CHAPTER FOUR
ANIMALS, BUDDHA-NATURE AND JĀTAKAS

The concept of Buddha-nature belongs largely to Mahāyāna Buddhism but its roots lie in texts such as the Jātakas. Through the Jātaka, all living being lies at the very basis of the concept of Buddha-nature.

IV.1. The Concept of Buddha-nature

The concept of Buddha nature is one of the most important ideas in East Asian Buddhism. In its simplest form, the Buddha-nature concept provides the answer to a question with which the ancient Chinese were very much concerned: Are all beings capable of attaining Buddhahood, or are there some who will never be free of the sufferings of saṃsāra? Buddha-nature theory answers without equivocation: “All sentient beings possess the Buddha nature” and thus are guaranteed the realization of Buddhahood. Not only human beings, but all beings born and reborn in the six destinies: hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, fighting demons, human beings, and gods are promised that Buddhahood awaits them. The belief in the icchantika, the one forever incapable of attaining Buddhahood, is expressly rejected. At its basis, then, the Buddha nature concept is an optimistic and encouraging doctrine.¹

From this concept arises the idea that all sentient beings are equal, and all dharma realms are one. These insights are the foundation needed by human beings to reach eternal peace, and they provide guidance that can

benefit the entire world.² Buddha-nature is an important doctrine for many schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism. This thought is also rooted in the Indian Mahāyāna doctrinal tradition.³

The term Buddha-nature is closely relative in meaning to tathāgatagarbha (Sanskrit: “womb of the thus-come one”).⁴ Scholars now generally agree that the Sanskrit equivalent is buddhadhātu.⁵ The Buddha-nature doctrine relates to the possession by sentient beings of the innate buddha-mind or buddha-element, which is, prior to the full attainment of Buddhahood, not fully actualized, or at least not clearly seen and known in its full radiance.

Unlike the Western concept of “soul” or some interpretations of the Indian “ātman”, Buddha-nature is not considered an isolated essence of a particular individual, but rather a single unified essence shared by all beings with Buddha-nature. The following terms refer to the same thing: Self-Nature, True Nature, Original Nature, Dharma Nature, True Mark, True Mind, True Emptiness, True Thusness, Dharma Body, Original Face, Emptiness, Prajñā, Nirvāṇa, etc.

According to the Avatamsaka Sūtra (Flowers Adornment Sūtra), “The Buddha nature is a Buddha seed”.⁶ The Buddha-nature is permanent.⁷ And “Whole-being is the Buddha-nature.”⁸ Buddha-nature was all existence

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which included sentient and insentient beings, and was no longer the possession of these beings. At the suitable time, inside and outsides of sentient being becomes Buddha-nature totally.

All living beings have inherent Buddha-nature and are capable of achieving enlightenment. Śākyamuni Buddha said: “all sentient beings totally possess Buddha-nature. The Tathāgata is permanently abiding, not subject to change.” When the Buddha attained enlightenment he declared that all sentient beings have Buddha-nature. This means that ordinary beings are same as the Buddha, for they all possess the capacity to become Buddha.

Buddha-nature is considered to be incorruptible, uncreated, and indestructible. It is eternal Nirvāṇa in dwelling Samsāra, and thus opens up the immanent possibility of Liberation from all suffering and impermanence.

The Buddha-nature is the original nature of all people, which is harmonious and non-dualistic. This is always present, whether it is ever realized or not. It is a concrete expression used to signify perfection.

In the Tantric teachings of the Buddha, Buddha-nature is the foundation, the path, and the fruition. Buddha-nature is described as being ultimately unstained by any defilement. It is just like space, which cannot ultimately be stained by anything. Even the being who is suffering in hell has a pure Buddha nature.

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The Buddha said: “In order to know the principle of Buddha-nature watch for the proper time and circumstance. When the time comes, Buddha-nature will be manifest.” And ‘to understand the principle of Buddha-nature’ does not mean simple knowing, but means also practicing, enlighten, clarifying, and ultimately forgetting.\textsuperscript{14}

Lord Maitreya explains that every sentient being has the potential for enlightenment. There is no sentient being that cannot improve and become enlightened eventually. This is so because every sentient being has Buddha-nature, regardless of which realm that sentient being belongs to. Every sentient being is ultimately perfect. Relatively, because of what are called, in Buddhism, defilements, sentient beings have countless imperfections. Defilements are things like anger, pride, and grasping. The purpose of Dharma practice is to apply the most effective method to overcome those imperfections. With the right method, a person can gradually awaken and overcome all defilements that prevent recognition of inner truth and realization of Buddha-nature.

The Buddha-nature is present in each individual. It is important that our intelligence goes side by side good intention. Without intelligence we cannot accomplish much. Without good intentions, we will not know whether the exercise of our intelligence is constructive or destructive. That is why it is important to have a good heart. Let us not forget that all these qualities are part of our basic nature. In other words, we need to look within, for the Lord Buddha, Buddhahood, is inside us.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14} Carl Olson, \textit{Op. Cit.} 343.
Buddhist environmentalists argue, furthermore, that ontological notions such as Buddha-nature or Dharma-nature provide a basis for unifying all existent entities in a common sacred universe, even though the tradition offers human life the privilege of spiritual realization. The universal Buddha-nature blurred the distinction between sentient and non-sentient life-forms and logically led to the view that plants, trees, and the earth itself could achieve enlightenment. Sentient beings, or living beings, are those who are not yet enlightened or awakened to the illusory nature of ordinary reality. Sentient beings exist in many forms, realms, and locations and even in formless realms.

An important Mahāyāna teaching in which Buddha nature is discussed in some detail is the *Mahāyāna-uttara-tantra*, one of the teachings of Lord Maitreya, which was transmitted to the great master Asaṅga. Lord Maitreya is a great bodhisattva who is not in human form, although he is able to teach human beings who are advanced enough to understand the level on which he teaches. Asaṅga was able to bring these teachings to the human beings. Sentient beings have Buddha-nature, whether they know about it or not. They may be totally ignorant of Buddha-nature. It is on the ultimate level that every sentient being is Buddha.

Loving-kindness and compassion are the eternal spring in all things; they are the Buddha-nature. With loving-kindness and compassion, all sentient beings will become Buddhas.\(^{16}\)

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IV.2. Equality of Human Beings and Animals in Terms of the Buddha-nature

Buddhism is perceived as building on a deeper understanding of human dependence on, and intimate relationship to animals. Several central elements in Buddhism contribute to this. One fundamental element is the continuity of all life forms, expressed in the idea of reincarnation, i.e. every sentient being’s rebirth in different life forms. In the popular Jātaka stories, relations between animals themselves and between animals and humans are important. An enlightened Buddhist will ‘know’ his or her previous lives, but also without this specific knowledge a Buddhist regards an animal as a possible future human, or even a former human. Tightly related to this is a second element, the idea of karma, i.e. that we will experience the effects of all our volitional activities in the present and the next life. A third element more explicitly influencing the human–animal relationship is the ideal of non-violence (ahiṃsā). This is expressed in the first of the Five Precepts ‘Ye shall slay no living thing’. A fourth element is action-guiding, the ideal of compassion, understood as the primary ethical value. On these grounds Buddha not only objected to animal sacrifice, but showed animals respect. These core elements are valuable incentives to treat animals well, or at least not intentionally to inflict harm.

All sentient beings possess the Buddha-nature and thus are guaranteed the realization of Buddhahood. Not only human beings, but all beings born and reborn in the six destinies—hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, fighting demons, human beings, and gods are promised that Buddhahood awaits them. 17

Lord Buddha himself was reborn as an animal in many of his previous lives, and in all those existences he was wiser than many humans. He had the perfection of truth and by reciting those acts of truth he was able to cause miracles to happen. It did not matter whether he was a monkey, a fish, an otter, a deer, a lion or an elephant. These stories are all recorded in the Jātaka tales, and well known in all Buddhist cultures. It is due to the influence of such stories, as well as the precept of refraining from taking lives that Buddhists develop a respect for all living beings. Thus animals are treated with equal respect as humans, if not more so.

In the Jātakas, as the experience of animal lovers and pet owners will bear out a relationship when an animal turns out to be far worthier than a relationship with a human. In these tales, the animal reveals unsuspected subtleties of tenderness, understanding and fellow feeling; and indeed, compassion is held in great veneration by Buddhists, for compassion is the Buddha-nature.¹⁸

According to the Lotus Sūtra, central in Mahāyāna Buddhism, animals also have Buddha-nature, and can thus be fully enlightened. However, influential lines of Buddhism also include clear elements of hierarchy between humans and other animals. According to this, only a human can attain enlightenment, and every human is more valuable than any other animal since their physical nature is a manifestation of moral status, and ‘human nature is itself’ a product of moral evaluation’. In practice, neither the non-harming principle nor compassion has been strong enough to prevent captivity or instrumentalization of animals in Buddhist countries.¹⁹

Animals are depicted as being capable of meritorious behavior. In one passage from the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, an instance of amity among a partridge, a monkey, and an elephant is cited as exemplary for Buddhist monks. In the *Nigrodhamiga-Jātaka*, a prior incarnation of the Buddha in the form of a deer offers his own life to replace that of a pregnant doe headed for slaughter. The deer’s generosity appealed to the reigning king’s sense of compassion, who then granted guarantees for the protection of all deer in the park, and ultimately for all animals, birds, and fish in the realm.²⁰

Animals are also deemed receptive to hearing and learning the teachings of the Buddha. In one instance, the Buddha approached a wild buffalo that had been causing trouble on the outskirts of a small village. He preached to him about “impermanence, lack of substance, and peaceful Nirvāṇa. He also reminded him of his past births… Overcome with remorse, the buffalo died and was reborn in the Devaloka, the realm of the gods. In another story the Buddha pacified a greedy cobra and chastised him for his behavior, warning that his action would cause rebirth in hell. The snake reportedly died thinking of the Buddha and was reborn in one of the heavens.”²¹

Through the *Lotus Sūtra*, the eight year old Naga princess, who in the space of a moment changes into a male, completes the eight phases of a Buddha’s life, and manifests perfect enlightenment. With the thirty-two features and eighty characteristics of a Buddha, she preaches the *Lotus Sūtra* to all living beings there. This reveals that Buddhahood is not limited to men.

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(as had been believed previously) but men, women and animals can all equally attain Buddhahood ‘in their present form.’

