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THE SIGNIFICANT OF SUTTA IN TRIPITAKA

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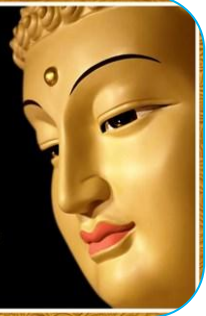
ABSTRACT :

The *Sutta Pitaka*, a component of the Pali Canon, which is often referred to as the *Tripitaka*, bears great importance in the Theravada Buddhist tradition. The *Suttas* consist of a massive compilation of lectures ascribed to Gautama Buddha. They provide a complete manual on the fundamental ideas, teachings, and ethical issues that are at the core of Buddhist philosophy. This abstract examines the crucial significance of the *Sutta Pitaka* in safeguarding and spreading the Buddha's profound knowledge, clarifying its influence on comprehending the journey towards enlightenment, moral behavior, and the essence of life.

I do not teach you to gain followers, nor to make you abandon your current teachers and way of lives.

Instead, I teach you to abandon bad habits that will corrupt you and bring you suffering in the future.

~Buddha~



KEY WORDS: *Sutta*, *Tripitaka*, *Buddhism*, *Buddha*, *Pali Canon*.

1. INTRODUCTION:

The *Tripitaka*, also known as the Pali Canon, is the primary text of *Theravada* Buddhism. Within its three-part structure, the *Sutta Pitaka* serves as an essential collection of the Buddha's spoken teachings. Compiled throughout the decades after the Buddha's *Mahā-Parinibbāna*, or death, the *Sutta Pitaka* contains a broad collection of teachings that explore several facets of human life, including ethical behaviour, meditation techniques, and deep philosophical questions. This study examines the complex importance of the *Sutta Pitaka* in the wider framework of Buddhist philosophy. The *Sutta Pitaka* is a fundamental aspect of *Theravada* Buddhism, serving as a timeless and invaluable resource for anyone who wants to explore the deep wisdom and teachings of Gautama Buddha. It offers inspiration and advice for people wishing to alleviate suffering and achieve *nirvana*.

2. THE CONCEPT OF THE TRIPITAKA

Gautama Buddha achieved *Mahā-Parinibbāna*, which is the state of passing away. This occurred in the twin Sālā Grove, located along the curved road that leads to the entrance to *Kusināra* city. The sentient beings in this world no longer have the chance to receive the teachings of the Dhamma imparted by the Buddha. Nevertheless, following his demise, the Buddha bequeathed the Dhamma and the Vinaya, which he imparted throughout his forty-five-year teaching tenure, as guidelines for his disciples.¹

Buddhavacana refers to all the teachings of Buddha that are received after attaining Enlightenment. At the Sala Grove, the Buddha addressed his disciples, stating, "*Ānanda, I have taught*

¹ *Dialogues of the Buddha (Dīgha-Nikāya)*, Vol. II, (Tr.), T.W. and Mrs. Rhys Davids, London: Pali text Society, 1899, p. 16.

the Dhamma and Vinaya. Therefore, I am your teacher by virtue of that".² Ānanda, with the death of Tathāgata, it is appropriate for you to see yourself as having acquired a mentor. The ideology and discipline that I have taught and established for all of you will serve as your guide after my death. The Buddha's demise occurred over 2500 years ago. However, the Dhamma, which he elucidated over forty-five years, endures to this day. He made a significant discovery of a pathway that leads to release, benefiting both humans and deities. The teachings of the Dhamma of the individual have a profound impact on both human beings and heavenly entities. Previously, he delivered several speeches to both mortals and deities, all of which were memorized by his followers upon his *Parinibbāna*. The primary student of the Buddha, Venerable *Mahākassapa*, and his assistant, Venerable *Ānanda*, who had the exclusive privilege of hearing all of the teachings, repeated the Dhamma (Teachings). Meanwhile, Venerable *Upāli* recited the *Vinaya* (Disciplines). Gautama Buddha's teachings consist of the *Tripitaka*, which is divided into three baskets. The *Tripitaka* was fully compiled. The term "Tripitaka" refers to the three baskets, which are separated into three pieces as follows.³

1) The *Vinaya Pitaka* is synonymous with the Baskets of Discipline. The text primarily pertains to the guidelines of behaviour for Monks and Nuns, enabling them to pursue a life of utmost holiness and perfection.

