CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND DESCRIPTION OF THE SOURCES
A. Introductory remarks on the problem of the self in Buddhism

Some of the metaphysical issues raised by Buddhism are of abiding significance to a student of the history of Indian philosophy. These are — the Buddhist analysis of causation, the nature of the self and the ultimate goal of life — Nirvāṇa. In particular, to a student of Buddhist thought these questions come up again and again, and are in essence interlinked to one another. In this dissertation though all these problems cannot be discussed comprehensively because of its narrow scope, still in the exposition of the idea of the self in early Buddhism these basic questions of this philosophy would be referred to again and again. However, in the entire history of philosophy both in the East and the West the problem of the nature of the self has been a matter of great interest and speculation.

It is a central problem of the Upaniṣads. The dictum 'Ātmānam viddhi' draws our attention to the realisation of one's own self as the major aim of philosophical speculation. But even if one agrees about this aim, it raises many disputes and controversies. A.C. Mukerji, while considering the problem of the nature of the self, remarks:
"... though it has rightly occupied a most prominent place in the vast array of problems that are generally recognised as the philosophical problems par excellence, yet, like every other problem, it has come to manifest in the history of thought an enormous vitality and stands to this day as one of the most slippery problems of philosophy."¹

In the history of Indian philosophy too, it may be obvious to most of the students that the nature of the self is a fundamental problem for philosophical speculations, and controversies have been centered around it. The problem itself has appeared in various forms — sometimes appearing as an investigation into the nature of the human being and at other times appearing in more complicated ways as explanation of personal identity, of the spirit, of the knowing subject, of mind, of the ego, etc.²

Since philosophy is not a mere intellectual exercise, it has to be regarded as an interpretation of life and as authentic search for ultimate truths of all existence and in spite of the fact that problems of philosophy in the contemporary world have become academic, the purpose of


inquiry has always remained the same. The classical western conception of the self, unlike the Indian conception, was not connected to a practical aim. The early Greek conception of logos, nous etc., the Platonic idea of forms, the Aristotelian categories, the medieval conception of the substance, Leibnitz's monads and the Hegelian Absolute, all place the reality outside the human subject. To some extent the Cartesian res cogitans, Berkeley's 'esse', Kant's transcendental unity of consciousness, Fichte's 'ego' and the recent so-called existentialist incursions into 'existence' represent a turning of attention 'inwards'. At no time, however, did the interest in the nature of the self, mind, soul, consciousness, subject, spirit, ego, etc., may be said to have ceased. In the succeeding pages, an attempt will be made to show the similarity in treatment of this problem in Western and Indian thought. Just as there is a terminological difficulty in the West regarding this problem, in Indian thought too, the same problem has appeared in various forms as inquiry into the nature of Ātman, manas, jīva, attā, puruṣa, ahamkāra, buddhi, mahat etc.. S.N. Dasgupta remarks:

"... in the pre-Upaniṣadic Vedic literature Ātman probably was first used to denote "vital breath" in man, then the self of the world and the self in man."  

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In the Upaniṣadic conception of the self one may say that we attain a very high degree of philosophical imagery. The commentators are not agreed on the real meanings of the Upaniṣads, and in particular, to the exact relationship between the self and ultimate reality, but the place of the self in the over-all picture of cosmos is recognised by the Upaniṣads as having highest importance.


as attributeless, formless, partless, omnipresent, all-pervading, ultimate and non-dual — non-dual in the sense of there being an identity of the self and Brahman, or that of the subjective and the objective realms in transcendental consciousness. The Viśiṣṭādvaita interpretation of the Upaniṣads would regard the souls as organic part of the ultimate reality of Brahman, each part being distinct, though inseparable from it. The Dvaita view of the Upaniṣads would completely separate the finite selves from the Brahman.

From a religious standpoint the latter two views may be more appropriate, but the Upaniṣads cannot be regarded as religious texts as the Gītā is. Their philosophical speculations would be regarded even as anti-religious and anti-ritualistic. Thus the Buddhist philosophical speculations may have derived an inspiration from the Upaniṣadic thought. Early Buddhism, it may be pointed out, did not aim at finding a new religion. It has been remarked that "Buddhism grew and flourished within the fold of orthodox belief".¹

But it is interesting to note that in spite of the great similarity between Mahāvīra's and the Buddha's lives and sources of inspiration, Jainism has not entered into a detailed speculation of the nature of the self. The self or jīva is a conscious atomistic substance, which