In earlier Buddhism it had been asserted that women were gravely hampered in their endeavors by “five obstacles”, one of which is that they could never hope to attain Buddhahood. But all such assertions are here in the *Lotus Sūtra* unequivocally thrust aside. The child is a dragon, a nonhuman being, she is of the female sex, and she has barely turned eight, yet she reaches the highest goal in the space of a moment. Once again the *Lotus Sūtra* reveals that its revolutionary doctrines operate in a realm transcending all petty distinctions of sex or species, instant or eon.\(^{22}\) Therefore, the Dragon Girl’s enlightenment has an important implication. It reveals that the power of the *Lotus Sūtra* enables all people equally to attain Buddhahood in their present form, without undergoing *kalpas* (aeons) of austere practices. The transformation occurred instantaneously, not in the next life.

Buddhism affirms the unity of all living beings, all equally possess the Buddha-nature, and all have the potential to become Buddha, that is, to become fully and perfectly enlightened. Among the sentient, there are no second-class citizens. According to Buddhist teachings, human beings do not have a privileged, special place above and beyond that of the rest of life. The world is not a creation specifically for the benefit and pleasure of human beings.

According to the Mahāyāna view, Buddha-nature is the true, immutable, and eternal nature of all beings. Since all beings possess

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Buddha-nature, it is possible for them to attain enlightenment and become a Buddha, regardless of what level of existence they occupy. The Mahāyāna sees the attainment of Buddhabood as the highest goal; it can be attained through the inherent Buddha-nature of every being through appropriate spiritual practice.

Here, there are some stories about animals that cultivate to drive home the point that all beings have the Buddha-nature.23

In 1980, Fujian, a shepherd boy said to an ox, “Tomorrow you will be sold to a butcher”. The ox immediately shed tears and knelt on its front legs. The shepherd boy told his parents and the local government officials to come and watch, and then the ox knelt and begged for mercy. Everyone pitied him, collected some money to buy him and send him to a monastery to be liberated. After the ox moved to the monastery, he enjoyed listening to lectures on the sutras and bowing to the Buddhas. Whenever he saw laypeople come to the monastery, he would bow in gratitude to them. At the end of his life, he knew in advance the time of his death. He slowly walked to the meadow and lay down. After half a day, he went off to rebirth. It was the 13th day of the 10th Lunar month, 1993. He was buried at the location where he passed on.

And another story24 follows as:

In 1987, a green-feathered, red beaked parrot from Le Shan, Sichuan Province, was brought to Baotou City, Inner Mongolia. Because he was a dumb parrot that couldn’t speak, and he would peck at people who tried to

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24 Ibid. 48.
train him, he was an unpopular parrot. Eventually he was given to an Elder Layman Wang to be raised. Elder Layman Wang’s entire family was devoted to Buddhism and loved all kinds of animals and small creatures. They raised many abandoned cats, dogs, goats, doves in their home. After the parrot joined their family, he heard tapes of Amitābha Buddha’s name and Guanyin Bodhisattva’s name being recited all day long, and his temperament became gentler. Several months later, the parrot that couldn’t learn anything before, began to recite the Buddha’s name! He would say, “NamoAmitābha Buddha! Amitabha! Buddha, Buddha, Buddha! Namo Guanshiyin Bodhisattva! Guanyin Buddha!” etc. His voice was clear and pleasant. Often he would add, “Hurry and recite Buddha! Brother, recite Buddha!” (Brother is his nickname), “Hey, how about reciting Buddha?”

Every day when his owner did the morning and evening recitation, the parrot would follow along. Whenever someone recited a sutra or the Buddha’s name in the Wangs’ Buddha Hall, he would join in. Even when his owner was reciting silently in his mind, the parrot would know it and recite for as long as his owner did. The strangest thing was that aside from reciting the Buddha’s name, he still couldn’t be taught to say anything else. The Wang family welcomed many Buddhists to their home to practice together, and every day there was a lot of chatter in the house. However, the parrot never learned common phrases such as “How are you? Please have a seat,” which people tried to teach him. He’d only say, “Let’s recite the Buddha’s name? Namo Amitābha!”

One day in May 1998, the parrot was frightened by something, and stopped eating after that. He continuously had diarrhea until the next day. As the end of his life approached, he recited the Buddha’s name with his owner,
and one could faintly hear the syllables “Namo Amitofo” in his throat. After he went to rebirth, his body remained soft and his feathers glossy, as if he were still alive. Elder Layman Wang and his whole family recited for him for 12 hours. They invited an elder Dharma Master from Wutai Mountain to preside at the cremation ceremony, which over a hundred laypeople heard about and flocked to attend. It was a magnificent ceremony. After the cremation, they found the parrot’s tongue intact and more than 20 pearly white śarīra clusters with tiny red flecks, plus several dozen śarīra seeds.”

IV.3. Introduction to Jātaka.

IV.3.1. The meaning of Jātaka

Meaning of the Word: The generally accepted derivation of Jātaka is from jāta, in the sense of ‘born’, ‘engendered’, ‘birth’ + ka. Thus Jātakāṃ in the Jātaka Collection would mean ‘birth’, ‘nativity’ or ‘life’ and in the Buddhist sense, a story of one of the former births of the Buddha. Jātaka means ‘birth-let’, ‘birth-er’, or collectively ‘birthanea’. In translating Jātaka by “birth-story”, the original meaning must have been simply “tale, story”.

Jātaka is a Pāli and Sanskrit word that means ‘birth.’ It is a part of Buddhist canonical literature and as such is popularly believed to be pearls of wisdom from the mouth of the Buddha himself. Stories, ballads, anecdotes, and episodes that talk about the previous lives of the Buddha, in both human and animal form, are called Jātakas. Jātaka is the technical

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26 C.A.F. Rhys Davids, Buddhist Birth-Stories (Jātaka Tales), Delhi: BKP, 2005: vi.
name in Buddhist literature. They are tales of the former births of the Lord Buddha, when he has a Bodhisattva, when he has still on the road to perfection, to Buddhahood. Such story is sometimes called a Bodhisattva story that is “a story in which the Bodhisattva plays a part in one of his former existences, whether as the hero of the story or as a secondary character or as a spectator only.” Asaṅga, the greatest exponent of the school, says that a story related to the deeds of a Bodhisattva with the practice. He further clarified that the Buddha reveals, by the knowledge of his former births, his experiences in past existences as Bodhisattvas. These revelations are obviously known as the Jātaka.

The term is also used for the name of a collection of stories included in the Pāli Buddhist Canon. In the Pāli version these stories assume diverse forms. This is the most ancient and the most complete collection of folklore now extant in any literature in the world. The Jātaka stories which tell of past lives of the Buddha in folktale fashion, frequently involve animals as peripheral or main characters, spending innumerous pāramitās.

Moreover, Jātaka is the tenth book of Khuddaka Nikāya. It consists of 547 stories divided into 22 Nipātas according to the number of verse concerning each story. This is a collection of upwards of 547 folk-lore tales which forms part of the Buddhist canonical scriptures. The tales are in prose, each explaining a much more ancient poem of two or more lines. The allusions in the verses cannot be understood without the explanation give in

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Therefore, in the *Khuddaka Nikāya*, there is the famous *Jātaka* Tales, usually described as histories of the previous lives of the Buddha. In these birth-stories are embedded moral principles and practices which the Bodhisattva had observed for self-development and perfection to attain Buddhahood. Later on, this collection of myth and legend has been the inspiration of some of the greatest Buddhist art, from the caves of Ajanta to frescoes of the present day.

The *Jātaka* is a huge collection of fables framed as previous incarnations of the Buddha, many of which either have parallels or derivatives in western folklore and literature. Although the *Jātaka* is not considered part of the canonical Buddhist scripture, it is very popular. Each tale usually has a concise moral, and the entire collection is a browsers’ delight. In the Buddhist sense of a story of a former birth of Gotama the Buddha, the word *Jātaka* occurs for the first time in Buddhist Sanskrit literature, in the text *Buddhacarita*.

From the foregoing discussion distinct, the meanings of the word *Jātaka* may be summed up as follows:

1. A birth story or “life” of a previous birth of the Buddha, as found in the earlier books of the canon. As an extension of this, it may mean a birth story of the Bodhisattva in one or other of his numerous existences in his career on the way to enlightenment (i.e.

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Buddhahood), in the plural it could refer to the collection of such tales, usually 547 in number in the Pāli text.

2. The name of one of the nine categories (nine and sometimes twelve in the later Sanskrit literature) or varieties of literary composition. In the Pāli, this refers to a collection of verses - the Jātaka Pāli.

3. The name of a narrative work in the form of a voluminous prose commentary the Jātakaṭṭhakathā, also known as Jātakaṭṭhavanaṇṇanā, in which the verses are embedded.

IV.3.2. Historical background of the Jātaka

According to E.B. Cowell, since the later Vedic period, the doctrine of Metempsychosis has played an important part in the history of the national character and religious ideas that we need not be surprised to find that Buddhist literature from the earliest times has always included the ages of the past as an authentic background to founder’s historical life as Gautama. Jātaka legends occur even in Canonical Piṭakas; thus the SukhavihāriJātaka and the Tittira Jātaka, which are found in the CullaVagga (volume 6); and there are several other examples.36

1. The author of Jātaka

The Buddhists believe that the Jātaka verses were uttered by the Buddha himself and hence these were placed in historical context. Originally, the Jātakas represent a popular collection of tales and fables, by adopting these legends and giving them Buddhist guise Early

36 J.v. 232.
Buddhism acquired a simple and effective means of popularizing the faith.\textsuperscript{37}

There is no reason to doubt that the Buddha himself made use of popular tales in preaching to the people. We found it in the \emph{Mahāsudassana Sutta} of the \textit{Dīgha-Nikāya}\textsuperscript{38} and later on in the book of T.W. Rhys Davids. They mentioned about dialogues of the Lord Buddha preaching the \emph{Mahāsudassana Jātaka}. Sutta no. 95 is one of many such instances to be recorded in the Pāli Canon. It is certain that monks and preachers also did so. This was, indeed, a widespread practice throughout the length and breadth of India. The preachers of all religious sects there always took advantage of the native passion for storytelling and story-hearing, and made extensive use of stories to preach. They ventured frequently to take fables, fairy tales and amusing anecdotes from the rich store house of popular tales or from secular literature, altering and adapting them wherever and whenever necessary to suit their aims.