2) The *Sutta Pitaka* is also known as the Baskets of Discourse. The content mostly pertains to the fundamental teachings of the Dhamma, which were delivered to various individuals in various locations.

3) The *Abhidhamma Pitaka* is referred to as the Baskets of Ultimate Doctrine. This text explores the essence of Dhamma, the fundamental truths, and their interconnectedness via the concept of cause and effect.

In here, we focus only *Sutta Pitaka*.

3. SUTTA PITAKA

The *Sutta Pitaka* is a comprehensive compilation of all the complete teachings given by the Buddha. The volume of the *Sutta Pitaka* contains a collection of talks given by esteemed followers of the Buddha, as well as some tales.⁴ Similar to a plumb line guiding carpenters or a thread protecting strung flowers from scattering, *Sutta* serves as a means to clearly elucidate, comprehend, and safeguard the accurate understanding of the Buddha's teachings, preventing any misinterpretation.

(1) *Sīla*, which refers to achieving moral purity by correct action.

(2) *Samādhi* refers to the state of having a pure mind achieved via concentration, specifically through the practice of *Samatha*.

(3) *Paññā*, on the other hand, refers to the state of having pure insight achieved through *Vipassanā* meditation.

The *Sutta Piṭaka* is categorized into five distinct groupings referred to as *Panca Nikāyas*:

(1) *Dīgha Nikāya*: the compilation of lengthy texts.

(2) *Majjhima Nikāya*: the compilation of texts of medium length.

(3) *Samyutta Nikāya*: the compilation of texts organized by topic.

(4) *Anguttara Nikāya*: the compilation of texts arranged according to numerical factors.

(5) *Khuddaka Nikāya*: the compilation of little writings.

4. DĪGHA NIKĀYA

The *Dīgha Nikāya* is a collection in the *Sutta Piṭaka* consisting of thirty-four lengthy discourses delivered by the Buddha. The subject is partitioned into three subdivisions:

(1) The *Sīlakkhanda Vagga* is a chapter that focuses on morality.

² *Dhīgha – Nikāya*, Vols. II, Yangon: Department of Religious Affairs, 1997, p. 16

³ *The Expositor (Aṭṭhasālinī)* (Tr.) Pe Maung Tin, London: PTS, 1976, p. 25.

⁴ *The Expositor (Aṭṭhasālinī)*, Pe Maung Tin, London: PTS, 1976, p. 24.

(2) The *Mahā Vagga* is a huge division chapter.

(3) The *Pāthika Vagga* is a chapter that starts with a lecture on *Pāthika*, the naked ascetic.

1) Silakkhada Vagga: consists of thirteen Suttas that thoroughly discuss several forms of morality. These include minor morality, which is a fundamental form suitable to everyone; medium morality, and major morality, which *Samanas* and *Brāhmanas* primarily practice. Additionally, it addresses the erroneous perspectives that were widespread at that time, including the Brahmin beliefs on sacrifice and caste, as well as other religious practices such as severe self-mortification.

2) Mahā Vagga: consists of 10 Suttas that are very significant in the *Tipiṭaka*. The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* is well renowned since it provides a detailed narrative of the last days and demise of Gautam Buddha, as well as the allocation of his sacred remains. The *Mahāpadāna Sutta*⁵ provides concise narratives of the last seven Buddhas and the biography of the *Vipassī Buddha*. The *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*,⁶ which addresses the four techniques of unwavering awareness and the pragmatic features of Buddhist meditation.

