Sutta Pitaka and Abhidhamma Pitaka.

- There are **Pali, Chinese, and Tibetan versions of the Tripitaka** (The Three Baskets/ Collections) as well.
- In the Buddhist context, **sutta** (from the Sanskrit sutra) refers to texts that are supposed to contain what the Buddha himself said.

Canonical literature	
Vinaya Pitaka (Basket of Discipline)	• Compiled at the First Buddhist Council (483 BC) • Recited by Upali • Subject matter: Vinaya Pitaka consists mainly of rules governing the daily life of monks and nuns. ◦ This contains instructions on the organization of the Sangha and how to keep the sangha working harmoniously. • Composition ◦ Suttavibhanga: Patimokkha (basic code of monastic discipline) and commentary ▪ Mahavibhanga: rules for monks ▪ Bhikkhunivibhanga: rules for nuns ◦ Khandaka: 22 chapters on various topics ◦ Parivara: analyses of rules from various points of view.
Sutta Pitaka (Basket of Discourse)	• Compiled at: First Buddhist Council (483 BC) • Sutta Pitaka was first orally rehearsed by Ananda (Buddha’s cousin). • Subject matter: Sutta Pitaka contains the core teachings of Buddhism. • Sutta literally means discourse. • The Sutta Pitaka: Contains the five Nikayas (collections), which developed on the essential teachings of the Buddha. ◦ Digha-Nikaya: comprises the long collection (34 suttas) ◦ Majjhima-Nikaya: comprises the middle length ◦ Samyutta-Nikaya: comprises the connected discourses of Buddha ◦ Anguttara Nikaya: comprises numerical discourses ◦ Khuddaka-Nikaya: comprises the minor collection ▪ It is a heterogeneous mix of sermons, doctrines and poetry attributed to Buddha and its disciples. ▪ Khudakka-nikaya includes Dhammapada and the Sutta-nipata

Abhidhamma Pitaka (Basket of Higher Doctrine)	• The essence of Abhidhamma was formulated by the <u>Buddha</u> after his Enlightenment. • Buddha repeated it to Sariputta, who then transmitted it to his disciples. • Subject matter: It is a higher and advanced formulation of Buddhist teachings. • Abhidhamma Pitaka deals with philosophy and metaphysics. ◦ It includes discourses on various subjects such as ethics, psychology, theories of knowledge and metaphysical problems. • It gives a precise and detailed description of the "principles behind the mental and physical processes of the Buddha's teaching" and states everything in psycho-philosophical language, expressing the 'ultimate' (paramattha) teachings. • It consists of seven books: Dhammasangani, Vibhanga, Dhatukatha, Puggalapannatti, Kathavatthu, Yamaka, and Patthana. • The earliest texts of the Pali canon have no mention of the texts of the Abhidhamma Pitaka.
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Table - Canonical literature

Non-Canonical literature

A vast non-canonical literature developed mostly as commentaries to explain the canonical texts to the Buddhist monks outside India.

- The great bulk of non-canonical literature is the product of the **Sri Lankan monks**.
- Some of the Indian non-canonical works are the **Milinda-panha, the Nettipakarana and the Petakopadesa**.

Non-Canonical literature	
Dipavamsa (Chronicle of the Island)	• Time period: 3-4th century • Author: Probably authored by several Buddhist monks of the Anuradhapura Maha Viharaya • Language: Pali • Subject matter: Dipavamsa is the oldest historical record of Sri Lanka. The Dipavamsa gives a fuller account of the arrival of Theri Sangamitta (daughter to Asoka). • Buddhaghosa refers to Dipavamsa in his treatise "Samantapasadika". • The Dipavamsa lauds the Theravada as a "great banyan tree," • The Dipavamsa was likely the first completely new Pali text composed in Sri Lanka. • The Dipavamsa is considered as source material for Mahavamsa.

Mahavamsa (Great Chronicle)	• Time period: 5th Century CE • Author: Mahanama • Language: Pali • Subject matter: It consists of thirty-seven chapters describing the founding of the Sinhala kingdom by Vijaya, who migrated from India during the sixth century B.C.E. and ◦ the political as well as history of Buddhism upto the King Mahasena, who lived during the third century C. E. ◦ It recounts the history of Buddhism in India, from Buddha's death to the third Buddhist council. • It was written based on prior ancient compilations known as the Atthakatha. • It deals with Emperor Ashoka's expedition to Sri Lanka and the establishment of the Mahavihara. • It recounts the history of Buddhism in India, from Buddha's death to the third Buddhist council. • The second part of the Mahavamsa, more commonly known as the Culavamsa was written in the 13th century AD. ◦ Author: Dhammakitti Thero, but many historians believe that it was authored by many monks.
Milinda Panha (Questions of Milinda)	• Time period: 1st Century BC-2nd Century AD • Author: Nagasena • Language: Pali • Subject matter: The Milindapanha records a series of discussions on points of Dhamma between the Indian Buddhist sage Nagasena and 2nd Century BC Indo-Greek king Menander 1 of Bactria. ◦ After the discussion, Menander adopted the Buddhist faith and then handed over his kingdom to his son to retire from the world and attain enlightenment afterwards. • It is mentioned in the Grand Inscription d'Angkor engraved in 1701 on the walls of <u>Angkor Wat</u> in Cambodia.

