



**National Conference on Recent Advances in Engineering,
Technology, Science, Management and Humanities
(NCRAETSMH – 2025)**

23rd February, 2025, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India.

CERTIFICATE NO : NCRAETSMH /2025/C0225132

An Overview of Buddhist Literature (Hinayana, Mahayana, Tripitaka)

Bishnu Pada Sarkar

Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy,
Mansarovar Global University, Sehore, M.P., India.

ABSTRACT

Buddhist literature is broadly categorized into Hinayana and Mahayana traditions, with the Tripitaka serving as the foundational text for Theravada Buddhism (often associated with Hinayana). The Tripitaka, or "Three Baskets," comprises the Vinaya Pitaka (monastic rules), Sutta Pitaka (teachings of the Buddha), and Abhidhamma Pitaka (philosophical analysis). Mahayana Buddhism, on the other hand, developed its own extensive collection of texts, often composed in Sanskrit, including the Prajnaparamita Sutras and the Lotus Sutra. In this article, an overview of buddhist literature (Hinayana, Mahayana, Tripitaka) has been discussed.

Keywords: *Buddhist, Literature, Hinayana, Mahayana, Tripitaka.*

INTRODUCTION

The teachings of the Buddha are preserved and explained in Buddhist literature, which encompasses a vast array of works such as poetry, commentary, scriptures, and texts. It is crucial in shaping the cultural, philosophical, and intellectual traditions of Asia and contributes to a huge worldwide heritage. Countless works were inspired by Buddhism as it spread across Asia. These works not only documented the teachings of the Buddha but also shaped the intellectual and cultural environments of various regions. Buddhist writings, commentaries, and poetry have had a profound impact on the literary traditions of several Southeast Asian countries, including India, Tibet, China, and Japan. Sharing intricate philosophical practices, fostering cross-cultural understanding, and contributing to global intellectual and spiritual history have all been made possible by the Buddhist literary legacy. Buddhism and literature, in all their forms and variations, have always been and will always be powerful sources of inspiration and connection for people all across the globe. (Briggs, P., 2022)

All of Buddhist scriptures and canonical texts are based on the oral teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha. The foundation of Buddhist literature is the Tripitaka, sometimes called the Three Baskets, which was compiled from oral transmissions of teachings. The original Buddhist texts, which were written in Pali and Sanskrit, mainly contained the teachings of the Buddha, moral



**National Conference on Recent Advances in Engineering,
Technology, Science, Management and Humanities
(NCRAETSMH – 2025)**

23rd February, 2025, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India.

guidelines, and rules for monastic life. As Buddhism spread across Asia, it gave rise to new literary subcultures and philosophical systems, which in turn altered Buddhist literature.

The Tripitaka, sometimes called the Pali Canon, is the supreme text in Theravada Buddhism. The word pitaka, meaning "basket," refers to the original writing materials used to create the sacred texts: palm leaves. The Sutta Pitaka is where the Buddha left his talks and teachings. It is believed to comprise sayings, discourses, and teachings that the Buddha and his closest disciples had. Monks and nuns (Sangha) in Buddhist society are governed by the monastic code, which is described in the Vinaya Pitaka. There are seven volumes that make up the Abhidhamma Pitaka. This set of scriptures provides a philosophical and methodical analysis of the teachings of the Buddha and includes works like the Digha Nikaya, Majjhima Nikaya, Samyutta Nikaya, Anguttara Nikaya, and Khuddaka Nikaya.

In the epic poem "Milindapanho," also known as "Questions of Milinda," the Buddhist monk Nagasena and the Indo-Greek monarch Menander's legendary figure, King Milinda, engage in a conversation. The discussion touches on significant Buddhist concepts, making this a crucial book for understanding the growth of Buddhism in the Hellenistic culture. Sri Lanka's well-known canonical texts, the Mahavamsa and the Dipavamsa, detail the island's Buddhist past. Dipavamsa, which means "Chronicle of the Island," is the more ancient book. However, for a more comprehensive account of Sri Lankan history, see the Mahavamsa (Great Chronicle), which details not only the conquests of numerous Sinhalese kings but also the spread of Buddhism to the island. Also included were the Sanskrit scriptures found in Buddhist literature.