illuminates itself and other objects as well. It is one of the seven fundamental tattvas of the universe, the others being ajīva, āsrava, bandha, saṃvara, nirjara and mokṣa. Being eternal and all-pervading, the self possesses infinite knowledge and infinite power but owing to sheer ignorance karma enters into it fettering it to a life of bondage. On the whole the Jaina conception of the self is naive and naturalistic. According to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system God — the efficient cause, creates the universe from numerous eternal atoms of earth, fire, water, ether, space and time. The self is also as eternal and transcendent as these atoms are. It possesses some qualities like pleasure and pain, cognition and conation, but merely on empirical level. The self of the Sāmkhya is called puruṣa — the subject, the knower and the enjoyer. It is formless, attributeless, eternal, and all-pervading. It is beyond the limits of merits or demerits, space and time, likes and dislikes. It is above the three guṇas and the universe. Unlike the non-dualism of Śaṅkara and like Jainism and Mīmāṁśa, Sāmkhya believes in the plurality of selves. The Mīmāṁśa, being a pluralistic realism, maintains the existence of numerous individual souls. The soul of the Mīmāṁśa is all-pervading, eternal, and infinite. It is also considered as the real subject of cognition, the enjoyer, but it is absolutely different from the body and the senses.
It is against this background of the various ways of regarding the self in Indian philosophy that we have to consider the problem of the self in Buddhist philosophy. It is indeed a central problem in Buddhism as it is in the Vedānta. Nevertheless, it is surprising how little attention has been given to this problem. Stcherbatsky, Oldenberg, Coomaraswamy, Rhys Davids and Murti were concerned with other doctrines of Buddhism. There is no doubt that they touched upon the problem of self, but they do not devote as much attention to it as is demanded by the field of the present investigation. There are also passing references to the problem of self by other writers who look at it from their own standpoint. Mrs. Rhys Davids recognises this defect in the earlier works on Buddhism:

"This is a point usually passed over and even misrepresented both by commentator and by translator." ¹⁰

The present enquiry seeks to fill up an important gap in researches into Buddhist philosophy. First, after referring to the sources it is proposed to trace the evolution of the problem in early Buddhist texts. Then the nature of the self as treated in the early Buddhist dialogues will be given. Thirdly, it is proposed to take up the problem in detail with special reference to the

Questions of King Milinda. Fourthly, to maintain the historical continuity in the account of the problem of the self, a brief account of the concept as developed in later Buddhism will also be presented. Some concluding remarks and a critical resumé of the problem is placed at the end of this work.

B. Sources of study

The literature on Buddhist philosophy is very vast. Apart from texts in Pāli and Sanskrit, there are also works in Tibetan, Chinese, Japanese etc. Its past history of two and a half millennia shows the development of various philosophical systems and beliefs in different directions. The presently available Buddhist literature may broadly be divided into two main heads:

I. Early Buddhist Texts -

These texts may be divided into:-

(a) Canonical literature i.e. the Tripiṭakas.

(b) Semi-Canonical literature i.e. texts which do not form part of the Buddhist scriptures, but have their own value and significance. Such texts include the Milindapañha, the Visuddhimagga, Atṭhakathās etc.

II. Later Buddhist Texts -

These texts comprise the works on the yogācāra
and Mādhyamika schools of Buddhist metaphysics. But much details of these texts will not be referred to here, since we are mainly concerned with early Buddhist Dialogues.

Early Buddhist texts consist of the canonical and the semi-canonical Pāli literature. The Pāli Canon is the oldest available sacred Buddhist literature. It is known as Tipiṭaka (or Tripiṭaka in Sanskrit), because it contains three pitakas or the baskets of law which are the three well-arranged and systematic collections of the sacred Buddhist scripture. The pitakas are the most important of the sources for the study of Buddhism. For a long time the texts of the pitakas were not written down but passed orally from teachers to disciples successively. They were written down probably in the first century B.C. and the work of their compilation was accomplished in the third great Buddhist council held during the reign of Aśoka. The three pitakas are Vinaya pitaka or 'rules of


12 For the date of Pāli Canon please cf. F. MaxMüller (tr.), The Dhammapada, S.B.E. Vol. 10, Part I (Reprint, Delhi, 1968), pp. xxvi-xxxii.

discipline', *Sutta pitaka* consisting of the narratives, legends, parables, discourses and popular teachings of the Master, and the third is *Abhidhamma pitaka* which treats mainly with the psycho-ethical doctrines.

The *Tripitakas* consist of an account of the original and fundamental teachings of the Buddha as repeated by his disciples at the first council, held shortly after the death of the Buddha. They are the repositories of the various philosophical teachings and doctrines of early Buddhism. Radhakrishnan remarks:

"They are undoubtedly the earliest and most authoritative account of Buddha's teachings now in existence."\(^1^4\)

*Vinaya pitaka*

The first\(^1^5\) of these *pitakas* is the *Vinaya pitaka* or 'the rules of discipline', which consists of (1) *Sutta-vibhaṅga*, (2) *Khandhakās* and (3) *Parivāra*.

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\(^{15}\)S. Radhakrishnan (op. cit., p. 344) regards the *Sutta pitaka* earlier than the *Vinaya pitaka*, but H. Kern (op. cit., pp. 1-2) considers the *Vinaya pitaka* earlier than the *Sutta pitaka*. Winternitz (op. cit., p. 21), however, remarks: "The Buddhists themselves place the *Vinaya pitaka* at the head of the canon, and we may follow their example, without committing ourselves to the opinion that this is earlier than the *Sutta pitaka*."

But the Patimokkha, which may be called as the nucleus of the Vinaya pitaka is considered to be its oldest part. In the present available edition of the Vinaya pitaka, it is combined with the text of the Suttavibhaṅga and it does not stand as an independent part of this pitaka. The Patimokkha is a list of disciplinary rules of the Order together with atonements for their transgression meant for the guidance of monks and nuns to regulate their daily life. It is believed that the Patimokkha contained 152 rules in the beginning but with the passage of time their number increased to 227. These rules were recited by the monks as a confession fortnightly on the new moon and full moon days, which was called Uposatha\textsuperscript{16} ceremony. The classification of various sins that may be committed by the monks and nuns has also been done under eight heads.