The Buddha teaches both by \textit{sūtras} and stanzas and by legends and \textit{Jātakas}. Again it is mentioned in the same work that the Tathāgata, knowing the differences in faculties of his numerous hearers, preaches in many different ways, ‘tells many tales, amusing, agreeable, both instructive and pleasant, tales by means of which all beings not only become pleased with the law in this present life, but also after death reach happy states’.\textsuperscript{39}


According to T.W. Rhys David, the edition of the *Jātaka* by Fausböll is an edition of the commentary written probably in the fifth century CE by and an unknown author, who, as Childers thinks, was Buddhaghosa. Whether this commentary was actually written by Buddhaghosa or not, the numerous Jātaka quoted or narrated by Buddhaghosa in his commentaries show a close agreement with the commentary edited by Fausböll.\(^{40}\)

It has been shown that the word commentary, the prose of the framework, and the prose of the stories are all the work of the same author.\(^{41}\) E.B. Cowell confessed that he has no confidence in their historical credibility.

However, Burlingame finds, as also does Winternitz, the arguments of Rhys Davids and Fausböll convincing lie adds that the strongest argument of all is, however, that the *Jātaka* commentary and the *Dhammapada* commentary, differ so widely in language and style from the genuine works of Buddhaghosa as to make it in the highest degree improbable that he is the author of either of them. “Buddhaghosa is not the author of the *Jātaka Commentary* or of the *Dhammapada* commentary” he emphatically states. “Their authors are unknown.”\(^{42}\)

Some scholars are of the opinion that these *Jātaka gāthās* are of pre-Buddhist origin and were the work of many authors, chiefly non-Buddhist, though a compiler may have altered and even added new verse here and there, while recasting the whole text.\(^{43}\)

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Another text in Buddhist literature that derives heavily from the Jātakas is the Sanskrit work Jātakamālā (meaning garland of birth stories) by Āryasūra. A famous Sanskrit collection from approximately the fourth century CE, arranges the bulk of its thirty four Jātakas, it is a work of high literary standards. Stories similar to Jātakas occur in the Vedas. Some of the Brāhmaṇas and Purāṇas are simply narrative stories. In many cases, the context, the style or the core theme of the story is altered. In some cases the same story is told in different forms by different authors.

It is unlikely Aesop and other early storytellers had copies of the Jātakas handy. And it’s unlikely that the monks and scholars who compiled the Pāli Canon more than 2,000 years ago ever heard of Aesop. Perhaps the stories were spread by ancient travelers. Perhaps they were built from fragments of the first human stories, told by our paleolithic ancestors. Jātaka and similar other stories travelled far and wide by word of mouth along caravan routes. Many Jātaka stories have appeared in many other languages and media. Retellings of the stories may contain significant amendments to suit different host cultures.

India has always had a rich tradition of oral storytelling and preachers from various religious sects have made extensive use of stories in their sermons. Buddha was no exception. According to folklore, the Lord Buddha often cited examples from his past lives in order to explain the right conduct. Since he told the stories according to the demand of a give situation, he

never gave a sequence to these stories. It is quite uncertain when they were put together in a systematic form.

The oral storytelling which technique is made use of by various religious preachers to spread their beliefs. According to folklore, Buddha often recited stories from his past lives to teach his disciples the right conduct of life which came to be compiled as the *Jātakas*. Therefore, the *Jātakas* are Buddhist parables and tales of Buddha in his previous lives which included incarnations in the form of a snake, a rabbit, a swan, a fish, a quail, an ape, a woodpecker, a deer and an elephant.\(^{46}\) The extensive narrative work known as the *Jātakaṭṭhavaṇṇāṇa* from Fausböll’s edition of the work and more often as *Jātakaṭṭhakathā* in other editions is the work of an unknown Sinhalese monk.\(^{47}\) It is a commentary or compilation of the fifth century CE.

E.J. Thomas thought that the Sinhalese text itself, upon which it was based, “was probably a translation of an older Pāli work, and as several of the tales have been preserved in other parts of the Canon in a more ancient style.”\(^{48}\) *Jātaka* tales are not considered *Buddhavacana*, i.e., generally, Theravāda Buddhists do not accord them the authority of being the actual word of the Buddha, and Sri Lanka orthodoxy maintains that they are not canonical writings. However, in Burma and elsewhere they are included as part of the Pāli canon, and these tales have been among the more popular and influential segments of Buddhist literature, irrespective of their heterodoxy.

2. The Existence of Jātaka Tales

In any case it is conclusive as to the existence of a collection of Jātaka at a very early date. The text of the Jātaka book, as now received among the Southern Buddhists, consists, as will be seen from the translation, not only of the stories, but of an elaborate commentary, containing a detailed explanation of the verse or verses which occur in each of the stories. According to one tradition, the Jātaka stories composed in Pāli in India were taken to Ceylon by Mahinda about 250 BCE and the commentary translated there into Sinhalese and again translated into Pāli in fifth century CE by Buddhaghosa.\textsuperscript{49} The accuracy of this tradition has been discussed by T.W. Rhys Davids in the introduction to the first volume of his Buddhist Birth Stories.

But, A.K. Warder said that the Jātakas are the precursors to the various legendary biographies of the Buddha, which were composed at later dates.\textsuperscript{50} Although many Jātakas were written from an early period, which describe previous lives of the Buddha, very little biographical material about Gautama’s own life has been recorded.

Whatever else this may prove with regard to the way in which the ancient Canon was preserved, it shows at all events that Jātakas existed before the Vesāli Council as an integral portion of the sacred Canon, and we learn at the same time that it was possible even then to compose new chapters of that canon, and probably also to add new Jātaka stories.\textsuperscript{51}

Another tradition holds that in Ceylon the original Jātaka book comprised of the Gāthās and a commentary that contained the stories written in early Sinhalese was found. This was later translated into Pāli about 430 CE by Buddhaghosa and after that the Sinhalese original book was lost. But there might have existed as a book containing Jātaka tales in India too at least by the third and second centuries BCE. Some of the stories are of pre-Buddhist origin ranging down to the fifth Century CE. The gāthās are undoubtedly old, and they necessarily imply the previous existence of the stories, though not perhaps in the exact words in which we now possess them.

Several scholars found the Jātaka panels in sculpture in many places such as Bharhut and Sanchi. At Bharhut has opened a line of inquiry and continued by Foucher and Barua. Foucher described the Jātaka stories depicted in Torana (4 gates) reliefs at Sanchi. Barua gave an accurate identification of the Jātaka at Bharhut with the Jātaka text. Winternitz, who observed the depiction of Jātakas on the stupas at Bharhut and Sanchi, commented that the sculptors have followed the prose version and so they are of pre-Buddhist origin. The Jātaka Tales form part of the Sutta Piṭaka of the Pāli canon, whereas the Vinaya Piṭaka was particularly concerned with monastic discipline. The Sutta Piṭaka focuses not only on the teachings of the Buddha but also on the lives of the Buddha and his disciples. There is also a long introduction to the Jātaka commentaries known as the Nidānakathā that is primarily a biography of the Buddha. The Jātaka tradition appears to take on something like its present form in Sri Lanka sometime between the beginning of the Common Era and the fifth century CE.

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What we possess is the Pāli text of the *Jātaka* as it has been preserved in Ceylon. It is in this commentary alone that the text of the *Jātakas* has come down to us. This text has been edited by Fausböll. He has distinguished in his edition between three component elements, the tale, the frame, and the verbal interpretation. This text, of which the beginning was translated in 1880 by T.W Rhys Davids, is now being translated by R. Chalmers, W.R.D. Rouse et al, and the first volume of their translation has appeared in 1895 under the able editorship of E.B. Cowell.56

In the same century, Kern published *Jātakamālā* in the year 1891. Later J.S. Speryer in the year 1895 translated Āryasūra’s *Jātakamālā* (garland of birth stories) into English. He says that the Āryasūra’s *Jātakamālā* has higher pretension and is in fact a kind of kāvya style, a work of art and it was used by the Northern Buddhists, whereas the Pāli *Jātaka* is in simple prose style, followed by the Buddhists of south India. Similarly, three decades later, the Royal Asiatic Society published the translation of another great work namely *Avadānakalpalatā* in the year 1920.57

The Western scholars began to draw the attention to the form of *Jātakas* that was raised quite early in the last decades of the nineteen century. They first came into existence.58 However, the *Jātaka* which belong to different periods ranging in date from the early sixth century BCE (pre-Buddhist period) down to the fifth century CE give a comprehensive picture of the contemporary Indian society besides providing us a harmonious and a homogeneous profile of the pre-Buddhist India.59

Piṭakas are generally accepted as at least older than the Council of Vesāli and thus Jātaka legends must have been always recognised in Buddhist literature.  

3. The origin of Jātaka

The Jātaka book was originally in verse alone, to which the recite, in the oral tradition of the time, added explanation. It is thought by Buddhist to be a compilation of the highest significance for social and literary history. Although many Jātakas can be regarded as being non-Buddhist, or even pre-Buddhist, there are some which are certainly Buddhist. These show clearly that the Buddhists added material of their own to the Jātaka collection. On the whole, the best description of the Jātakas is found in Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend, which defines them as:

“a collection of gāthās arranged in 22 sections, according to the number of stanzas forming a Jātaka, the Jātakas of each section progressively containing an additional gāthā. Thus, those in the first section contain one stanza, those in the fifth, five, etc. These gāthās are embedded in a prose commentary, which consists of a story of the present explaining why Buddha is telling the tale of the past, followed by the Jātaka (the gāthās) or story of the past, a commentary of the gāthās, and an integration of the two parts. They include fables, Marchen, moral tales, maxims and legends. More than a half of the Jātaka stories are not of Buddhist origin.”

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Therefore such stories are not only pre-Buddhist in origin but are very old. Thus the Jātaka system is based on handing down tales or some legends in prose, with the conversation only being in verse, which itself are pre-Buddhist. Such tales preserve the original form of the Indian folklore.”

The commentary to these gives for each Jātaka, or birth stories, an account of the event in Gotama’s life which led to his first telling that particular story. Both text and commentary were then handed down, in the Pāli language in which they were composed, to the time of the Council of Patna (held in or about the year 250 BCE); and they were carried in following year to Ceylon by the great missionary Mahinda, the son of Asoka. The commentary was written down in Singhalese, the Āryan dialect spoken in Ceylon, and was retranslated into its present from in the Pāli language in the fifth century of our era. But the text of the Jātaka stories themselves has been throughout preserved in its original Pāli form.