Buddha Charita and Saundarananda are two poems penned by Ashvaghosha. Both the life of the Buddha (Buddha Charita) and the spiritual growth of his half-brother Nanda (Saundarananda) are recounted in them. Mahayana Buddhism's foundational texts are the Madhyamika Karika and Prajnaparamita Karika, both written by Nagarjuna. The Prajnaparamita Karika discusses the ideal of perfect wisdom—a major concept in Mahayana—and the Madhyamika Karika (Verses on the Middle Way) addresses the doctrine of emptiness (Shunyata). (Karunaratne, A.H.G.K., 2019)

BUDDHIST LITERATURE (HINAYANA)

Mahayana practitioners coined and used a derogatory epithet, "Theravada," to refer to early Buddhism. Hinayana devotees appear to identify with the theory by using the name "Theravada." This is known as Southern Buddhism and is considered the teaching of Elders because it appears to be primarily practiced in countries in southern Asia. According to its adherents, the Hinayana is a branch of Buddhism that embodies the true, legitimate teachings that the Buddha first delivered. All of its doctrines are based on the texts that are thought to have been personally revealed by the Buddha.



**National Conference on Recent Advances in Engineering,
Technology, Science, Management and Humanities
(NCRAETSMH – 2025)**

23rd February, 2025, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India.

This ancient Buddhist tradition investigates issues including pain relief, personality development, the meaning of life, and the nature of humans. The three primary goals are liberation from pain, enlightenment, and the end of the cycle of birth and death. The only way to get it by doing one's own thing is to not partake in worldly pleasures. That being the case, all Hinayana followers would have to go through homelessness and, if needed, become monks to achieve this goal. (Patil, P.G., 2023).

It appears likely that the term Hinayana predates the term Mahayana but was only introduced later because of the historical disapproval and competition between the two bodhisattvas and traditional philosophies. Several other terms, such as the Great Vehicle, which was used as the reference name for Mahayana, originated from the phrase Bodhisattva Yana, which means bodhisattva vehicle. Later, as attitudes toward bodhisattva concepts grew increasingly extreme, the word Hinayana was created to contrast with the pre-existing Mahayana.

While the term Hinayana appears to be very uncommon in the early texts and appears to be absent from the earliest translations of the scriptures, the name Mahayana appears to be used frequently in early Mahayana literature as an honorific and as a synonym for Bodhisattva Yana. Because the names did not actually originate in the same time period or era, the often-observed similarity between Mahayana and Hinayana may therefore be deceptive.

The goal of the scriptures is to develop the creative mind. After Buddha's death, the Buddhist community experienced several splits, which ultimately caused the primary school to split into 18 or 20 factions. Throughout their cultural dissemination, these monks mainly concentrated on doctrinal research in order to preserve the Buddha's profound words as they understood them. This led to the creation and subsequent dissemination of Abhidharma texts, including doctrinal treatises that appear to contain the Buddha's original teachings. But as the days went by, they grew increasingly alone and concentrated more on theological study and abstinence.

In summary, the Hinayana section's teachings appear to be more focused on selfish behavior. It appears to be a guide for the inner awareness of the lone practitioner. According to the study, the teachings of the Hinayana appear to consist of several branches, a range of ideas, interpretations, and scriptures. Some supporters of Hinayana also seem to refer to it as a means of obtaining enlightenment. Buddha expected his students to practice the concepts of self-enlightenment. These adherents appear to be only curious about the act of self-reliance that promotes self-excellence. (Sarma, S., 2023).