The Suttavibhaṅga or the 'explanation of the sutta' is itself a commentary on the Patimokkha. All the suttas are explained word for word in detail and an introductory historical account for framing rules has been given. The Suttavibhaṅga is further divided into Mahāvibhaṅga and Bhikkhuni vibhaṅga. In Mahāvibhaṅga there are eight chapters that deal with eight classes of disciplinary violations. As compared to Mahāvibhaṅga,

Bhikkhuṇīvibhaṅga is a smaller compilation which is also a commentary on the rules of discipline for nuns as the Pātimokkha for the monks. The offences in accordance with their severity are grouped into pārājikas and pācittiyas.

The Khandhakas or the 'sections' are just a supplement to the Suttavibhaṅga, since the treatment and nature of the subject-matter of the Khandhakas is much akin to that of the Suttavibhaṅga. They are divided into the Mahāvagga and the Cullavagga.

The Mahāvagga or the greater section is a sort of historical account of the growth and formation of the Order. There are ten sections in it which contain a disciplinary code and the description of various ceremonies meant for the monks and nuns to regulate their life. Rules for admission to the Order and for the performance of ceremonies like Uposatha, Vassāvāsa and Pavāraṇā have been strictly framed. The other important subjects dealt within the Mahāvagga are residence for monks during rainy seasons, rules for robes, shoes and transportation, prescription of medicines, description of social crimes, ecclesiastical lapses and some metaphysical and ethical problems of Buddhist philosophy.

The Cullavagga or 'smaller section' may be called a further continuation of the foregoing work. Its main
contents are disciplinary proceedings, punishments and atonements, settlement of disputes, daily life of the monks, their abodes etc. Besides a description of many other rules and offences, it also gives an account of the two great councils held at Rājgarh and Vaiśālī.

The Parivāra is the last book of the Vinaya pitaka. It is not as important as the other texts are. In addition to indices and appendices, it contains the instructions in the form of questions and answers for easy remembrances and understanding of the rules and regulations of the Order. The date of its composition is considered to belong to a much later period.

The Vinaya pitaka, therefore, embodies disciplinary codes, meant for the guidance of the monastic Order. Various guide-lines have been suggested to the monks and nuns for the formation and maintenance of the discipline of the Order. Necessary injunctions and instructions, rules and regulations, expiations and atonements, offences and repentences are explained in detail in this pitaka. By the maintenance of discipline and order among the monks and nuns, the Vinaya pitaka aims to prepare them for a well-integrated and poised spiritual life and thus to save them from the delusions of corporeal pursuits.
Sutta pitaka

Most of the literary and philosophical works of early Buddhism are compiled in the Sutta pitaka, which deals with discourses, sermons, ethical tenets, and the popular teachings of the Buddha. It is an exposition of the 'Dharma' of the Buddha. Winternitz remarks:

"Just as the Vinaya pitaka is our best source for Saṅgha, i.e., the regulations of the ancient Buddhist order and the life of the monks, so the Sutta pitaka is our most reliable source for the Dhamma i.e., the religion of the Buddha and his earliest disciples."  

It is in this pitaka that the cardinal religious, psycho-ethical, and metaphysical doctrines of Buddhism are expounded in the form of dialogues and discussions which are considered as the best pieces of Buddhist literature. It comprises five Nikāyas (or collections) viz., the Dīgha, the Majjhima, the Samyutta, the Aṅguttara and the Khuddaka which are both in prose and verse. Rhys Davids writes:

"In depth of philosophical insight, in the method of Socratic questioning often adopted,

in the earnest and the elevated tone of the whole, in the evidence they afford of the most cultured thought of the day, these discourses constantly remind the reader of the dialogues of Plato...

From the point of view of this thesis, the Sutta piṭaka is of great importance. The doctrine of the unreality of the self as dealt with in this important piṭaka will form the subject-matter of one of our subsequent chapters.

Diγha Nikāya

The Diγha Nikāya, which is a collection of thirty-four longer sermons, contains philosophical doctrines prevalent in the times of the Buddha. It is divided into three main vaggas or sections viz. Sīlakhandhavagga, Mahāvagga and Pāṭikavagga which are independent of each other. They differ in nature and subject-matter. Some of the problems dealt with in this Nikāya are regarding causation, conception of soul, asceticism, miracles, Nirvāṇa and rebirth.

Majjhima Nikāya

The suttas of the Majjhima Nikāya are of medium-sized length. They are not as long as that of the Diγha Nikāya. There are 152 suttas in this Nikāya which have

\[18\] Cited by Radhakrishnan, op. cit., p. 344.
fifteen vaggas under three main divisions. It deals with the important teachings of Buddhism. The doctrine of karma, enlightenment, temporary existence, soul, asceticism etc., are dealt with in this Nikāya. Regarding this Nikāya, Charles Eliot remarks:

"Taken as a whole it is perhaps the most profound and impassioned of all the Nikāyas and also the oldest."

Samyutta Nikāya

The Samyutta Nikāya or 'Collection of Combined Sayings' contains 56 groups of suttas which have five divisions called vaggas viz., Sagātha, Nidāna, Khandha, Saḷāyatana and Mahā. The subject-matter of these five vaggas is ethical, metaphysical, epistemological and psychological in nature. The famous Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path and 'Dhamma-Cakka-ppavattanasutta' or Sermon at Benares are also included in this Nikāya. A.D. Pusalker remarks on the content of this Nikāya as follows:

"The sayings and episodes in this Nikāya impress one successively with Buddha's great good sense, readiness to adapt his teaching to

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the individual enquirer, keen intuition, 
ready humour and smiling irony, courage and 
dignity, and catholic and tender compassion 
of all creatures."20

This Nikāya will also be considered by us as one of the 
main sources in the discussion of the Buddhist doctrine 
of the unreality of the self in one of our later chapters.

