

LITERATURE (HETRODOX SECTS)

Buddhist literature

Buddha preached in Prakrit but the Buddhist literature was compiled in Pali Language. Later on, after the emergence of Mahayana Buddhism even Sanskrit came to be used as medium of literary and philosophical discourse. The major parts of the Buddhist literature are mentioned below:

Tripitakas

Considered as the oldest part of the Buddhist literature the Pali Tripitakas consist of the following:

1. Sutta Pitaka: It was compiled on the basis of the details provided by Ananda. It contains the teaching or preaching of Buddha. It is divided into five parts known as Nikayas. The largest nikaya is Dirgha/Diggha Nikaya followed by Majjhima Nikaya, Samyukta Nikaya, Anguttara Nikaya and Khuddaka Nikaya. Anguttara Nikaya contains a reference to 16 Maha-Janpadas which has emerged by the 6th Century B.C. Khuddaka Nikaya is the smallest and is particularly known for containing Jataka stories which are the stories related to previous births of Buddha.

2. Vinaya Pitaka: It contains rules related to the conduct of monks and nuns as well as for the transaction of the affairs of Sangha. It is based on the reproduction made by an important disciple of Buddha Upali. It includes the 'Patimokkha' which is a list of transgressions of the monastic discipline and their atonements.

3. Abhidhamba Pitaka: It contains metaphysical and psychological aspects of Buddhism. Unlike the first two Pitakas which were recited at the first council of monks at Rajgriha immediately after the death of Buddha , the Abhidhamba pitaka evolved later on.

Some other important works are :

Dipavamsha and Mahavamsha

They are Sri Lankan chronicles of Buddhism

In Pali.

Milinda-Panho (The questions of Minander)

A part of Pali literature text is in question-answer form and is basically a compilation of the religious conversation between the famous Buddhist monk nagasena (Nagarjuna and the Indo-Greek ruler Minander mentioned as King Milinda in Buddhist literature).

Avadanas

A category of Buddhist poems in Sanskrit collected in works such as 'Avdansataka' and 'Divyavadana'.

Mahavastu

Composed in different periods in Sanskrit it is a rare example of the use of Sanskrit even by the Hinyana school.

Lalitvistara

Sacred text in Sanskrit associated with Mahayana Buddhism

Buddhacharit

It is the biography of Buddha written by Ashvaghosha. He was a resident of Patliputra but later on started living in the court of Kanishka. It was written in Sanskrit language. He was also the author of a famous Buddhist text 'Saundrananda'.

Jaina religious Literature

Mahavira preached in Prakrit but the Jaina religious literature was compiled in Ardhamagadhi which is supposed to be a form of Prakrit. The sacred books of Jainism are collectively known as 'sidhanta' or ' agama' It consists of the following components:

1. Angas (12).
2. Upangas (12)

3. Prakirnas/ painnas(10)
4. Cheya suttas/ ched sutras (6)
5. Mula suttas/ Mula sutras(4)

The Angas , the oldest part are said to have been compiled at a council held at Patliputra. But the final compilation of the Jaina religious literature took place in the 5th or 6th century at a council held in Vallabhi in Gujrat , presided over by Kshamashramana.