BUDDHIST LITERATURE (MAHAYANA)

Mahayana Buddhism's beginnings are still unclear; it is unclear when and where the tradition first appeared, and it most likely developed gradually and in several locations. The goals of modern



**National Conference on Recent Advances in Engineering,
Technology, Science, Management and Humanities
(NCRAETSMH – 2025)**

23rd February, 2025, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India.

sectarian movements have had a big effect on most reconstructions, and the texts that later groups value the most may not be the ones that best show the movement in its early stages. This makes it even harder to give the early Mahayana a fair evaluation. The tradition's oldest sources are the Mahayana sutras, originally collected about four centuries after the Buddha's passing. Similar to other canonical Buddhist texts, these texts, which were most likely penned by monks, offer the movement's novel concepts as sermons purportedly given by Siddhartha Gautama, also known as the Buddha Shakyamuni.

The contrasts between Mahayana and non-Mahayana Buddhism are typically more a matter of degree and focus than of fundamental opposition, despite the widespread belief that pre-Mahayana Buddhism is the antithesis to Mahayana. Many non-Mahayana literary materials, written during a period when the Mahayana was already well-established, carry influences from both sets of sources. Therefore, one should not view the Mahayana as the continuation of a long-standing custom. There is no historical foundation for the classification of the Mahayana as one of the three vehicles, which was done to demonstrate the Mahayana's superiority over other doctrines. The same is true of the comparison between Mahayana and Hinayana, or "Lesser Vehicle," which is commonly used in contemporary studies to disparage undesirable and aberrant viewpoints. This term has no real-world equivalent and is never comparable to non-Mahayana Buddhism, much less to any particular sect like the Theravada.

The concept of the bodhisattva, or someone who aspires to become a Buddha, is fundamental to Mahayana ideology. Mahayana Buddhism says that anyone can try to reach awakening (bodhicittotpada) and become a bodhisattva. This is different from non-Mahayana Buddhism's main idea, which says that only the Buddha was a bodhisattva before he reached awakening (bodhi), or illumination. According to Mahayana Buddhism, realizing the essence of reality is the key to awakening. Mahayana theory expands this concept to include everything, whereas non-Mahayana theology stresses the self's absence in persons. Buddhist teaching of "dependent arisal" (pratityasamutpada) says that nothing has an essence and that everything depends on everything else to exist. Emptiness (shunyata) goes much further than this. The goal of the bodhisattvas is to actualize this reality through compassion (karuna) and to comprehend it through wisdom (prajna). They understand that their own emancipation is inextricably linked to the liberation of all beings, as there can be no true distinction between themselves and others, as no individual possesses a "self." As a result, they are "selfless" in both a philosophical sense—realizing that everything and everyone lacks a self or essence—and an ethical sense—acting without bias on behalf of all beings.

Buddhism, like most Indian philosophical traditions, views the world as a place of rebirth, or transmigration (samsara), from which one can attain nirvana. The Mahayana tradition places more emphasis on knowledge or wisdom—the mastery of which is awakening—than on nirvana. Also,



**National Conference on Recent Advances in Engineering,
Technology, Science, Management and Humanities
(NCRAETSMH – 2025)**

23rd February, 2025, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India.

basic differences like the one between samsara and nirvana can't be kept up because the truth of emptiness says that all duality, like beneficial and evil or existence and nonexistence, is ultimately illusion. Later philosophers, like Jnanagarbha in the eighth century, came up with the theory of the Two Truths, which says that there is absolute truth and conventional truth. This theory resolves what seems like a conflict by saying that things don't really exist the way they seem to. Ordinary reality, then, is nothing more than custom or implicit consensus. In order to comprehend absolute truth, one must recognize that everyday reality is merely conventional. In the Vajrayana school, which uses a lot of symbolic language, this is done through meditation and a number of rituals that are meant to break down common beliefs by shockingly turning them on their heads. For example, practices that question conventional notions of purity and impurity teach that these concepts are imposed by convention rather than being a natural aspect of the world. (Prabhu, P., Manivannan, K., 2022).