Aṅguttara Nikāya

The Aṅguttara Nikāya is a collection of various 
types of discourses arranged in numerical groups in an 
ascending order from one to eleven. It is called Aṅguttara, 
because of the increase of one number in the subsequent 
chapters of each book. There are about 2300 suttas in 
this Nikāya. The Aṅguttara Nikāya is simply a rearrangement 
of the various topics dealt with in the Majjhima Nikāya 
and the Dīgha Nikāya for the purpose of convenience. 
It is divided into eleven parts which are nipātas. Each 
nipāta is further sub-divided into several sections or 
vaggas. Some of the important metaphysical and psycho-
ethical doctrines of the early Buddhism are taken up in 
it. B.C. Law remarks on the style and importance of 
this Nikāya:

"Sanity and perspicuity characterise the style of this Nikāya. In a purely prosaic and mechanical scheme there are to be seen matters that bristle with interest. The variety of contents assigns a very important place to this Nikāya in regard to the subsequent development of Buddhist texts belonging to all the three piṭakas."\textsuperscript{21}

**Khuddaka Nikāya**

The fifth and the last Nikāya of the Sutta piṭaka is the Khuddaka Nikāya or collection of smaller discourses. Often it is considered as the supplementary Nikāya, since it is believed to be an accretion of later stages. The first four Nikāyas are found in other canons also, though in a different setting, but the Khuddaka Nikāya is particularly found in the Pāli Canon only. Some of the most important texts of early Buddhism having rare metaphysical and literary value have been incorporated in this Nikāya. The scope and subject-matter of the Khuddaka Nikāya is very vast and varied. It consists of fifteen books viz., the Khuddaka pātha, the Dhammapada, the Udāna, the Itivuttaka, the Suttanipāta, the Vimānavatthu, the Petavatthu, the Theragāthā, the Therīgāthā, the

Jātakas, the Niddesa, the Paṭisambhidāmagga, the Apadāna, the Buddhavaṃsa, and the Carivyāpīṭaka.

Khuddakapāṭha

The Khuddakapāṭha or the 'manual of short sayings' is that Buddhist text which is meant for the novices who join the Buddhist Order. Some of its verses are chanted even now as sacred Buddhist prayers. It is divided into nine sections, namely, Tisaraṇa, Dasaśikhyāpada, Dvattiṁsākāra, Kumārapaṇha, Maṅgalasutta, Ratanasutta, Tiṭṭhatasutta, Nidhikaṇḍasutta, and Karanlyamettasutta which deal with the manifold aspects of the Buddhist cult and creed.

Dhammapada

The Dhammapada is one of the most renowned works of the Pāli Canon. It consists of 423 verses which are divided into twenty-six vaggas (chapters). It is a collection of various verses taken from the canonical works. The style of the text is simple and eloquent.

Cf. "Dhamma is 'Discipline', law, religion; pada is patha, means (upāya), way (magga). Dhammapada is thus the path of Virtue. Pada also means the base; Dhammapada is then the base or the foundation of religion. If pada is taken as a part of a verse, then Dhammapada means the utterances of religion. The Chinese translate Dhammapada as 'scriptual texts' since it contains passages from the various canonical books." S. Radhakrishnan (tr.), The Dhammapada (London, 1950), p.1. Cf. F. MaxMüller (tr.) The Dhammapada, S.B.E. Vol. 10, Part I (Reprint, Delhi, 1968), pp. XLV-XLIX; Samuel Beal (tr.), Dhammapada (2nd ed. Calcutta, 1952), p. 1.
It possesses high ideals which have universal appeal for the mankind at large. The Dhammapada is an exposition of Buddhist norms and morality. The popular ethical and metaphysical teachings of the Buddha are explained in this work. Besides other topics, the theories of non-existence and self, find a suitable place in this text. We shall specially refer to the attavagga and maggavagga sections of the Dhammapada while discussing the nature of the self in early Buddhist texts, in the subsequent chapter of this thesis.

Udāna

The Udāna or 'inspired sayings' is the third book of the Khuddaka Nikāya. It is a collection of eight vaggas or sections which are further sub-divided into suttas. Its text is both in prose and verse. Every sutta consists some saying in verse and brief description in prose which is followed by an udāna or inspired utterance of the Teacher. Winternitz remarks:

"Most of these utterances serve to glorify the Buddhist ideal of life, the deep blissful repose of mind of the saint (Arhat) torn away from all earthly things, the endless bliss of Nirvāṇa."²³

²³Winternitz, op. cit., p. 84.
Itivuttaka

The Itivuttaka is a collection of 112 short suttas which are divided in four nipātas. It falls very near to the Udāna in its plan and aim. Buddha's deep and concise utterances are explained firstly in prose and then the same ideas are presented in verse. Often the verses have been introduced with 'Iti vuttam bhagavata' i.e. 'thus it is said by the Blessed One'. The text comprises the ethical teachings of the Buddha.