It is a classification according to their form and contents. It seems that all these diverse types of Buddhist literature were already in existence when the canon was compiled in its present form. The seventh aṅga is the Jātaka (stories of the Former Births of Buddha).

The stories found in the Jātaka have been found in numerous other languages and media many of them being translations from the Pāli versions, but others are instead derived from vernacular traditions prior to the Pāli compositions. Sanskrit and Tibetan Jātaka stories tend to maintain the

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Buddhist morality of their Pāli equivalents, but re-tellings of the stories in Persian and other languages sometimes contain significant amendments to suit their respective cultures.\(^{68}\)

In the sixth century, some of the stories were translated to Persian and this translation was later retranslated to Greek, Latin and Hebrew.\(^{69}\)

According to an Italian scholar, the origin of several of stories of al-Sindbad and Arabian Nights could be traced from the Jātaka tales.\(^{70}\) Although in many instances it is possible that these stories migrated from India to the West, it is not impossible that in others Western movies were brought to India.\(^{71}\) Generally, the Jātaka stories have disseminated from India to become part of the world’s folk-literature, in numerous variations, with the Pāli recensions representing one cultural and religious notion of what the stories “ought” to be.

Several Jātaka stories can be shown to be old because they have counter-parts in Jain canonical texts, and sometimes the similarity between them is so close that one version can be used to restore the text of the other.\(^{72}\) The Buddhist or Jain orientation is very clearly marked in these stories. As the term Jātaka implies, these tales cut across generations in their continuity of themes and even characters. The rebirth motif is also dominant in the Jātaka tales and the moral tone is never left obscure.\(^{73}\) They read like


parables to teach certain truths, and are never meant for leisurely entertainment.

There are also several Jātaka stories in the *Mahāvastu* which do not have a parallel in the Pāli collection. The *Dīpavamsa* tells of the Mahāsaṃghikas making changes in the canon after their separation from the Theravādins and states that they rejected a portion of the *Jātaka*. This presumably means that the contents of the Jātaka collections of the two sects differed, doubtless because they both added to their collections after the schism.\(^{74}\)

In the seventeenth century, there are notable examples mentioned historical records and other sources of eminent exponents of the *Jātakas*, great teachers and renowned preachers. La Fontaine the great exponent of

The fable literature created his own land mark. It was the fashion in those days that generally literary men and women used to meet in their salons and its origin to the various *Jātakas* and their transformations, imitations, adaptations and other various literary.\(^{75}\) This tradition has come down to the present day. Thus it is that the temple and monastery have continued to be a powerful base of support for the propagation and popularization of the *Jātakas*.

There are several *Jātakas* scattered throughout the canonical Pāli literature as well as the Sanskrit Buddhist literature and even outside the literature of Buddhism, many of the stories of the *Jātaka* Book occur in the *Pañcatantra*, *Kathāsaritsāgara* and other Indian story books. Some stories


have parallels in the Mahābhārata and in the Rāmāyaṇa, the Purāṇas, and still others in Jaina literature. There are also a large number of Jātaka tales in the non-canonical Pāli literature, notably in the Milindapañha. Many Jātakas occur in the Mahāvastu in prose as well as in verse in mixed Sanskrit. Some of them are variants of Pāli Jātakas while others are not found in the Pāli collection.

Some Jātaka stories can be found in Jain literature, such as the story of Isisinga in Suyakadanga, which is the Nalini Jātaka. They are found in even the Mahābhārata, for example Rsisringaupakhyāna. The literature of countries such as Persia, China, Arabia, Italy, Greece, Britain and Japan have borrowed ideas and themes from the Jātaka and similar other stories.

There is a well-known reference to the Jātakas as a book of the Khuddaka Nikāya in the Cullaniddesa where a collection of 500 Jātakas is mentioned. This collection, in the opinion of a reputed scholar, appears to be earlier than the scriptural basis of the Buddhist sculptures at Bharhut and Sanchi and hence earlier than the sculptures themselves. It was certainly later than that of the suttanta Jātakas scattered throughout the first four Nikāyas.

Despite the large number of stories found in the Jātaka collection, it is clear that it by no means includes all the Jātaka stories which existed in North India in the early days of Buddhism. There are stories found elsewhere in the Pāli canon. Asvaghosa in this work draws upon the Pāli

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*Jātaka* called the *Samgamavacara* which tells the identical story though in a shorter form. The existence of this technique for overcoming desire, the instruction to “fight passion with passion”, in such an early *Jātaka* tale, suggests that it was certainly understood by, and perhaps practiced by some of the earliest followers of the tradition.\(^{79}\) Which are technically *Jātaka* stories because they purport to tell of the Buddha in an earlier birth, and conclude with an identification of the characters, and are nevertheless not found in the collection.

The *Jātaka* legends occur in the *Vinaya Pițaka*, too. For example, the *Jātaka* (No.10); *Tittira Jātaka* (No.37) are to be found in the *Chulla-Vagga* (vii.1; and vi.6, respectively). Further, the *Cariyapițaka*, a book of the *Sutta-Pițaka*, contains thirty-five *Jātakas* in verse-form. Besides, several *Jātakas* exist in the canonical texts but not included in the *Jātaka* collection. Further, the *Samantapasādikā* makes a reference to the *Jātaka Nikāya*; and the *Dīghabhāṇakas*, i.e., those who recited the *suttas* or discourses of the *Dīgha Nikāya* included the *Jātaka* in the Abhidhamma Pițaka. There are also Mahāyāna *Jātaka* stories such as *Vyāghrī*, *Dhammasoṇḍaka* and *Seta Gandha Hasti* which do not appear in Pāli at all.

An analysis of the more than 500 *Jātaka* stories of the Pāli collection as we have it shows that it contains a wide variety of different types of verse composition. Many of them seem to be un-Buddhist in origin. Some of these stories are also found in Aesop’s fables and other European literature and the problem of their inter-dependence has been much discussed. Representations

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of some of them are found in the reliefs on the Bharhut stupa, showing that they had already become popular by the second century B.C.

4. The Jātaka Commentary

In the post-canonical tradition of the Theravādins the Jātaka tradition culminated with the appearance of the Jātaka Commentary in Ceylon in the fifth century CE.\textsuperscript{80} There is no doubt that a Sinhalese commentary in all likelihood, included verses in the original Pāli and was translated or rather recast and reworked into Pāli, formed the basis of the Pāli compilation.

The Jātaka Commentary itself is a collection of 547 stories, each containing an account of the life of Gotama the Buddha during some incarnation in one of his previous existences as a Bodhisattva, an animal hero, a being destined to Enlightenment. That is the role he played before he became Buddha, the Enlightened One, The number of such “births” does not correspond to exactly 547 stories, since some of the tales occur more than once in a different setting, or in a variant version, and occasionally several stories are included in one birth.\textsuperscript{81}

Much of the material, however, is demonstrably many centuries older. The Jātaka forms the tenth book of the Khuddaka Nikāya of the Sutta Pițaka. In the Pāli Canon it also forms one of the nine “āṅgas” or divisions of the Buddha’s teachings, grouped according to the subject matter Like the Udāna (“verses of uplift, fervent utterances”) and Itivuttaka (“as it was said”) of the same canonical collection, the Jātaka is the name of an actual


work. Although the canonical book of the Jātaka contains only the verses, it is certain that from the earliest times, there must have been handed down an oral commentary, giving the stories in prose. \(^{82}\)

It is not possible to say exactly when the Jātakas in their present form came into existence, nor how many of them were among the original number. What can he definitely stated is that they must have come into being and continued to grow over a considerable time before they reached their final form. In the time of the Cullaniddesa, there appear to have been 500 Jātakas, for reference is made to pañca-Jātaka-satani. Five hundred was the number seen by Xuanzang too. One is not certain, however, if the reference made was to a round number or an exact one.

Many scholars subscribe to the view that not all the stories contained in the Jātaka collection are “Buddhist” in a somewhat restricted view of the term, or even that they emanated from a Buddhist milieu. Some of these birth-stories are patently Buddhistic and depend for their point on some custom or idea peculiar to Buddhism, but many are said to be pieces gathered from folklore, “which have floated about the world for ages as the stray waif of literature and are liable everywhere to the appropriated by any casual claimant. This is an interesting observation. It is however, worth noting that no proprietary rights have been claimed by Buddhists for these stories, apart from the claim that, by and large, they are tales with Buddhist content and flavour and that Buddhist narrators and writers have invested them with a particular structure and form. Such appropriation of stories from a common stock by Buddhist samanās in the course of their wanderings is

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therefore quite possible and is only to be expected, when one considers the historical and cultural context in which the stories originated. Equally important is it to recognize the fact that Jātaka tales have been, over the centuries, appropriated by storytellers belonging to far-flung regions to which they had migrated. They have been used by different authors to achieve their special objectives.

5. The number of Jātakas

The tenth book of the Khuddaka Nikāya of the Pāli Tipiṭaka is called Jātaka which is supposed to contain, by definition, tales of the Buddha’s former births. This canonical book of Jātaka comprises 6653 verses, constituting 547 Jātakas. As of today, there are a total of 547 extant Jātakas arranged roughly by increasing number of verses. But there are indications that the actual number of Jātakas could be 550. According to Oskar von Hinuber, only the last 50 were clear to understand without any explanation. Folklorists are interested in these explanations in the form of short stories.

The Jātakas have been grouped under twenty-two nipātas, depending on the number of verses in each Jātaka, e.g. the Jātakas in the Ekanipāta contains one verse each, those in the Bukanipāta two verses each and so on. As the nipātas proceed, the Jātakas contained therein grow more and more lengthy. But this principle of naming the nipātas, depending on the number of verses has not been adhered to uniformly. In the present editions of the Jātaka as well as in the Jātakaṭṭhakathā, there are more exceptions than consistency. As for instance, the tenth nipāta is called the Dasakanipāta, i.e.

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each of the *Jātakas* is supposed to contain ten verses only; but in fact, quite a few of them contain many more.