There are an infinite number of bodhisattvas and buddhas in the universe, each of whom resides in his own world-realm. This conclusion is based on the universal accessibility of awakening and the notion that the universe has no beginning in time and is full of an infinite number of beings and worlds. These buddhas' existence eliminates the distinction between samsara and nirvana that is present in the notion that buddhas vanish after achieving nirvana. Many Mahayana sutras and later Tantric traditions make reference to these "cosmic" buddhas. Numerous Mahayana and Vajrayana texts illustrate this cosmology, which holds that all aspirants can become buddhas. The bodhisattva Dharmakara, whose vows established the circumstances for his enlightenment and transformation into the Buddha Amitabha (Japanese: Amida), is a well-known illustration of this concept. He pledged to establish the world-realm Sukhavati, or "Pure Bliss," and to ensure that common people may achieve rebirth there instead of re-entering the transmigration cycle just by believing in him. By giving his followers, a portion of the boundless merit, he amassed over the course of his eons of bodhisattva practice, Amitabha guaranteed them admittance into Sukhavati. Even though the classical theory of karma says that only a person's actions can change his future, early writings show that the idea of transferring merit, especially to one's dead parents, to them finally frees them, which is documented. Making merit has always been important in Buddhism, but the Mahayana added the idea that merit can be used to gain knowledge and reach enlightenment, not just to get better rebirths in samsara. (Mishra, N., 2022).

As this cosmology evolved, the belief that the Buddha Shakyamuni is the only haven or source of liberation gave way to the understanding that there are several sources. As a result, there were many different objects of worship, including bodhisattvas like Avalokiteshvara, other buddhas like Amitabha and Vairocana, and eventually even symbolic representations like scrolls that used the calligraphy of the Japanese monk Nichiren (1222–82) to reproduce the title of the Lotus Sutra, an



**National Conference on Recent Advances in Engineering,
Technology, Science, Management and Humanities
(NCRAETSMH – 2025)**

23rd February, 2025, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India.

early Mahayana text. A wide variety of visual art has been produced as a result of this commitment; paintings and sculptures are frequently regarded as having the ability to support believers.

BUDDHIST LITERATURE (TRIPITAKA)

The Buddha persistently pondered how individuals could achieve true happiness in the face of perpetual impermanence and unhappiness. He conducted a thorough and objective analysis of nature's facts and the universal law of impermanence. He then unveiled a whole manual for leading a healthy and fulfilling life. Buddhahood, also known as enlightenment, awakening, or illumination, is the state in which ignorance is completely eradicated from one's consciousness and represents his ultimate realization of the truth. The Buddha explained the Tripitaka, or magnificent Dhamma. The Buddha was not alive when the Tripitaka was composed. One of the oldest compilations of Buddhist texts is the Tripitaka. The writing of the Tripitaka did not occur until the first century BCE. Pali and Sanskrit were the two languages spoken. Theravada Buddhism's doctrinal underpinning is the Tripitaka. The term "tripitaka" refers to its division into three main portions. The Tripitaka Sutra contains an estimated 10,000 distinct texts.

Mahakasyapa, a distinguished disciple of the Buddha who rose to prominence as the sangha's head following the Buddha's passing, called the Council. A monk had told Mahakasyapa that the Buddha's death meant that the monks might disregard the rules of discipline and behave as they pleased. Therefore, reviewing the norms of discipline for monks and nuns was the Council's first task. (Marlatt, G.A., 2002).

Mahakasyapa then summoned the Buddha's cousin Ananda, who had been his closest friend. Ananda's extraordinary recall made him well-known. It must have taken Ananda many days to memorize all of the Buddha's teachings. (All Buddhist sutras start with the phrase "Thus I have heard," which Ananda used to start all of his recitations.) The Council accepted the collection of sutras that Ananda delivered after concluding that it was accurate.

In order to explain Buddhist teaching and prevent the spread of heresies, the Third Buddhist Council was reportedly called in 250 BCE, according to certain traditions (other versions retained in some schools record an altogether different Third Buddhist Council). This council recited and eventually adopted the full Pali Canon version of the Tripitaka.

The Tripitaka comprises three baskets: the Abhidharma-pitaka, or Basket of Special Teachings; the Sutra-pitaka, or Basket of Sutras; and the Vinaya-pitaka, or Basket of Discipline.