Suttanipāta

Like Dhammapada, the Suttanipāta is also one of the important works of the Khuddaka Nikāya. It contains various Buddhist legends, myths and discourses. There are seventy suttas in the Suttanipāta which are divided into five vaggas, viz. Uragavagga, Cūlavagga, Mahāvagga, Aṭṭhakavagga and Pārāyaṇavagga. They are in verse having small introductory remarks in prose. Some of the fine examples of the ancient Buddhist poetry are traceable in it.

While commenting upon the importance of the Suttanipāta, V. Fausboll remarks:

"In the contents of the Suttanipāta we have, I think, an important contribution to the right understanding of Primitive Buddhism, for we see here a picture not of life in
monasteries, but of the life of hermits in its first stage. We have before us not the systematizing of the later Buddhist church, but the first germs of a system, the fundamental ideas of which come out with sufficient clearness."  

The subject-matter of the *Suttanipāta* is varied which includes ethical teaching, impermanence of the universe, Dhamma, aversion towards mundane pursuits, non-existence, self and attainment of permanent bliss.

**Vimānāvatthu**

The *Vimānāvatthu* or the stories of the celestial abodes consists of eighty-five poems which are divided into seven vaggas. In these tales of heavenly palaces, the state of personality after rebirth, in any of the heavens explain their meritorious acts that elevated them.

**Petavatthu**

The *Petavatthu* or the stories of the petas (evil spirits or ghosts) are the tales of those beings who became ghosts or disembodied spirits due to their guilty

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and unworthy acts of their former lives. The Petavatthu contains fifty-one legends in verse, which are divided into four vaggas. The style and plan followed in the text is similar to that of the Vimanavatthu. These two works emphasise the importance of the Buddhist theory of karma.25

Theragāthā

The Theragāthā is a collection of 107 poems containing 1279 gāthās, which are attributed to the theras or the elders. Mrs. Rhys Davids, in her commentary on this work has translated the word Theragāthā as 'Psalms of the Brethren'.27 These verses are full of excellent

25 Cf. "The truly great and profound doctrine of Karman, which has found expression in Brahmanical as well as Buddhist texts in so many beautiful sayings and legends, is most clumsily explained by means of examples in these stories, whose metrical form is their only poetical attribute." M. Winternitz, op. cit., pp. 98 f.

26 Cf. "Thera (Skt. Sthavira) denotes an old man, while Therī (Skt. Sthavirā) means an old lady. But in the Buddhist literature they are employed in a technical sense. A highly qualified senior monk is called a therā while a highly qualified senior nun (Bhikkhunī) is known as a therī. A monk and a nun who were highly advanced in their path of spiritual progress are usually designated as therā and a therī respectively." A.C. Banerji, Buddhism in India and Abroad (Calcutta, 1973), p. 135.

27 Mrs. Rhys Davids (tr.), Psalms of the Brethren (London, 1913).
and rapturous feelings of lyrical poetry and hence they are considered to be the best pieces of the early Buddhist poetry. Besides the exposition of religious and ethical ideas, there are some references to the problem of the self also in the Therāgāthā.

Therīgāthā

The Therīgāthā is a collection of verses which are ascribed to the nuns. It contains seventy-three poems with 522 gāthās. It portrays the true picture of womanhood. Ecstatic and psychological feelings of the women heart are expressed in a beautiful manner. It also presents a glimpse into the society of the Buddhist times. There are some similarities of language and technique in the Therā and Therīgāthā. Both the works describe the moral ideals and the basic principles of Buddhist philosophy. A.A. Macdonell remarks:

"The Therāgāthā and Therīgāthā, or 'Songs of monks and nuns', are poems of great literary merit exalting mental calm as the religious ideal, and describing the value of Buddhist ethical doctrine from personal experience."28

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28 Cf. "Common to both collections are the religious ideals which are set up and the moral doctrines which are proclaimed." Winternitz, op. cit., p. 103.

The highest ideal found in the Therīgāthā is the attainment of permanent release. Some of the verses have touched upon the idea of the self also.

**Jātakas**

The Jātakas are the important works of the early Buddhist literature. About 550 tales of the supposed former births of the Buddha and his disciples are narrated in them. These tales are both in prose and verse and are divided into twenty-two sections or nipātas. The verse portion of the Jātakas is considered more valuable from the Buddhist point of view since it is believed to have been uttered by the Buddha himself. The presently available Jātaka tales are not in their original form as they have been translated from Siṁghalese near about in the 5th century A.D., which itself was the translation of the earlier Pāli version. During the process of translation from one language to another language many omissions and accretions have mutilated their originality. The subject-matter of the Jātakas is vast and varied. Fairy tales, birth stories, parables, religious fables, ethical descriptions, adventurous legends and many other topics of varied interest are described in the Jātakas. In spite of this diversity of the subject-matter, Buddha has been presented as Boddhisattva in his former births in all the Jātakas. Robert Chalmers remarks:
"The Jātakas themselves are of course interesting as specimens of Buddhist literature; but their foremost interest to us consists in their relation to folklore and the light which they often throw on those popular stories which illustrate so vividly the ideas and superstitions of the early times of civilisation."\(^{30}\)

The Jātaka stories served as an important means for the propagation and transmission of the early Buddhist creed. They had an impact on the literature of the later ages also.\(^{31}\)

**Niddesa**

It is an exposition of certain suttas of the *Suttanipāta* which is ascribed by tradition to Sāriputta. It has two parts: Mahāniddesa, which is a commentary on the Aṭṭhakavagga of the *Suttanipāta*, and the Cullaniddesa — a commentary on the Pārāyanavagga and Khaggavisānasutta of the same text. Many technical terms of Buddhist philosophy have been explained in this work. It is


considered to be the oldest commentary in Pāli literature. The subject-matter of the book is metaphysical and ethical in nature.