3) Pāthika Vagga: consists of eleven shorter talks that cover various topics. The text discusses the Buddha's refusal to accept the incorrect and extreme practices of asceticism followed by many sects. In addition, they also address the cyclical progression and disintegration of the cosmos, the chronicles of cosmic rulers, and the thirty-two attributes of an exceptional individual. The *Singāla Sutta* is a speech that specifically addresses a young Brahmin and outlines the responsibilities that individuals in human society should fulfil. The last two Suttas, *Saṅgīti* and *Dasuttara*, consist of teachings delivered by the Venerable *Sāriputta*. These teachings consist of categorized lists of doctrinal terminology organized based on their subject matter and number of units. Their composition style deviates from that of the other nine Suttas in the category.

5. MAJJHIMA NIKĀYA

The *Majjhima Nikāya* is a compilation of 152 Suttas, which are medium-length discourses. These Suttas are divided into three volumes called *Paṇṇāsa*. The book *Mūlapaṇṇāsa* covers the first fifty Suttas divided into five *Vagga* (chapters). The second book, *Majjhimapāṇṇāsa*, has the second fifty Suttas similarly divided into five *Vaggas* (chapters). The third book discusses the remaining fifty-two Suttas, which are divided into five *Vaggas* (chapters). *Uppāpaṇṇāsa* refers to a quantity that exceeds fifty.

The *Majjhima Nikāya* is the second compilation of the Buddha's teachings, which may be found in the Sutta Pitaka of the Pali Canon. The term "*Majjhima*" refers to the middle length. This collection of Suttas, known as the *Majjhima Nikāya*, consists of Suttas that are of intermediate length. These Suttas are longer than those in the *Dīgha Nikāya* that comes before it and shorter than the Suttas in the *Samyutta Nikāya* and the *Anguttara Nikāya*, which are the two major collections that follow it. It is also equivalent to the *Madhyama Āgama* discovered in the *Sutta Pitakas* of many Sanskritic early Buddhist schools. These discourses together provide a comprehensive corpus of teachings, including all facets of the Buddha's doctrine.

6. SAMYUTTA NIKAYA

The *Samyutta Nikāya* is a collection of discourses in the *Suttas Pitaka*, consisting of 7762 Suttas of varying lengths, often brief. These Suttas are organized into five primary sections based on their topic matter, following a certain sequence.

- 1) *Sagāthā Vagga*
- 2) *Nidāna Vagga*
- 3) *Khandha Vagga*
- 4) *Salāyatana Vagga*
- 5) *Mahā Vagga*

⁵ *Dīgha Nikāya, Mahāvagga Pāli*, Tr, John D. Ireland, London, PTS, 1994, p. 425.

⁶ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 1984, p. 55.

Each primary chapter, or *Vagga*, is subdivided into fifty-six groupings called *Samyuttas*, which consist of related issues arranged together. The *Samyuttas* are titled based on their respective themes, such as the *Bojjhanga Samyutta*, which focuses on the seven aspects of enlightenment, or they may be named after prominent figures like the Venerable *Sāriputta*, King *Pasenadī Kosala*, or *Sakka*. The *Kosala Samyutta* comprises a collection of teachings centred on King *Pasenadī Kosala*, whereas the *Devatā Samyutta* focuses on celestial beings like *Sakka*, *Indra*, *Brahmā*, and others. Each *Samyutta* is subdivided into parts comprised of individual *Suttas*. The *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*,⁷ a well-recognized text, has the distinction of being the inaugural discourse in the second part of the *Sacca Samyutta Nikāya*.

7. ANGUTTARA NIKĀYA

The *Anguttara Nikāya* is a compilation of 9557 concise *Suttas*, organized into eleven sections called *Nipātas*. Each *Nipāta* is further subdivided into chapters known as *Vagga*, often consisting of 10 *Suttas*. The discourse is organized sequentially, with each *Nipāta* consisting of *Suttas* that discuss different aspects of Dhamma. The *Suttas* start with one item and progressively increase by one until there are eleven things of Dhamma in each *Sutta* of the last *Nipāta*. Therefore, the term “*Anguttara*” signifies a progressive increase by one element. The first *Nipāta*, *Ekaka Nipāta*, consists of individual elements of Dhamma referred to as the Ones in each *Sutta*. The second *Nipāta*, *Duka Nipāta*, comprises two elements of Dhamma in each *Sutta*, known as the two. The final *Nipāta*, *Ekādasaka Nipāta*, consists of *Sutta* containing eleven elements of Dhamma in each, referred to as the eleven.