The textual foundation of the monastic community (Sangha) is the Vinaya Pitaka, the first division of the Tipitaka. This encompasses not only the regulations that govern the lives of all Theravada monks and nuns but also a variety of protocols and etiquette conventions that promote amicable relationships between monastics and their lay supporters, who provide them with all of their material necessities.



**National Conference on Recent Advances in Engineering,
Technology, Science, Management and Humanities
(NCRAETSMH – 2025)**

23rd February, 2025, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India.

When the Buddha originally founded the Sangha, there were no formalized standards of behavior, and the group lived in discord. There were unavoidably times when a member of the Sangha would act in an incompetent manner as the group progressively expanded in size and developed into a more sophisticated society. As a deterrent to future wrongdoing, the Buddha would write a rule defining a proper punishment for the offense whenever one of these situations was brought to his attention. (Kumar, S., 2021).

Sometimes, especially in the West, people naively attack the monastic tradition and its underlying norms as unrelated to the "modern" practice of Buddhism. The Vinaya, according to some, is a relic from an old patriarchy, based on a patchwork of antiquated laws and traditions that only serve to mask the essence of "true" Buddhist practice. This mistaken perspective ignores one important fact: we have the luxury of learning the rich teachings of Dhamma today because of the unbroken tradition of monastics who have continuously preserved and protected the Vinaya's regulations for nearly 2,600 years. Buddhism wouldn't exist if it weren't for the Vinaya and people who are still preserving it today.

It is beneficial to remember that the Buddha called the spiritual path he taught "Dhamma-vinaya"—the Doctrine (Dhamma) and Discipline (Vinaya)—implying a combined body of knowledge and moral instruction. As a result, the Vinaya is an essential component and basis of all of the Buddha's teachings, inseparable from the Dhamma, and deserving of study by all disciples, both ordained and lay. The Vinaya Pitaka contains many profound teachings of the Dhamma itself, as well as many important lessons about human nature and how to create and preserve a peaceful society or organization. Its ability to encourage laymen to think about the remarkable opportunities that come with living a life of genuine renunciation—a life lived completely in accordance with the Dhamma—may be its greatest asset.

Suttavibhanga includes each Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni's "origin story" and basic behavior norms (Patimokkha). There are two kinds of Khandhaka. Mahavagga Several significant sutta-like writings, including a description of the time immediately following the Buddha's life, are included in this part along with guidelines for the Sangha's behavior and manners. Stories of his outstanding students joining the Sangha and achieving awakening, as well as his first sermons to the group of five monks, are included in Awakening. The laws and methods for dealing with offenses that may be committed inside the Sangha are explained in the Cullavagga, along with the etiquette and obligations of the bhikkhus. Parivara summarizes the earlier sections, classifying and reclassifying the rule summaries in several ways for educational reasons. (Heim, M., 2019).



**National Conference on Recent Advances in Engineering,
Technology, Science, Management and Humanities
(NCRAETSMH – 2025)**

23rd February, 2025, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India.

More than 10,000 suttas (discourses) given by the Buddha and his close followers during and soon after his 45-year teaching career are included in the Sutta Pitaka, the second division of the Tipitaka, along with several other verses by other Sangha members. The suttas form five nikayas, or collections.

CONCLUSION

The Mahavibhasha Shastra is a foundational text for the Sarvastivada school of Buddhism, and the vast majority of scholars attribute its composition to Vasumitra. A comprehensive evaluation of Abhidharma's teachings is presented in it. The Vajra Suchi, another significant work that Ashvaghosha cited, condemns caste systems and stresses the inherent equality of all living things. The Jataka stories make up a large chunk of Buddhist literature. The many forms that Gautama Buddha took on are depicted in them. Impartiality, kindness, intelligence, and charity are some of the admirable traits exhibited in every Jataka tale. Many of these stories show the Buddha modeling these values and giving advice on how to live a good life. The Jataka stories make the Buddhist teachings interesting and easy to understand. Sculptures and paintings depicting scenes from the Jataka stories abound, attesting to their cultural and spiritual importance. This is particularly true at ancient Buddhist sites such as Sanchi and Ajanta. (Raju, L.P., Gowda, G., 2014).