Patisambhidāmagga

The text of this book is in the form of catechism like that of the Abhidhamma. It consists of three parts (vaggas) — Mahāvagga, Yunganadhavagga and Paññāvagga. Each vāgga is further divided into ten chapters. Some of the important Buddhist problems like knowledge, action, the Four Noble Truths and conduct have been dealt with in this work.

Apadāna

The present work contains legends in verse regarding the lives of monks and nuns, which describe the meritorious and pious deeds performed by the Buddhist Arhants. The text is descriptive and voluminous like the Jātakas and is insignificant from literary point of view. Winternitz has given an exposition of the word Apadāna.


\[33\] "The word apadāna (Sanskrit avadāna) means "heroic deed, glorious deed", the sense being extended also to glorious deeds of self sacrifice and piety; and the Apadānas, like the Avadānas which are their counterpart in the Buddhist Sanskrit literature, are "tales of heroic deeds", i.e., the pious works of the saints (which often consist of very commonplace actions performed in adoration of a Buddha)." Winternitz, op. cit., p. 158. Cf. also B.C. Law, op. cit., p. 302.
Buddhavamsa

The Buddhavamsa presents in verse a historical account of twenty-four former Buddhas which are considered to be the predecessors of Gautama. The Buddha himself gives a description of the setting of the Wheel of Religion in motion and the similarities of the various events of the Buddha's life to that of former Buddha. The questions raised by Sāriputta are answered by him. From literary and philosophical point of view the legends of the text are dull and somewhat uninteresting.

Cariyāpiṭaka

The fifteenth and the last book of the Khuddaka Nikāya is Cariyāpiṭaka which means a 'basket of conduct'. It is an anthology of thirty-five legends taken from the Jātakas, which describes in verse the righteousness and good conduct of the Buddha. It is an account of the Cariya (or conduct) and ten pāramitās (or perfections) attained by the Buddha in his previous

34 There is a difference of opinion even among the Theravādins regarding the number of works in the Suttapiṭaka. But Buddhaghosa in his commentary on the Vinayapiṭaka mentions all these fifteen works.


36 The ten Pāramitās are: dāna, sīla, nekkhamma, paññā, vīriya, khanti, sacca, adhiṭṭhāna, mettā and upekkhā.
births. But there is an explanation of seven perfections only in this work and the remaining three are not included. The date of compilation of the Cariyāpiṭaka goes after the Aśokan age. The subject-matter of this work is mainly ethical and metaphysical.

**Abhidhamma pitaka**

The third piṭaka is the Abhidhamma which literally means 'further dhamma' or 'special dhamma'. It expounds the psychological and ethical doctrines. Some metaphysical problems have also been touched upon but they are of very secondary importance. In Pusalker's view:

"Contrary to the indications given by its name (Abhidhamma, higher religion or metaphysics), there is very little of metaphysics in the Abhidhamma Pitaka (basket of the transcendental doctrine)."  

The philosophy of the Abhidhamma is not systematic and well-arranged. The ideas are not well-defined, rather clustered in the series of synonyms. The enumeration of the categories is in abundance which makes the subject dry. There is lack of freshness and originality throughout the whole text. The subject-matter of the Abhidhamma piṭaka

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is almost similar to that of the Sutta pitaka, but it has been presented in the form of catechism and in a more elucidatory though naive manner. The Dhamma of the Sutta pitaka is presented here from another viewpoint but the depth of the ideas is lacking. I.B. Horner remarks about the Abhidhamma pitaka:

"The Abhidhamma is a systematisation and classification of doctrinal points, and was drawn up with a view to expounding difficult parts of the teaching which we should call psychological and logical." 38

It was compiled probably between the reigns of King Aśoka and Kaniska.

The Abhidhamma pitaka39 is a collection of seven


39 Theravādins’ Abhidhamma differs from that of the Sarvāstivādins: The number of the books in the Abhidhamma of the Sarvāstivāda school is identical to that of the Theravādins; but they are ascribed to seven disciples of Buddha and not to him. They are preserved only in Chinese version. The equivalent Sanskrit names of these books are as follows: Jñānaprasthāna, Saṃśītaiparītrā, Prakārapādā, Vijñānakāya, Dhātukāya, Dharmaśāndha, and Prajñapādāstra. Cf. B.C. Law, op. cit., pp. 336-342; E.J. Thomas, The History of Buddhist Thought (Reprint, London, 1953), p. 275.

Dhammasanqani

The Dhammasanqani is the first work of the Abhidhamma pitaka. It is a book on the enumeration of the Dharmas (or psychological phenomena and mental processes) in the form of questions and answers. The problems discussed in it are of psycho-ethical nature. An analytical account of the different stages of the monks is also given. The book is divided into four sections, which are called Māṭikās. These Māṭikās are further sub-divided into various sub-sections. Buddhaghosa wrote a commentary on Dhammasanqani which is called Atthasālīni. Commenting upon the subject-matter and method of the book, Mrs. Rhys Davids remarks:

"The method of the book is explicative, deductive; its object was, not to add to the Dhamma, but to unfold the orthodox import of terms in use among the body of the faithful, and, by organizing and systematizing the aggregate of doctrinal concepts, to render the learner's intellect both clear and efficient."^{40}

Due to the obscurity and vagueness of the ideas, the book was meant specially for erudite scholars and learned monks.

