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Gautama Buddha & Buddhism

The early Buddhist literature is divided into canonical and non-canonical texts:

1. **Canonical texts:** are believed to be the actual words of the Buddha. Canonical texts are books which lay down the basic tenets and principles of Buddhism such as the Tipitakas.
2. **Non-canonical texts or semi-canonical texts:** these are commentaries and observations on canonical texts, quotes, definitions, historical information, grammars and other writings in Pali, Tibetan, Chinese and other East Asian languages. Some important ones are:
 - a. Mahavastu (written in Sanskrit-Prakrit mixed) – it is about the sacred biography, i.e hagiography of the Buddha.
 - b. Nidanakatha – first connected life story of Buddha.
 - c. The Dipavamsa & the Mahavamsa (both in Pali) – both give historical and mythical accounts of the Buddha's life, Buddhist Councils, Asoka and the arrival of Buddhism to Sri Lanka.
 - d. Visuddhimagga (the path to purification written by Buddhaghosa) – deals with the development from the purity of discipline to enlightenment (Nibbana).
 - e. Milindapanho (in Pali) – consists of a dialogue between the Indo-Greek king Milinda/Menander and the monk Nagasena on various philosophical issues.
 - f. Nettipakarana (The book of guidance) – which gives a connected account of the Buddha's teachings.

The Tipitakas (Canonical Texts)

The earliest compilation of Buddhist teachings which were written on long, narrow leaves is “The Tipitakas” (in Pali) and “Tripitaka” (in Sanskrit). All the branches of Buddhism have the Tripitakas (also called three baskets/collections) as part of their core scriptures, which comprise three books –

- The Sutta (conventional teaching)
- The Vinaya (disciplinary code)



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- The Abhidhamma (moral psychology)
1. **The Sutta Pitaka (Basket of Discourses)** – these texts are also known as Buddha Vacana or the word of the Buddha. It contains Buddha’s discourse on various doctrinal issues in dialogue form.
 2. **The Vinaya Pitaka (Discipline Basket)** – this contains rules for monks and nuns of the monastic order (Sangha). It includes the Patimokka – a list of transgressions against monastic discipline and atonements for these. The Vinaya text also includes doctrinal expositions, ritual texts, biographical stories and some elements of Jatakas or “birth stories”.
 3. **The Abhidhamma Pitaka (Basket of Higher Teachings)** – this contains a thorough study and systematisation of the teachings of the Sutta Pitaka through summaries, questions and answers, lists, etc.

The Tipitakas are divided into Nikayas (books):

1. Sutta Pitaka (5 collections)
 1. Digha-Nikaya
 2. Majjhima Nikaya
 3. Samyutta Nikaya
 4. Anguttara Nikaya
 5. Khuddaka Nikaya
 - Further subdivided into 15 books
2. Vinaya Pitaka (3 books)
 1. Sutta Vibhanga
 - Maha-Vibhanga
 - Bhikkuni-Vibhanga
 2. Khandaka



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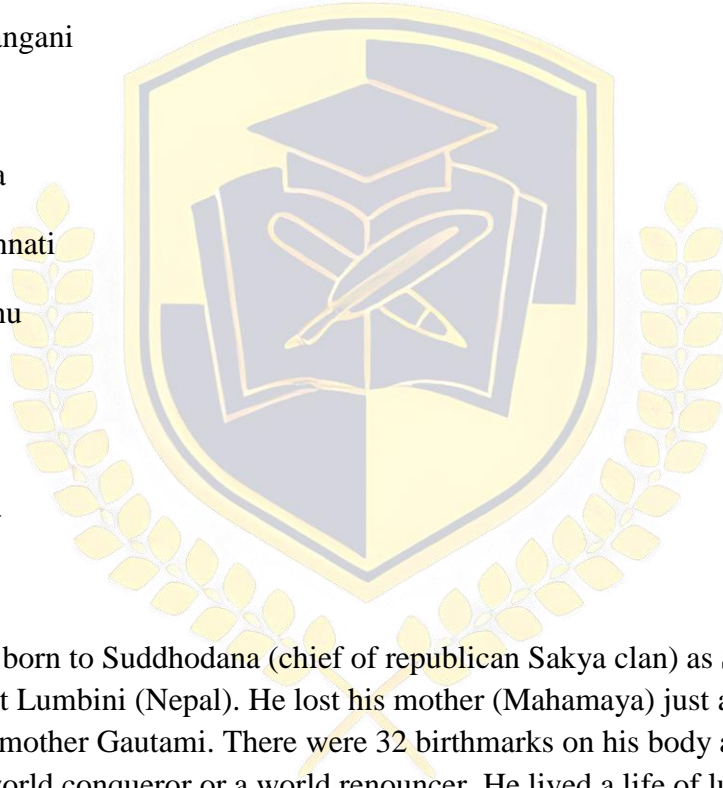
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- Mahavagga
- Cullavagga