**IV.3.3. Framework of the *Jātakas***

In Pāli version, each *Jātaka* is preceded by a long introduction, the *Nidāna-kathā* which provides the Buddha’s previous history both before his last birth and also during his last existence until he attain the state of Buddha. Each story opens with a preface called the *paccuppanavatthu* or story of the present relates on what occasion Buddha himself told the monks, the *Jātaka* in question. Next is the *Atītavatthu* i.e., the story of the past, in which a story of one of the former births of the Buddha is related. Every story is also illustrated by one or more *gāthās* narrated by the Buddha while he was still a Bodhisattva. The language of the *gāthās* is more archaic than that of the stories.  

A typical *Jātaka* will have four distinct parts. First, Buddha observes a real-life problem. Second, Buddha tells a story about one of his previous existences. Third, the meaning of the *Jātaka* is explained and Buddha shows how the *Jātaka* sheds insight on the presenting problem. Fourth, a concluding moral is stated. In the study of parables, *Jātaka* are fascinating precisely because the original contexts of the stories have been preserved. According to C.B. Varma, the treatment of the *Jātaka* Stories may be analysed in five stages:

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1. Contextuality of the story (*Pacchuppanna-vatthu*) or the background and the occasion which necessitated the Buddha to narrate the story;

2. Narrative of the past (*Atīta-vatthu*), which depicts the narrative of the previous life of the Bodhisatta;

3. Recitation of the original *Jātaka* verse (*Gāthā*) to accentuate and impart the moral of the story;

4. Explanation of the verse (*Veyyakaraṇa*);

5. Identification of the characters of the stories at the time of the narrator (i.e., the Buddha).

Each birth-story proper, i.e. ‘the story of the past’ is always preceded by a ‘story of the present’ which usually takes the form of a quasi-introduction to the former. This linking of ‘the story of the past’ and ‘the story of the present’ is an essential part of the plan of the original work.\(^88\)

In terms of narrative structure, many *Jātakas* possess or imply a threefold structure consisting of a ‘story of the present’, explain on what occasion the Buddha told this tale; a ‘story of the past’, which is the past life story itself, and the final ‘identifications’, in which the perspective shifts back to the present, and the Buddha identifies characters in the ‘story of the past’ as the previous births of those in the ‘story of the present’ and other well-known Buddhist figures of his time. These identifications are often predictable, for the relationships the Buddha has with other people during his last life often mirror the relationships he had with them during his numerous previous lives.\(^89\)

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In respect of literary form, Winternitz recognizes five classes, which he proposes mainly for “the stories of the past” along with the canonical gāthā. He distinguishes the following:\(^{90}\)

1. tales in prose in which are included just one or two or few verses containing the moral or gist of the tale
2. ballads (a) dialogues(b) mixture of narrative and dialogue
3. long tales partly in prose partly in verse
4. strings of moral maxims on some one topic
5. regular epics or epic fragments.

In respect of content the tales are divided into the following groups:

1. fables marchen (fairy tales, animal stories)
2. anecdotes and comic tales.
3. tales of adventure and romance.
4. moral tales
5. moral maxims
6. legends

All the Jātakas are put into 22 nipatas (book). The first nipāta contains nearly 150 stories. Each story has one gāthā or a śloka. In the second nipata, there are two gāthās. From third to 13\(^{th}\) nipātas, there are 500 stories, each story having three or four gāthās. In the 9\(^{th}\) nipāta, there are 150 Jātakas. In 14\(^{th}\) nipāta, stories are found in poetry. Almost all the remaining nipātas contain more gāthās and each gāthā contains 10 to 14 stories. In 21\(^{st}\) nipāta, there are nearly 90-100 gāthās. In 22\(^{nd}\) nipāta there are 10 stories.

Each Jātaka contains hundreds of gāthās. The last Jātaka i.e., Vessantara contains 500 gāthās.\(^91\)

Each story opens with a preface called the paccuppaññavatthu or ‘story of the present’, which relates the particular circumstances in the Buddha’s life which led him to tell the birth-story and thus reveal some event in the long series of his previous existences as a bodhisattva or a being destined to attain Buddha-ship. At the end, there is always given a short summary, where the Buddha identifies the different actors in the story in their present births at the time of his discourse, it being an essential condition of the book that the Buddha possesses the same power as that which Pythagoras claimed but with a far more extensive range, since he could remember all the past events in every being’s previous existences as well as in his own.\(^92\)

Among 547 or 550 Jātaka stories, Buddha was born as Bodhisattva 83 times as Bhikshu, 58 times as a king, 43 time as tree god, 26 times as a preacher, 24 times as a minister, 24 times as a priest, 24 times as heir apparent, 23 times as a gentleman, 22 times as a scholar, 20 times as Indra, 18 times as a monkey, 13 times as a merchant, 12 times as a rich man, 12 times as a hen, 10 times as a deer, 10 times as a lion, 8 times as a goose, 6 times as a elephant, 5 times as a Garudā, 4 times as a horse, 4 times as a tree, 3 times as a potter, 3 times as an untouchable, 2 times as a fish, 2 times as an elephant rider, 2 times as a rat, 1 times as a carpenter, ironsmith, frog, hare etc. The Buddha did one or more good deeds of benevolence, renunciation, valour, wisdom, friendship and charity and as a result of these good deeds done in

\(^91\) B. Subrahmanyam, Jātakas in South Indian Art, Delhi: BKP, 2005: 21.

innumerable lives in the past, he obtained Enlightenment and freedom from the cycle of *Samsāra*.

Every story is also illustrated by one or more *gāthās* which are uttered by the Buddha while still a Bodhisattva and so playing his part in the narrative; but sometimes the verses are put into his mouth as the Buddha, when they are called *abhisambuddha-gāthā*.

**IV.3.4. The value and influence of *Jātaka***

The Seventh Dalai Lama wrote, “A poem to transform the mind written with references to a few drops from the ocean of tales on how Buddha practiced the six perfection in his previous lives.”

Here he indicates that his work refers to the *Jātaka* tales, the stories of the previous lives of the Buddha, which illustrate how he cultivated the six perfections while a bodhisattva in training.

And the twelfth century Kadampa masters had considered the Rosary of *Jātaka* Stories by the Indian master Āryasūra to be one of the six essential texts to be studies by all Kadampa monks, and in 1410 Lama Tsongkhapa instituted the tradition of having a senior monk read from this text to the crowd at the full moon ceremony of the Monlam Chenmo Festival.

The primary aim of the *Jātakas* is to instruct, to teach the people the value of a good life. They serve as instruments of preaching the doctrine. In addition to this didactic purpose, there is no doubt that these stories are meant

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to amuse and entertain. Each Jātaka is introduced by a simple prose sentence of ethical and religious purport. Every Jātaka tale conveys a message or moral to the mankind at large, in multifarious ways. The message conveyed by Buddha in these tales has universal application. Buddha while narrating these Jātaka stories brought out the realities and values of human life.

All ancient civilizations had taken upon them the responsibility of maintaining moral values in society. Though they had different value systems, yet a common factory in those times was propagating moral teachings through storytelling.

In Buddhist Communities too, Jātaka tales were a major source for inculcating in people a deep sense of moral values. Lack of literacy in those days necessitated the appointment of Jātaka storytellers known as Jātakabhāṇakas. The Jātakabhāṇakas would travel far and wide to propagate the message of kindness, compassion, generosity, non-violence, self-sacrifice, charity, refrain from greed etc. through these stories. The Buddha himself used Jātakas stories to explain concepts like karma and rebirth and to emphasize the importance of certain moral values.

The function of the stories is to teach moral lessons by allegory, but they are also important as illustrating the position that animals occupy side by side with men in the Buddhist world-view. By and large the Jātakas do not exalt animals unduly, for every tale of animal gratitude or affection can be balanced by another showing less worthy traits which animals and men have in common. There is at least one, however, which satirizes a peculiarly

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human characteristic, hypocrisy. If the story were not intended to be satirical it would be an injustice to wolves. Whatever other vices it may have, no animal degrades itself with sham piety, either to impress its fellows or to make spiritual capital out of an involuntary deprivation.

The stories seek to inculcate good manners, good sense and good behavior, all of which usually reap an appropriate reward owing to the working of karma by which the result of a volitional act, of body, speech or thought, is suited to the nature of that act. However, Jātaka tales are still listened to today: on special occasions a hsayadaw or other member of the samgha may tell the congregation a tale suitably chosen and tailored to the circumstances, and some parents, grandparents and teachers also tell well-loved tales, in simplified form, to youngsters.99

The stories were told around some incident then happening, and it is in their relationship with that incident that we find their true lesson. At the close of the story the Buddha always identified the birth so that lines of action and character stand out clearly from the past to the present, sometimes the same, sometimes changed for the better.

The stories as preserved to us are for the most part Indian rather than Buddhist. The ethics they inculcate or suggest are milk for babes; very simple in character and referring almost exclusively to matters common to all schools of thought in India, and indeed elsewhere. Kindnesses, purity, honesty, generosity, worldly wisdom, perseverance, are the usual virtues praised; the higher ethics of the Path are scarcely mentioned.100

*Jātaka* Stories are the most ancient moral folklores that are a part of Buddhist Literature and are thought to be in existence since around the third century BCE. These are fables which end up with “Morals” and were used by Buddhist Kings to spread morality among the people through storytelling. Ancient *Jātaka* Stories were then carried by messengers of various cultures to their own and having given them a flavour of their own, the cultural messengers named them accordingly as per the needs of their cultures. An enormous variety of actual, mythical, magical, and hybrid animals are to be found in Tibetan art.¹⁰¹

In all the *Jātakas*, the bodhisattva is projected as a hero, a secondary character, a spectator, an animal, a bird etc. These previous Birth Stories were told by the Buddha and narrated by his disciples on various occasions to their followers in support of the Buddhist doctrine, which conveyed a message that the good actions obviously yield a higher and better position in the next birth, while bad actions entail a lower position, as a consequence of which the attainment of Nirvāṇa is postponed or differed.¹⁰²

Consequently, with *Jātaka* stories as the root, it gave birth to fables in other parts of the world. The stories abound in information about life and customs of ancient India, and characters and situations that are found everywhere even today. Both literature and history, the *Jātaka* is a treasure house of Indian heritage.¹⁰³ Through the centuries these stories have been much more than fairy tales. They were, and are, taken very seriously for their moral and spiritual teachings. Like all great myths, the stories are as

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much about us as they are about the Buddha. The *Jātaka* stories, over millennia, have been seminal to the development of many civilisations, the cultivation of moral conduct and good behaviour, the growth of a rich and varied literature in diverse parts of the world and the inspiration for paintings, sculpture and architecture of enduring aesthetic value. The Buddha himself used *Jātaka* stories to explain concepts like karma and rebirth and to emphasize the importance of moral values.¹⁰⁴

For developing moral conduct and good behaviour, there are few more instructive foundation than *Jātaka* stories. All *Jātaka* stories hold out advice on how to correct our ways. They played and continued to play in some societies an enormous role in the cultivation of peace and generosity. When Buddhist monks taught children in vihāras, *Jātaka* stories took a prominent place in primary education. Young *sāmaṇeras* (novice monks) were required to read and preach effectively. In India these and similar other stories were a principal instrument in the socialization of children, discouraging them from selfishness and laying foundations for family had community solidarity. *Jātaka* stories speak eloquently of those human values, which contribute, to harmony, pleasure and progress.