The *Anguttara Nikāya* is a significant reference work on Buddhist psychology and ethics. It offers a systematic description of all the fundamental aspects related to the theory and application of the Dhamma. The chapter called “*Etadagga Vagga*” in the section “*Ekaka Nipāta*” lists the names of the most prominent disciples in various categories, such as monks, nuns, male lay devotees, and female lay devotees. These individuals have achieved excellence in specific areas of attainment or meritorious activities.

8. KHUDDAKA NIKĀYA

The *Khuddaka Nikāya*, one of the five *Nikāyas*, has the highest number of treatises and the most diverse categories of Dhamma. Despite the literal meaning of “*Khuddaka*” as tiny or small, the substance of this collection is far from insignificant. It encompasses the two main divisions of the *Piṭaka*, namely, the *Vinaya Pitaka* and the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*.

- 1) ***Khuddakapāṭha***: kindness towards all creatures is esteemed as a true Buddhist cult.
- 2) ***Dhammapada***: a compendium of Buddha’s teachings
- 3) ***Udāna***: the profound proclamation of the Buddha
- 4) ***Itivuttaka***: compilation of the Buddha's authorized teachings
- 5) ***Suttanipāta***: details on the societal, financial, and religious state
- 6) ***Vimāna vatthu***: a lyric that provides a vivid depiction of certain heavenly dwellings.
- 7) ***Peta vatthu***: Comprises concise verses that show the conviction in the presence of an afterlife.
- 8) ***Thera gāthā***: a compilation of poetry that expresses the religious doctrines and emotions that were commonly held throughout the Buddhist community.
- 9) ***Therī gāthā***: a compilation of poetry specifically designed for women who are recognized for their intellectual and artistic abilities.
- 10) ***Jātaka***: a collection of stories that recount the former births and existences of the Buddha.
- 11) ***Niddesa***: (consisting of the *Mahā Niddesa* and *Culla Niddesa*) is a kind of textual commentary or gloss.
- 12) ***Paṭisambhidā Magga***: focuses on the transitory nature and inherent suffering of composite entities.
- 13) ***Apādāna***: compilation of poetic tales
- 14) ***Buddhavamsa***: a text that presents the history of the 24 Buddhas in poetry form.

⁷ *Samyutta Nikāya, Mahā Vagga Pāli*, Tr, Ñānamoli Thera, Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 1993, p. 420.

- 15) *Cariyā Piṭaka*: a canonical compilation of stories that serve to illustrate.
- 16) *Nettipakarana*: a manual providing direction
- 17) *Peṭakopadesa*: guidance about the *Tipiṭaka*
- 18) *Milindapañhā*: an inquiry by *Milinda*

The *Nettipakarana* and *Peṭakopadesa* serve as introductory texts to the teachings of Buddhism. These publications provide techniques for interpreting and explaining concepts that lead to understanding the principles of the moral code. *Peṭakopadesa* refers to the guidance provided for the *Tipiṭaka*. The original material comes straight from the *Sutta Piṭaka*. The *Milindapañhā*, composed in the Sutta style, presents a conversation between the Indo-Greek ruler Menander (known as *Milinda* in Pāli) and the *Thera Nāgasena*. This dialogue sheds significant insight into key aspects of Buddhism. These three volumes are included in the *Khuddaka Nikāya* of the Burmese *Tipiṭaka*, but the first two are also included in the Sinhalese printed copy. The list adheres to Myanmar customs.

Essentially, the *Sutta Pitaka* comprises the fundamental teachings of early Buddhism. It included the whole of Buddhist thought, including both morality and the spiritual journey. Gaining a profound comprehension of the *Sutta Pitaka* will enable us to accurately comprehend the teachings of Buddha and the path to enlightenment.