3. Parivara

3. Abhidhamma Pitaka (7 books)

1. Dhamma-sangani
2. Vibhanga
3. Dhatu-katha
4. Puggala-pannati
5. Kayha-vatthu
6. Yamaka
7. Patthana



The Buddha – Biography

Hagiography

The Gautama Buddha was born to Suddhodana (chief of republican Sakya clan) as Siddhartha in 563 BCE on Vaishakha Poornima day at Lumbini (Nepal). He lost his mother (Mahamaya) just a few days after his birth and was brought up by his stepmother Gautami. There were 32 birthmarks on his body and Brahmanas predicted that either he would be a world conqueror or a world renouncer. He lived a life of luxury and comfort in his early years.

- He was married to Yashodhara at the early age of 16 and had a son named Rahula. At the age of 29, he left his palace and decided to become a wanderer. He along with Channa, his charioteer and his horse, Kanthaka, wandered for six long years in search of truth (**Mahabhinishkramana**/Great Renunciation).
- He first meditated with Alara Kalama and then Uddaka Ramaputta. They were considered to be the established teachers of that era but he was not convinced with their teachings that liberation from sorrow can be obtained by mental discipline and knowledge only.



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- The Buddha later joined five wandering ascetics – Assaji, Mahanama, Vappa, Bhaddiya and Kondanna. He practised severe austerities until his body was almost emaciated and realising that austerities could not lead to realisation, he left them. He then moved towards the village of Senani and took a seat under a peepal tree facing east. He then resolved not to rise until enlightenment was achieved.
- As Gautama sat in deep meditation – Mara, the Lord of illusions, recognising that his power was about to be broken, tried to distract him. The Buddha touched the earth, calling it to bear witness to the countless lifetimes of virtue that had led him to this place of enlightenment. The earth shook, on hearing the truth of Gautama’s words. Mara then unleashed his army of demons. In the epic battle that ensued, Gautama’s wisdom broke through the illusions and the power of his compassion transformed the demon’s weapons into flowers. Mara and his army fled in disarray. Thus, at the age of 35, he ultimately attained Nirvana/enlightenment at Gaya, Magadha (Bihar) under a peepal tree (Bodhi tree), on the banks of river Niranjana and came to be known as the Buddha – the Enlightened One. It is believed that Ashoka’s queen was envious of the Bodhi tree, and tried to kill it but it grew again. The tree was cut down many times, but it grew again at the same place and is still revered by Buddhists.
- The Buddha delivered his first sermon on deliverance from sufferings to his five former companions at Sarnath. This event is known as **Dhamma Chakka-Pavattana**, which means turning the wheel of dharma. The Buddha wandered about for over four decades, and established an order of monks and nuns known as Sangha. He attained **Parinirvana** at the age of 80 at Kusinara (of the Mallas). His last words were “All composite things decay, strive diligently”.
- The five forms that represent Buddha are:
 - Lotus and Bull – Birth
 - Horse – Renunciation
 - Bodhi Tree – Mahabodhi
 - Dhammachakra Pravartana – First sermon
 - Footprints – Nirvana



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