The immensely popular *Jātaka* Tales or “Birth-stories” are an important part of Buddhist literature. The *Jātaka* stories have contributed many civilizations, moral conduct and good behaviour, a rich and varied literature, and inspired painting, sculpture and architecture of great value.

There are depths of meaning in the enjoyable Buddhist *Jātaka* Tales. In India these and similar other stories helped in socializing children, discouraging them from selfishness. *Jātaka* stories hold out advice on how to correct our ways. They were thought up to impart values of sound morality, noble ways of living, honesty, kindness to animals, respect for elders, being grateful, ill of associating with bad people, generosity, and inculcate ideas, faith, and insights relating to wider aspects of life.

The *Jātakas* were very popular in Asia, especially in the Buddhist countries, and had a marked influence on the development of the narrative literature of many peoples. In some countries the longer *Jātaka* tales are still performed in dance, theatre, and recitation. Sri Lanka in particular has been nourished by *Jātaka* stories. Even later works of drama are based on *Jātaka* stories.\(^{105}\)

In all Buddhist countries the *Jātaka* tales were the major source for developing the character of the people. They were used widely in preaching by monks and lay preachers. They usually used these stories in their sermons. Even Mahinda, who introduced Dharma into Sri Lanka, used these stories to illustrate the truth of the teachings.\(^{106}\) Some were even used by the Buddha in his teachings, and from him his followers learned them and passed them into popular use in society. Even earlier, the same types of stories were present in Vedic literature.\(^{107}\) Many of the stories probably predate the Lord Buddha. Many of the tales come from the Pāli scripts and some 550 stories at least are known to be in existence. Like the *Pañcatantra*,

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Aesop’s fables, and Grimm’s fairytales. The Jātaka Tales have defined a moral code through easy-to-interpret verses. Similar tales have also been found in Tibet, in China, the Middle East and through Europe.\textsuperscript{108}

According to Felix Adler, there are other fables, notably the so-called Jātaka tales, which deserve attention. The Jātaka tales contain deep truths, and are calculated to impress lessons of great moral beauty.\textsuperscript{109} Quaint humor and gentle earnestness distinguish these legends and they teach many wholesome lessons among them the duty of kindness to animals.\textsuperscript{110}

The general function of the Jātakas, then, is to illustrate how the bodhisattva, in life after life, cultivated various virtues on the bodhisattva path that ultimately contributed to his attainment of Buddhahood. Accordingly, most Jātaka portray the bodhisattva as an exemplary figure, highlighting such features as his wisdom, compassion, and ascetic detachment. Many Jātakas, in fact, are explicitly intended to illustrate the bodhisattva’s cultivation of one of the six or ten perfections needed for the attainment of Buddhahood.\textsuperscript{111}

The Jātaka genre was thus used to assimilate an enormous variety of traditional Indian folklore into the Buddhist fold including some tales whose moral lessons were not especially true of the massive Pāli Jātaka collection, much of whose contents are likely non-Buddhist in origin, including many traditional animal fables, folktale, and fairy tales.

\textsuperscript{111} Reiko Ohnuma, \textit{Bodily Self-Sacrifice in Indian Buddhist Literature}, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2009: 36.
This section dealing with the literary significance of the Jātakas will be concerned, as its title indicates, primarily with a discussion of the value of the stories as pieces of literature.

It is divided broadly into 4 sub-sections as follows:\(^{112}\)

1. The intellectual milieu in which the stories originated and flourished; this will include some general remarks on their content and form, followed by a brief description of the arrangement of the stories
2. Individual Jātakas in the Pāli Canon;
3. The Longer Jātakas and.
4. Assessment of the stories as pieces of literary merit.

Several scholars have studied the Jātaka literature from various angles. Richard Fick has studied these Jātakas from the social point of view, keeping always in view, the caste and the priest. Roy Chaudhary has studies these stories to draw the political history of ancient India. Rhys Davids and N.S. Subba Rao have studies and drawn the economic conditions that prevailed during the early centuries of Christian era. Beni Prasad in his work, The State in Ancient India, has exhaustively dealt with the administrative aspects. B.C. Sen in his work, Studies in Jātakas, has drawn political and administrative matters. Ratilal N. Mehta in his work, Pre-Buddhist India, studied the Jātakas from several aspects such as political, administrative, economic, social and geographical survey of ancient India.\(^{113}\)

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From the foregoing analysis of the literary significance of the Jātakas, it would have become clear that the stories achieve a high degree of literary merit. The generality of the tales contained in the large Pāli collection possess poetic features of structure, content, form, arrangement and language which would match away compilation of stories in any language or literature. The orderly structure of the stories may sometimes appear to be somewhat stilted and artificial, but it still is quite characteristic of the Pāli Collection. The structure and form of such tales helps one to understand that particular feature marks it out from other similar collections. The smaller Sanskrit collection, the Garland of Birth Stories mentioned above, appeals to the reader for quite other reasons.

Apart from their literary value, this fact alone makes the Jātaka collection of great interest; beside which, this is the “most reliable, the most complete, and the most ancient collection of folk-lore now extant in any literature in the world.114 This helps to establish the close connection between the Jātaka Tales and the folk-lore of ancient India. E.B. Cowell stresses this link in his preface to the UNESCO translation of the Jātaka Tales: “The Jātakas themselves are of course interesting as specimens of Buddhist literature; but their foremost interest to us consists in their relation to folk-lore and the light which they often throw on those popular stories which illustrate so vividly the ideas and superstitions of the early times of civilization. In this respect they possess a special value, as, although much of their matter is peculiar to Buddhism, they contain embedded with it an

unrivalled collection of folk-lore. They are also full of interest as giving a vivid picture of the social life and customs of ancient India.”

The literary value of the Jātaka was in any case seen as minimal, thanks to the large amount of repetition and omission, as well as the sometimes crude content. In any case they are stories, and therefore ‘low culture’, thus the only other interest in them was as folklore, albeit as “the most reliable, the most complete, and the most ancient collection of folklore now extant in any literature in the world.” Indeed, for T.W. Rhys Davids, the fact that Jātakas are ancient folklore is what gives them real historical value, since they provide insight into more ‘primitive’ cultures, and form ‘a priceless record of the childhood of our race’.

It has been remarked earlier that these stories originated, developed and spread in lands and among peoples where a belief in the notion of recurrent lives (punabbhava) was prevalent. They show that such a view of life, a belief that all beings had already had previous lives and would have them in the future as well, was an integral part of the psychological equipment of both narrators and hearers. They illustrate poignantly the operation of karma, the law of moral action, by demonstrating how the Bodhisatta shaped his destiny through unending efforts on behalf of, and for: his welfare of, all beings. In the animated world of these stories, the relationship between action and its result can be clearly seen, increasing our awareness of how the actions of sentient beings shape their experience. Reflection on the Jātakas offers an opportunity to observe the workings of

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karma in everyday life and to appreciate more fully the moral choices open to individuals and society in the modern world.

This section is concerned with discussing briefly:118

1. The influence of the Piṭakas in the life of the people;
2. Their sociological value under which reference will be made to the role of the story collection as an instrument for the propagation of the faith in addition to surviving as a vehicle of Buddhist propaganda. The stories have to be viewed and appreciated as they doubtless were in the days when they were first recounted, against the background of the notions of kamma i.e. the view that every action produces a reaction, a resultant effect, and that of punabbhava (rebirth). Both in the eyes of the narrators as well as the hearers, the Bodhisatta is an ideal being who, in all his previous existences, has demonstrated through precept and practice, one or more of the great virtues or Perfections (pārami);
3. A reference to some popular stories as standard texts for the Bodhisatta ideal;
4. The story collection as the common property of all Buddhist countries. In that sense, the stories are the chief witnesses of popular Buddhism; and
5. The role of the temple in the writing, transmission, preservation and propagation.

This section is devoted mainly to supplementary information from the Buddhist Jātakas. Therefore, the Jātakas may be taken as influenced by conditions during the Sātavahana period, and their historical detail infiltrated

by such tradition as was then extant. Social conditions had changed considerably in some cases from the time of the Buddha.\textsuperscript{119}

Most of the moral narratives, sayings and pious legends are the common property of Indian didactic poetry, it has been claimed and are only partly of Buddhist origin. It has also been stated that there is nothing specifically Buddhistic in the short anecdotes, humorous tales and jokes that frequently occur in the \textit{Jātakas}. They give also particulars of the life of people of all classes, about some of whom there is scarcely any other information in Indian literature. The stories appeal to all strata of the population. They are understandable not only to the wise but even to the simple-minded. Only the all-too-clever will smile at them indulgently, they have not lost their human appeal and continue to exert a deep influence on the life of peoples. In Thai Land, the \textit{Jātakas} were already popular during the Sukhothai period, and remain an essential feature of Thai literature and art today.\textsuperscript{120}

It need hardly be mentioned that this influence is to be felt mostly in Buddhist lands like Sri Lanka, Burma, Siam and Cambodia where crowds of people would listen with rapt attention for hours when bhikkhus, during full-moon nights and on other religious occasions, recite the stories of the Buddha’s former lives. It has been reported that even in Tibet, tears in the eyes of sturdy caravan men have been seen, when sitting around the camp fire, listening to tales of the Bodhisatta’s suffering and sacrifices. For ordinary people, the \textit{Jātakas} are not merely literature or folklore, but something that happens in their very presence and profoundly affects their

\textsuperscript{120} Arne Kislenko, \textit{Culture and Customs of Thailand}, USA: Greenwood Press, 2004: 44.
own life, something that moves them to the core of their being, because it is present reality to them.