Nettipakarana (The book of Guidance)	• Time period: 1st Century BCE-1st Century CE • Author: Mahakaccana • Language: Pali • Subject matter: Nettipakarana is a mythological Buddhist scripture sometimes included in the Khuddaka Nikaya of Theravada Buddhism. • The Nettipakarana is ascribed to the Buddha's disciple Kaccana by the text's colophon, introductory verses, and the commentary attributed to Dhammapala. ◦ The text's colophon says he composed the book, that it was approved by the Buddha and that it was recited at the First Council (483 BC). • It is divided into two divisions: ◦ Sanghavara ◦ Vibhagavara
Petakopadesa	• Time period: Around 2nd Century BCE • Author: Mahakaccana • Language: Pali • Subject matter: Petakopadesa is a Buddhist scripture sometimes included in the Khuddaka Nikaya of Theravada Buddhism. • The text is often connected to another para canonical text, the Nettipakarana.
Jatakas	• Time period: 4th Century BCE • Language: Pali • Subject matter: The Jataka tales are a large collection of Buddhist morality stories in which the Buddha recounts some of his past lives on his long road to enlightenment. ◦ Jataka stories have also been illustrated in Buddhist architecture throughout the Buddhist world. Some of the earliest illustrations can be found at Sanchi and Bharhut. ◦ The Jatakas throw invaluable light on the social and economic conditions ranging from the sixth century BC to the second century BC. ◦ They also make incidental reference to political events in the age of the Buddha.

Table - Non-canonical literature

Important Sanskrit texts in Buddhist literature

Authors	Buddhist Sanskrit Texts
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Asvaghosa (80 AD-150 AD)	• Buddha Charita: It is an epic poem in the Sanskrit maha kavya style on the life and teachings of Gautama Buddha. • Saundarananda: It is a kavya poem with the theme of the conversion of Nanda, Buddha's half-brother so that he might achieve salvation. ◦ The first half of the work describes Nanda's life, and the second half describes Buddhist doctrines and ascetic practices. • Sutralankar • Sariputra Prakaran: It deals with Sariputta, the disciple of Buddha. Sariputta had a key leadership role in the ministry of Buddha, and he frequently appears in Mahayana sutras. • Vajra Suchi: It is a specimen of Buddhist polemical writing on the caste system advocated by the Vedic schools.
Vasumitra	• Mahavibhasa Shastra: It is an encyclopedic work on Abhidhamma, scholastic Buddhist philosophy. ◦ Its composition led to the founding of a new school of thought called Vaibhasika.

Buddhaghosha (5th century)	• Visuddhimagga (path of Purification): It is a comprehensive summary of older Sinhala commentaries on Theravada teachings and practices. • Sumangalvasini • Atthakathayen	Nagarjuna (150 and 250 CE)	• Madhyamika Karika: It is a foundational text of the Madhyamaka school of Mahayana Buddhist philosophy. ◦ The work is a grand commentary on Buddha's "Discourse to Katyayana". • Prajnaparamita Karika: It means transcendental knowledge in Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism. ◦ It also refers to the female deity Prajnaparamita Devi, a personification of wisdom also known as the "Great Mother".
-NA-	• Lalitavistara Sutra: It tells the story of Gautama Buddha from the time of his descent from Tushita until his first sermon. • Mahyanasamgraha: Summary of the Great Vehicle. • Abhidharma-samuccaya: Summary of main Mahayana Abhiharma doctrines.		

Table - Buddhist Sanskrit texts

Other Sanskrit Texts		
• Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita • Prajnaparamita Hrdaya Sutra • Buddhavatamsaka Sutra • Dasabhumukasutra • Sukhavativyuha • Aksayamatiriradesa • Vimalakirti Niradesa Sutra	• Aryasamghata sutra • Lankavatara Sutra • Mahaparinirvana sutra • Samadhiraja sutra • Sakistamba Sutra • Tathagataguhyaka • Nilakantha Dharani • The Mahavastu	• Samgitiparaya • Jnanaprasthanam • Prajnaptipada • Mahakarmavibhanga • Mahavyutpatti • Mahavadanasutra • Avadanasataka

Sanskrit texts

Buddhist scholars

Buddhist Scholars	
Dignaga (480 AD-540 AD)	• Dignaga's work laid the groundwork for the development of deductive logic in India and created the first system of Buddhist logic and epistemology. • His Philosophy: ◦ Pratyaksha (awareness to acquire information) ◦ Anumana (type of cognition to be aware of general attributes) ◦ Apoahavada and language: (interpretation of conventional and symbolic signs to be conventional instances of inference) • His works: ◦ Pramana-samuccaya (perception, language and inference) ◦ Abhidharmakosa-marma-Pradip (Abhidharmakosa's Summary). ◦ Nyaya-mukha: (Introduction to logic) ◦ A summary of the Mahayana Astasahasrika-prajnaparamita sutra
Dharmakirti	• Dharmakirti is associated with the <u>Yogacara</u> and Sautrantika schools. • He was one of the primary theorists of Buddhist atomism. • His philosophy: ◦ Epistemology: (instruments of knowledge, i.e., perception and inference) ◦ Metaphysics: (real is only the momentarily existing particulars, and any universal is unreal and a fiction) • His works include Sambandhaparikshavrtti, Pramanaviniscaya, Pramavarttika-karaka.

Chandrakirti (600 CE-650 CE)	• Chandrakirti was a Buddhist scholar of Madhyamaka school. • His philosophy: ◦ Two truths ◦ The nature of conventional truth ◦ Prasanga and reasoning ◦ Buddhahood • His works include Mulamadhyamaka-vrtti-prasannapada, Madhyamakavatara, Yuktisasthika-vrtti.
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Buddhist Scholars

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