**Vibhaṅga**

It is the second book of the Abhidhamma pitaka. It contains 18 chapters, which are called vibhaṅga. Each of these chapters is divided into three parts which are Suttantabhājanīya, Abhidhammabhājanīya and Pañhāpucchaka. The subject-matter of this work is similar to that of the Dhammasaṅgani. It is a sort of exposition of the different categories and other concepts discussed in the preceding work. Many repetitions of the topics of the Dhammasaṅgani are noticeable in the Vibhaṅga and hence it may be regarded as a continuation and further elaboration of the Dhammasaṅgani.

**Dhātukathā**

The Dhātukathā is a description of dhātus or elements along with their categories. The book comprises fourteen chapters. Some of the topics discussed in this text are khandhas, dhātus, āyatanas, the Four Noble Truths, stages of meditation, the Noble Eightfold Path etc.

**Puggalapaññatti**

This book is an account of the nature of the
personalities with regard to their moral qualities. The various stages of their development along with the Eightfold Noble Path are also given in this text. The book comprises ten chapters and the subject-matter is somewhat uninteresting. The basic idea of the text is to describe the different types of individuals.

Kathāvatthu

The Kathāvatthu is an important work of early Buddhist philosophy. Kathā means 'discussion' or 'controversy', and vatthu means 'subject-matter', hence it is called 'Subjects of Discussions' or 'Points of Controversy'.

This book gives a clear picture of the different sects and dogmas of Buddhist philosophy. Various philosophical doctrines inimical to the Theravādins have been analysed and refuted. Puggalavādins' doctrine of the self is the first to be refuted. Other subjects, relevant to our purposes, dealt with in this text are, unreality of the self, causation, rebirth and karma. The negativistic and polemical attitude of the Kathāvatthu appears to be similar to that of the Milindapañha. The book is divided into

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41 Cf. "According to the commentarial tradition, Puggalapaññatti means 'pointing out', 'showing', 'expositions', 'establishing', and disposition of persons or it may also mean 'notion' or 'designation' of types of persons." B.C. Law, op. cit., pp. 329-330.

42 Cf. S. Z. Aung and Mrs. Rhys Davids (tr.), Points of Controversy or Subjects of Discourse (London, 1915), Intro.
twenty-three chapters which consist of 1000 suttas. Its authorship is ascribed by tradition to Moggaliputta Tissa, President of the third Buddhist council. This work, like the *Milindapañha* is an important source for this thesis.

**Yamaka**

This book contains pairs of positive and negative questions in ten chapters. Mostly psychological problems have been dealt with in this work. Winternitz remarks:

"This work, which is very difficult to understand, is intended to dispel any doubts which might still arise after the first five books of the *Abhidhamma*."

**Paṭṭhāna-pakarana**

The *Paṭṭhāna-pakarana* is the seventh and the last book of the *Abhidhamma piṭaka*. It is also called *Mahā-pakarana*. It is a voluminous work which gives an exposition of the causality i.e. the mutual relation of phenomenal things in twenty-four paṭṭhānas or ways. It consists of three main divisions viz. eka, duka and tika. The doctrine of paṭiccassamuppāda (dependent origination) along with its twelve links has been explained in detail in this text.

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43 Winternitz, op. cit., p. 171.
Semi-Canonical Texts

Besides the vast Pāli-canonical literature referred to in the preceding pages, there are also semi-canonical texts which include original works, elucidatory texts and commentaries. Most of the semi-canonical literature, strictly speaking, is not a part of the Pāli Canon, yet it has its own value and significance in the history of Buddhist thought. It consists of the Milindapañha, Buddhaghosa’s Visuddhimagga, Netti-pakarana, Petakopadesa, commentaries on Pāli Tripitaka, and the chronicles of Ceylon i.e. the Dipavaṃsa, the Mahāvaṃsa and the Cūlavamsa.

The Milindapañha

The Milindapañha or the Questions of King Milinda is a unique work of the semi-canonical Pāli literature, the philosophical importance of which is undisputed and unabated. It was written around the beginning of the Christian era, but its authorship is not known. It is very popular in many Buddhist countries like Ceylon, Burma, Siam, Japan etc. It consists of a dialogue between the Greek king Milinda (Menander) and the Buddhist philosopher

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44 We have preferred to use the word 'semi-canonical' in place of the stereotyped words like 'non-canonical or post-canonical' because some of the works of this category are also included in the Pāli Canon.
Nāgasena which is believed to have taken place about four
centuries after the death of the Buddha. Its faithful
representation of the Buddha’s teaching is perhaps
undoubted, but even if the Milindapañha is considered
as an independent philosophical work, its acute dialectics
and rigorous metaphysics are worth the careful attention
of all students of Indian philosophy and more particular
for Buddhist thought. The work is quoted many times as
an authority by the great Buddhist commentator, Buddhaghosa.
It is regarded as the only work outside the Pāli Canon
which he quotes.\textsuperscript{45}

These dialogues question the reality of the self
and its liberation. The work may be regarded as an attack
on the dogmatism of the orthodox religion. The book also
possesses literary qualities of a forceful language,
charming style and lucidity. European scholars like
Rhys Davids, V. Trenckner, F. otto Schrader, R. Garbe,
translated it into European languages, which we shall
refer in chapter III of this thesis.