**Purpose of the Jātakas:** The primary aim of the Jātakas is to instruct, to teach the people the value of a good life. They serve as instruments of preaching the doctrine. In addition to this didactic purpose, there is no doubt that these stories are meant to amuse and entertain. Many are in the form of animal fables that teach something about morality, not unlike Aesop’s fables. Many of the stories are charming and light-hearted, and some of these have been published in sweetly illustrated children’s books.¹²¹

The Jātaka tales are a veritable of wisdom. They have had a profound influence over mankind since time immemorial and find reflection not just in Indian literature, but the literature of the whole world. The advent of the animal related stories as a significant genre in French literature during the middle ages was apparently inspired by the Jātakas.¹²²

Another aspect of the influence of the Jātakas on the broad masses of the people, which included a relatively small group of learners and a much larger group of hearers, concerns the problem of the transmission of texts. Several elements were involved in this process of transmission. The first group referred to above was drawn from the monastic community consisting of trainee monks, attached to individual temples, while the latter comprised the much larger community of lay persons, drawn from all walks of life. Then there was the preacher or reciter of the text, who was usually an erudite

monk, and of course the book or the written text. The overall purpose of the Pāli Jātakas is to show how the Buddha lived many lives with the goal of realizing enlightenment. All beings are potential Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Each is able to feel compassion for the sufferings of others and act selflessly to ease the pain of all beings. The Jātakas also remind us that everything is food for something else, part of an all-encompassing food chain which does not end with humans.

As the common property of all Buddhist countries, the Jātakas, as mentioned earlier, have spread well beyond the confines of the Indian sub-continent, into other parts of Asia, through Tibet, Mongolia, and Central Asia to China, Korea and Japan in the Far East. They have been the chief vehicle of Buddhist propaganda, and the chief witnesses of popular Buddhism. The Buddhist texts belong to a later date, are relatively younger than the Indian texts, and therefore carry the doctrinal imprint of a time, far separated from the original texts, which themselves were already separated by some four hundred years at least of oral tradition, from the time of the Buddha. The Tibetan and Chinese texts of the Jātaka stories, for example, reflect the dynamic unfolding of Buddhist stories, which necessarily underwent a process of modification and elaboration, in the course of transmission. By reading these stories, children and adults can develop their knowledge and learn how to face the difficult experiences of modern life. They can easily develop human values and good qualities like patience, forbearance, tolerance and the four sublime states of mind loving kindness,

compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. The major purpose of these stories is to develop the moral and ethical values of the readers. Without them, people cannot be peaceful and happy in their hearts and minds. And the reader will find that these values are very different from those of the wider, violently acquisitive, ego-based society.

IV.3.5. Jātaka Art

The Jātakas were originally amongst the earliest Buddhist literature, with metrical analysis methods dating their average contents to around the fourth century BCE. The stories became a favourite subject with artists in ancient India, Ceylon, Central Asia, China, Bhutan and Nepal and especially in Tibet. These stories exercised a great moral influence on the people, establishing a firm conviction that merit would result from performing virtuous acts of courage, liberality, fortitude, nobleness and self-sacrifice. Jātaka stories adorn many ancient India monuments including Bharhut and Sanchi during second and first century BCE, in Amaravati and Goli during second and third century CE, and also in the caves of Ajanta from second century BCE to fifth century CE and elsewhere during the later periods.

The most important among these sculptures of Bharhut are the bas-reliefs representing Jātakas (episodes relating to the past births of the Buddha), and the incidents of the life of the Buddha. In the Jātakas, the bodhisattva, whether man or animal, always appear as a benevolent leader devoted to the welfare of his fellow creatures.


The sculptured representations of scenes from the Jātakas on the stone railings around the stupas of Bharhut and Sanchi are some of the earliest examples of monumental art. Those specimens bear witness to the existence and popularity of the tales as early as the third and second centuries BCE though, of course, in a pre-dominantly non-literary form. The Bharhut stupa has preserved representations of a whole series of Jātakas.

After the decline of the Mauryan Empire, the Śuṅgas succeeded to power in circa 185 BCE. They ruled the central and eastern parts of Northern India. Their native style, distinguished by its simplicity and folk appeal is best represented in monolithic free standing sculptures of Yakshas and Yakshis, discovered from Gwalior and Mathura; and the fragments of the beautifully carved gate and railings of the Buddhist stupa at Bharhut, now preserved in the Indian Museum, Calcutta.128 The Narrative art of Bharhut, depicting Jātakas of Buddha’s previous birth in sculptures, the decorative art of Sanchi and the Jain Stupa of Mathura belong to the same tradition. They all have an echo of wood construction and the style of the sculptures seems related to carving in wood or ivory, basically the exploitation and elaboration of a flat surface, governed by the law of formality as distinct from ‘perspective’ presentation. Whether it is the representation of Buddha by his lotus feet, and empty throne, a pair of fly whisks or the triratna symbol, or the nativity of Maya Devi by the tow elephants elegantly giving an abhiśeka or bath to the new born, pouring water from the kalaśa or jars, the language employed by the artist is that of symbols.

There are several interesting *Jātaka* stories, and Bharhut forms a treasure house of fables, visually represented.\(^{129}\) Nonetheless, the popularity of the *Jātaka* stories in India was no less consequential, as the *Jātaka* scenes have been the favourite themes in the sculptured carvings on the railings in the relic shrines of Sanchi, Amaravati and Bharhut, Nagarjunakonda and Goli. Some of which may well be dated back to the third century B.C. The *Jātaka* stories noticed on the *toranās* and railings of the stupa at Bharhut in central India, first by Cunningham in 1873 represent the early indigenous Art of the Sub-continent. The copingstone, pillars and circular medallions of the railing, exhibit a variety of *Jātaka* stories. Sixty four *Jātakas* are identified and studied by various scholars, leaving many, to be identified.\(^{130}\)

The popularity of the *Jātakas* can be occupied an important place due to its depictions of the *Jātaka*. *Jātakas* have also been gloriously depicted at the shrines at Sanchi and Amravati. Other places with prominent representations of *Jātakas* are Goli in Andhra Pradesh, Nalanda and Mathura.

**Sculptures:** The earliest historical sculpture in India is of the Mauryan age in the fourth-third centuries BCE. It is a bold and massive style marked by a certain realism freely employing foreign elements from Achaemenid Persia. The great Buddhist Emperor Asoka caused the erection of monolithic pillars of sandstone, 30 to 40 feet high, crowned by animal figures like the bull, lion and elephant, and had then inscribed with the Buddhist concepts of morality, humanity and piety, which he wished his people to follow. Famous Aśokan pillars are from Lauriya Nandangarh in


The railings and the gateways of the stupa at Bharhut were profusely decorated with bas-reliefs and figure sculptures for the purpose of beautifying the monument and instilling religious feelings in the minds of the Buddhist devotees. The majority of the reliefs are purely decorative. The full medallions are often decorated with a full blown lotus covering the whole space or with outer rings having the middle space covered with human heads, wringed limbs, elephants, makara, peacocks, honey-suckle etc.

There is a variety of sculptures of a miscellaneous nature. The ubiquitous animals are lion, bull, elephant, and horse, while numerous other fauna are represented especially in the Jātaka reliefs.

Besides literature, painting, sculpture and architecture in many parts of the world carried the message of Jātaka stories. This practice is still carried on today in Buddhist viharas in Sri Lanka, Myanmar (Burma), Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Viet Nam. According to Chinese pilgrimage, Faxian, who visited Sri Lanka in the fifth century CE recorded that festival times the city of Anuradhapura was festooned with paintings from Jātaka stories. This practice continues today in major cities in Sri Lanka during Buddhist days of celebration. Jātaka stories are well depicted in Amarāvatī, Nālanda, Ajanta, Ellora, Bharut, Nagarjunikonda, Borobudur and Angkor Vat. The late historian Mackensey in Buddhism in pre-Christian Britain (1928) demonstrated that there were artistic works based on Jātaka stories in pre-Christian Britain.

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The *Jātaka* are not mere illustrations of some past episodes to be taken as incidental, but as part of a thoughtful programme of conveying some of the basic, meaningful, humanly practicable religious precepts in which the artist have proved equally efficient as the verbal or literal narrator. The artisan first followed the tradition of oral narration and next he concentrated on visual presentation whereby stories are communicated to an audience in direct terms through two or three dimension figurative sculptures and paintings.\(^{134}\) The *Jātaka* stories have also been illustrated frequently in sculpture and painting through the Buddhist world.\(^{135}\)

The *Jātaka* stories occur in canonical *Piṭakas* such as *CullaVagga, Sutta Piṭaka, CariyaPikata, Vinaya Piṭakas* and other Buddhist texts. The *Sutra* and *Vinaya Piṭakas* are generally accepted as at least older than the council of Vaiśāli. And as such the *Jātaka* legends must have always been recognized as a part and parcel of the Buddhist literate. This is also confirmed by the occurrence of the *Jātaka* scenes on the railings of the stupas at Bhārhut, Sāñchi and Amarāvatī. Of them, the *stūpa* at Bharhut had the maximum number of *Jātaka* depicted on the railings and gateways. Thus they were considered as part of the sacred history of the religion.\(^{136}\)

A close study of the various *Jātakas* portrayed on the drum and dome panels of the stupas in India clearly suggests that each dynasty and ruler, whole selecting the *Jātakas*, might have exercised certain options base on two distinct ideological aspects viz., the moral or Dharma, which the *Jātaka* contained and secondly the acceptance of the particular *Jātaka* by the people at large in the society. For example, the Śuṅgas of North

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India chose the *Jātaka* in which the bodhisattva was born as an animal and the Kuśāṇas and Gandharas selected the *Jātaka* in which the bodhisattva was born a human being, whereas the kings of South India preferred the *Jātakas* in which the bodhisattva was born a wise minster or king, rather than animal forms.¹³⁷


At Ajanta the old practice of labeling the *Jātaka* was stopped as the paintings revealed the subject with clarity, save when the subject was uncommon as in the Kṣantivāda and Sibi *Jātaka*, where, for easy identification, the names of Kṣantivāda and Sibirāja are mentioned below their figures. The paintings, therefore, assume great interest giving a vivid picture of the social life and customs of ancient India.¹³⁹

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Bharhut artists equally excel in the carving of decorative patterns which show a remarkable variety of flora and fauna had been utilized to produce a profusion of motifs. The medallions having lotus patterns containing human busts, animals, birds etc., and the coping with the meandering creeper with their spaces filled with numerous and varied sculptures amply demonstrate the high quality attained by the artists in everything decorative. Temples in Sri Lanka afford abundant examples. Such sculptures and paintings have, in many cases, been executed by rural craftsmen and painters, under the inspiration and guidance of bhikkhus. There are notable instances where bhikkhus themselves have played the role of artists.\textsuperscript{140} Other art forms like architecture and painting, it would seem, have played no less significant part in the process of transmission. These stories have been represented in the construction of buildings too, especially in religious edifices.