Pali was the original language of the Tripitaka and other early Buddhist scriptures, whereas Sanskrit was the second language employed. Sanskrit became the language of choice for many later Mahayana works. As Buddhism spread across Asia, its literature was translated into many regional languages, making its teachings accessible to people from diverse cultural backgrounds. These languages included Tibetan, Chinese, and Japanese. Translations of Buddhist texts helped ensure the teachings' continued availability by bringing them to readers from all over the world, regardless of language or culture.

Indian culture benefits from Buddhism. It offered the Indian people a simple, inexpensive, and universally embraced faith. The disapproval of Hindu rituals and the giving up of Brahmana authority contributed to the religion's disfavour. Buddhism also had an impact on India through the monastic system, which established hierarchies among believers. It also helped bring religious harmony to India and fostered public morals by sustaining a high moral code. The thinkers of Buddhism brought a rational and individualistic perspective to the study of religion. They preached that freedom from one's attachments was the only path to Nirvana. Historic Buddhist residences such as Taxila, Nalanda, and Vikramashila became centers of learning and literature in India. (Dibeltulo Concu, M., 2017).



**National Conference on Recent Advances in Engineering,
Technology, Science, Management and Humanities
(NCRAETSMH – 2025)**

23rd February, 2025, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India.

The teachings of Buddhism have played a significant role in the promotion of world peace by stressing the importance of empathy, nonviolence, and understanding. Sutras (canonical Buddhist texts) like the Tripitaka and the Dhammapada stress the importance of mindfulness, ethical conduct, and the cessation of suffering, all of which contribute to a life lived in harmony. Buddhist literature fosters a cooperative spirit by teaching about interdependence and the renunciation of aggression. International peace initiatives benefit from these works because they encourage moral responsibility and inner peace, which in turn influences people's conduct and societal norms more generally.

REFERENCES

1. Briggs, P. (2022). Buddhist Philosophy and Mental Health: Lessons for the 21st Century. *BJPsych Open*, 20(8)-Suppl. 1, S18.
2. Dibeltulo Concu, M. (2017). Buddhism, Philosophy, History. On Eugène Burnouf's Simple Sutras. *J Indian Philos*, 45, 473–511.
3. Heim, M. (2019). The Philosophy of Emotion in Buddhist Philosophy (and a Close Look at Remorse and Regret). *Journal of Buddhist Philosophy*, 5, 2-25.
4. Karunaratne, A.H.G.K. (2019). Business, Financial, And Risk Management Perspectives of Buddhist Philosophy– A Review. *International Journal of Social Science and Economic Research*, 4(12), 7236-7247.
5. Kumar, S. (2021). Relevance of Buddhist Philosophy in Modern Management Theory. *Psychology and Education Journal*, 58(3), 2104-2111.
6. Marlatt, G.A. (2002). Buddhist philosophy and the treatment of addictive behavior. *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice*, 9(1), 44-50.
7. Mishra, N. (2022). The Buddhist Philosophy: A brief Study. *Dia-noesis: A Journal of Philosophy*, 13, 199-206.
8. Patil, P.G. (2023). Philosophy, Philosophers, and Buddhist Scholastic Texts (Śāstra)*. *Yin-Cheng Journal of Contemporary Buddhism*, 1(1), 58-99.
9. Prabhu, P., Manivannan, K. (2022). A study on the significance of ethical values of Buddhist philosophy. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 6(S4), 2013–2019.
10. Raju, L.P., Gowda, G. (2014). Buddhist Philosophy: An Ideal Source of World Peace. *Paripex - Indian Journal of Research*, 3(1), 90-91.
11. Sarma, S. (2023). Ethics in Buddhism: A Philosophical Retrospect of Gautam Buddha in the Context of Modern Society. *Journal of Survey in Fisheries Sciences*, 10(1), 3426-3431.