9. THE SIGNIFICANT OF SUTTA IN THE TRIPITAKA:

The *Sutta Pitaka*, a crucial part of the *Tripitaka* in *Theravada* Buddhism, has a major function in safeguarding, conveying, and clarifying the teachings of Gautama Buddha. The Suttas, which consist of the Buddha's teachings given during his lifetime, possess great importance in several crucial aspects:

Preservation of Buddha's Words: The *Sutta Pitaka* is a comprehensive collection of the Buddha's verbal teachings, carefully preserved via an oral tradition prior to being transcribed into written records. This collection functions as a priceless archive, guaranteeing the authenticity and uninterrupted transmission of the Buddha's teachings over successive generations.

Foundational Philosophical Teachings: The *Sutta Pitaka* contains detailed explanations of essential Buddhist principles, including the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and the notion of dependent origination. These discourses serve as the fundamental basis of Buddhist philosophy, providing a profound understanding of the essence of suffering, the route to freedom, and the development of wisdom and moral behaviour.

Guidance for Ethical Living: The Suttas provide pragmatic instructions on moral conduct, clearly outlining principles and rules that direct adherents in their day-to-day existence. The teachings cover ethical principles, attentiveness, empathy, and appropriate conduct, providing a structure for living a virtuous and balanced life.

Meditative Practices and Insight: The *Sutta Pitaka* contains comprehensive guidelines for numerous meditation methods and contemplative activities. These teachings provide practitioners with instructions on cultivating focus, mindfulness, and insight, which in turn facilitate the development of a profound comprehension of the mind and its connection to the fundamental nature of reality.

Diversity of Teachings: The Suttas include a broad spectrum of subjects, catering to the varied requirements and abilities of people. The *Sutta Pitaka* provides teachings that are suited for individuals at different stages of spiritual growth, ranging from those seeking moral direction to experienced practitioners on the path to enlightenment.

Historical and Cultural Insights: The *Sutta Pitaka* contains insights into the historical, cultural, and social settings of ancient India. The abundance of context enriches the comprehension of the Buddha's teachings, offering a setting that allows for a deep knowledge of the eternal principles of Buddhism.

The *Sutta Pitaka* functions as a complete manual for Buddhist practitioners, facilitating a profound comprehension of the journey towards liberation, moral behaviour, and the meaning of life. The continuing value of this text resides in its ability to elucidate the deep knowledge of Gautama Buddha, providing a timeless guide for people seeking enlightenment.

10. CONCLUSION

The *Sutta Pitaka* is a fundamental component of the *Tripitaka*, encapsulating the core principles of *Theravada* Buddhist doctrines and functioning as an enduring manual for followers. This collection serves a vital role in spreading the fundamental precepts of Buddhism throughout generations by carefully preserving the Buddha's spoken words. The Suttas provide a comprehensive framework for comprehending the human situation and the route to liberation via their deep insights and the essence of life. These discourses include both academic knowledge and practical advice for leading an ethical life, including moral qualities, mindfulness, and compassionate behaviour.

The *Sutta Pitaka* accommodates a wide range of readers, catering to the requirements of both novices and experienced practitioners. The teachings of this practice about meditation and contemplation aid in the cultivation of focus and understanding, promoting a comprehensive approach to spiritual advancement. In addition to its spiritual importance, the *Sutta Pitaka* offers valuable historical and cultural knowledge, allowing us to get a deeper understanding of the environment in which the Buddha resided and imparted his teachings. The abundance of context enriches comprehension, allowing practitioners to establish a wider connection with the teachings.

Essentially, the *Sutta Pitaka* serves as a tangible proof of the lasting significance of the Buddha's profound knowledge. As a beacon of inspiration and direction, it consistently sheds light on the journey towards enlightenment, moral behaviour, and a deep comprehension of the essence of being. The relevance of this resides not just in its historical origins but also in its ability to deeply connect with and provide guidance to people on their spiritual path in the modern world.

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