\textbf{Visuddhimagga}

The \textit{Visuddhimagga} or 'The Way of Purity' is the
first original and comprehensive philosophical work of

Buddhaghosa — an erudite scholar of deep intellect and vast knowledge. He was a brahmin of northern India, who after his conversion to Buddhism went to Ceylon to study the Pāli Canon. The *Visuddhimagga* was written in the fifth century A.D. It has twenty three chapters under three main divisions i.e. Śīla (moral), Samādhi (meditation) and Prajñā (wisdom). The style of the book is eloquent, lucid and attractive. Dry and dull philosophical problems have been made interesting and appealing by making proper use of the legends and fables. Buddhaghosa freely quotes from the early Buddhist texts in order to interpret the doctrine of the Buddha. Winternitz remarks:

"Even if Buddhaghosa had no original contribution to make, we should yet be indebted to him for his faithful preservation of ancient tradition." 46

Besides his original works he wrote many

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commentaries on the Pāli Canon.

Netti-pakarna

The Netti-pakarna or 'Netti' is the earliest work in which all the teachings of the Buddha have been presented in a systematic manner. It is regarded to be contemporary to the Milinda Pañha. It deals with exegetical and elucidatory methods. The book is ascribed to Mahākaccāna, the disciple of the Buddha. Dhammapāla wrote a commentary on Netti-pakarana.

Petakopadesa

The Petakopadesa or 'Instructions about pitakas' is also considered to have been written by Mahākaccāna. This book is a sort of further continuation of the foregoing work. It contains an exposition of the subject

Samantapāsādikā
Kaṇkhāvīṭarāṇī
Sūmantagalavilāsini
Pramaṇasūdani
Strātalipikānī
Manorathapūrāṇī
Paramatthajotikā (I and II)

Dhammapada-Atthakathā
Atthasālīnī
Sammohavipādinī
Puggala-paññatti-Atthakathā
Kathāvatthupakarana-Atthakathā
Yamakappakarana-Atthakathā
Dhammapada-Atthakathā
Atthasālīnī
Sammohavipādinī
Puggala-paññatti-Atthakathā
Kathāvatthupakarana-Atthakathā
Yamakappakarana-Atthakathā

Many other commentaries are ascribed to him by tradition.

47Buddhaghosa’s commentaries on the Tripitakas are:

Samantapāsādikā commentary on the Vinaya pitaka.
Kaṇkhāvīṭarāṇī commentary on the Pātimokkha.
Sūmantagalavilāsini commentary on the Dīgha Nikāya.
Pramaṇasūdani commentary on the Majjhima Nikāya.
Strātalipikānī commentary on the Samyutta Nikāya.
Manorathapūrāṇī commentary on the Aṅguttara Nikāya.
Paramatthajotikā (I and II) commentary on the Khuddaka Pātha and Suttaniṣṭa.
Dhammapada-Atthakathā commentary on the Dhammapada.
Atthasālīnī commentary on the Dhammaśāhānī.
Sammohavipādinī commentary on the Vibhanga.
Puggala-paññatti-Atthakathā commentary on the Puggala-paññatti.
Kathāvatthupakarana-Atthakathā commentary on the Kathāvatthu.
Yamakappakarana-Atthakathā commentary on the Yamaka.
already dealt with in the Nettipakaraṇa, but from a
different point of view. In this new approach some of
the topics which remained somewhat unintelligible, became
more clear and understandable. The significance of the
Four Noble Truths in Buddhist philosophy has also been
emphasised in this text.

Commentary work constitutes a major part of the
semi-canonical Pāli literature. Besides Buddhaghosa,
the other well-known commentators are Dhammapāla and
Buddhadatta who wrote many commentaries. Paramāṭhādīpanī
is a commentary by Dhammapāla on those works48 of the
Khuddaka Nikāya which were left uncommented by Buddhaghosa.
He also wrote Parmāṭhamaṇḍūṣā a commentary on Buddhaghosa’s
Visuddhimagga.

Buddhadatta’s commentaries – the Abhidhamnavatāra
and the Vinaya-Viniccaya are merely a summarized version
of Buddhaghosa’s commentaries. Apart from the chronicles
of Ceylon like the Dipavamsa, the Mahāvamsa and the
Cūlavamsa, there are many other commentaries and compendiums49
which fall under semi-canonical Pāli literature.

48 They are: Ittivutaka, Udāna, Cariyāṇītaka, Therīgāthā, Vīmānavaṭṭha and Petavaṭṭha.

49 For example Anuruddha’s Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha, translated into English by S.Z. Aung and Mrs. Rhys Davids under the title Compendium of Philosophy (London, 1910).
From the foregoing account of the sources of early Buddhist philosophy it would be clear that literature on Buddhism is very vast indeed. Detailed bibliography of the subject has been compiled at the end of this work, but the above references are intended only to present a gist. Although the present work gives particular importance to early Buddhist dialogues and to the *Questions of King Milinda*, a brief account of the evolution of the problem of the self in later Mahāyāna Schools has also been given in chapter IV.