\textbf{IV.3.6. The Jātaka in brief}

The early history of the Jātaka genre is difficult to trace, though we can see from the division of scriptures, the bhā/FL71aka traditions, and the inscriptions at Bharhut, that Jātaka is considered to be a distinct genre from at least a few centuries after the time of the Buddha. In addition, the idea of telling stories of past births is conceptually linked to the story of the Buddha’s awakening, and stories that demonstrate his abilities to recall past lives are found in both sutta and vinaya materials. However, there is no evidence at this stage that the genre had any relation to the path of the Bodhisatta, indeed a tendency to demonstrate the great abilities of the Buddha, or perhaps just a desire to tell good stories, is more prominent. The emergence of a defined Jātaka collection seems to have

been a gradual process, perhaps linked to the oral preservation of stories and the continued use of such stories in sermons. At some point this random assortment of Jātakas, or rather the verses relating to them, was collected together into one text.¹⁴¹

In support of his theory, Oldenberg cites as an example Jātaka No. 212 (Ucchithabhatta Jātaka). He adduces the following arguments to strengthen his claim.¹⁴²

1. The verses taken alone are to a large extent, meaningless, the prose introduced makes them clear, “that the verses were intended to complete just that context indicated by the prose is self-evident.” Sometimes the story is entirely in prose (as in certain instances outside the Pāli Jātaka). Sometimes it is recorded entirely in verse (e.g. Cariyapiṭaka), and sometimes first in prose entirely and then in purely metrical form.

2. The type of mixed prose and verse narrative which is almost the only prevailing one, is the oldest or one of the oldest forms.

3. But if prose additions, like those handed down in the Jātakarthavannana (No. 212 above) belong necessarily, with a few exceptions, to the verses of our Pāli Jātakas, then we must also add that this form of prose cannot be the original one.

4. …..in prose especially in the minor decorative details etc., yet at times in those also of greater importance traces of a more recent authorship than the verse are evident.

5. A very large portion of these verses… by its contents proves to have been composed just for the context or for one more or less similar - in which we find the corresponding verses.

6. The opening words of the first quotation *apannaka* become the title for the whole *Jātaka*.

7. The verses constitute an essential element in the form wielded by the compilers of these stories. These verses are not given to the listener as quotations, as for instance, in the *Pañcatantra*, where passages so often hear the stamps of having been taken from a thesaurus of popular philosophy. The prose-poetic narrative of Jātaka151 appears here in another prose-poetic version, the verses in the one corresponding almost literally to the verses in the other.

8. The prose-and-verse form which the *Jātaka* collection hears for the most part, was already in existence and popular, at the time when the Nikāyas and the great Vinaya texts originated that, for instance, the Mallakantha *Jātaka* (pp. 253) appears in the *Vinaya* (Vol.III, p. 145 ff.) with exactly the same three verses as in the *Jātaka* collection, and also with a prose framework as in the latter, only with archaic prose in place of conventional prose.

9. That the prose-and-verse *Jātaka* form was firmly rooted in the literary consciousness of India, may be seen by the fact that the form decisively asserts itself in the northern Buddhist Sanskrit literature too, and that at a time when purely metrical *Jātakas* were

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143 This was contrary to the view expressed by R. O. Franke and certain other scholars who saw the Jātaka verses as borrowings from external sources. See Franke: “Jātak Mahabharata Paralleler” WZKM. Xx, 317ff; Charpentier, ZDMG, xii, 745. Jat. 584 appears in M.BL. II. 41; Jat. 151 in M.BL.III, 194; Hertel, J.m ZDMG, xiv.1910, 58ff, and WZKM, xxiv, 1910, 121ff.

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actually to be found in it, yet co-existing quite distinctly beside them.\textsuperscript{144}

These last comments take us through almost the entire gamut of \textit{Jātaka} stories from their early beginnings to the period of the commentarial collection. The view of the original form of the \textit{Jātakas} put forward here agrees with that of an Indian scholar who says “a \textit{Jātaka} originally consisted of a verse or verses embodying in a concise form a part episode generally with a moral understood with the help of a prose narration, which for the most part remained implicit rather than explicit...”\textsuperscript{145}

A \textit{Jātaka}, in brief, is a story in which one of the characters-usually the hero is identified as a previous birth of the historical Buddha, generally appearing in the form of a man, a deity, or one of the higher animals as a female of any kind. Such stories exist within all kinds of Buddhist texts, both canonical and non-canonical including sutra, vinaya, abhidharma, śāstra, and commentaries, as well as individual \textit{Jātaka} texts and \textit{Jātaka} collections. The \textit{Jātaka} as a genre appears to be very old, for in the ancient system enumerating nine ‘limbs’ (\textit{aṅga}) of the Buddha’s teaching mentioned throughout the Pāli Nikāyas, \textit{Jātaka} constituted the seventh ‘limbs’. Since this is an ancient classification that predates the texts in which it now appears, \textit{Jātaka} as an \textit{aṅga} refers not to specific extant texts, but rather to a particular genre of composition and category of buddhavacana. The great age of the \textit{Jātaka} genre is also suggested by the fact that depictions of \textit{Jātaka} stories

\textsuperscript{144} Oldenberg notes here (Von Oldenburg, JRAS, 1893, 302; Pischel “Die lid Literatur” in Kultur der Gegenwart. T.I.Abte, vii, 188 “that the different versions of the Jātakas generally agree in the verses, but are as a rule very different in the prose. This also testifies that the verses are at the base of the whole, (notice also the similarity in the Jātaka verses and the difference in the Jātaka prose, in this Jaina parallels, in the case which Charpentier discusses, ZDMG, lxii, 728.

\textsuperscript{145} Gokuldas De, \textit{Significance and Importance of Jātakas: With Special Reference to Bharhut}, Calcutta University, 1951: 26 – 45.
appear in Indian Buddhist art at Bharhut and Sanci as early as the second century BCE."^{146}

The most interesting and valuable of the remains at Ajanta are the series of frescoes in the caves. These generally represent passages from the legendary history of Buddha, and from the Jātakas, or stories of the Buddha’s former births, the visit of Asita to the infant Buddha, his temptation by Māra and his forces, legends of the Nāgas, or serpent race, hunting scenes, battle pieces, the carrying of the relics to Sri Lanka, and other incidents in the Buddhist legend. Many of the frescoes represent incidents taken from the Jātakas, of which some twelve have been identified by S.F. Oldenburg.\textsuperscript{147} Of these, perhaps the most important are the Ummadanti Jātaka of King Sibi or Sivi and the Chaddanta Jātaka, or of the six tusked elephant.\textsuperscript{148}

The Jātaka tales are an ancient collection of some 550 stories about the past lives of the Buddha, founder of the Buddhist religion. Each Jātaka has four parts. It opens with a preface that explains the event in the Buddha’s life that led him to tell the particular birth story. Next comes the story itself. At the end there is a short summary, in which the Buddha explains which character he represents in the tale, along with the present day identities of all characters (who have also been reborn again and again). There is also a short verse illustrating the moral of the story. Some of the Jātakas were probably told by the Buddha himself, while others were developed later by his

\textsuperscript{147} Journal American Oriental Society, xvii, 183f; JRAS, 1896: 324.
followers. The tales were collected and written down several centuries after the death of the Buddha, traditionally dated at 483 BCE.\textsuperscript{149}

To sum up:\textsuperscript{150}

1. The canonical \textit{Book of the Jātakas} contains only the verses. It was composed in North India, in the so-called ‘Middle Country’, before the time of Asoka. It is still unpublished.

2. It is absolutely certain that, with these verses, there must have been handed down, from the first, an oral commentary giving the stories in prose; for the verses without the stories are unintelligible.

3. Bas-reliefs of the third century BCE have been found illustrating a number of these prose stories. One of these bas-reliefs gives also half of a verse.

4. There are Jātaka stories in those canonical books that are older than the Jātaka Book.

5. These oldest extant Jātakas are similes, parables, or legends. They usually give us neither framework nor verses. In them the Buddha, in his previous birth, is never identified with an animal, or even with an ordinary man. He is identified only with some famous sage of bygone times.

6. Our present edition is not an edition of the text, but of the commentary. It was written probably in the fifth century CE in Ceylon by an author whose name is not known.

7. This commentary, which contains all the verses, contains also the prose stories in which they occur. To each such story it further gives


a framework of introductory episode (stating when and where and on what occasion the story is supposed to have been spoken by the Buddha); and of final identification (of the characters in each story with the Buddha and his contemporaries in a previous birth).

8. This commentary is a translation into Pāli of the commentary as handed down in Sri Lanka. That earlier commentary, now lost, was in the Singhalese language throughout, except as regards the verses, which were in Pāli.

9. The Pāli commentary, as we now have it, has in the stories preserved, for the most part, the tradition handed down from the third century BCE. But in one or two instances variations have already been discovered.

10. As regards the allusions to political and social conditions, they refer, for the most part, to the state of things that existed in North India in and before the Buddha’s time.

11. When the original Jātaka was being gradually formed most of the stories were taken bodily over from the existing folklore of North India.

12. Some progress has already been made in determining the relative age, at that time, of the stories. Those in the sixth and last volumes are both the longest and latest. Some of these were already selected for illustration on the bas-reliefs of the third century BCE.

13. All the Jātakas have verses attached to them. In a few instances these verses are in the framework, not in the stories themselves. Such stories, without the verses, have probably preserved the original form of the Indian folklore.
14. In a few instances, the verses, though in the stories, are in them only as a sort of chorus, and do not form part of the narrative. In these instances, also, a similar conclusion may be drawn.

15. The whole collection forms the most reliable, the most complete, and the most ancient collection of folklore now extant in any literature in the world.