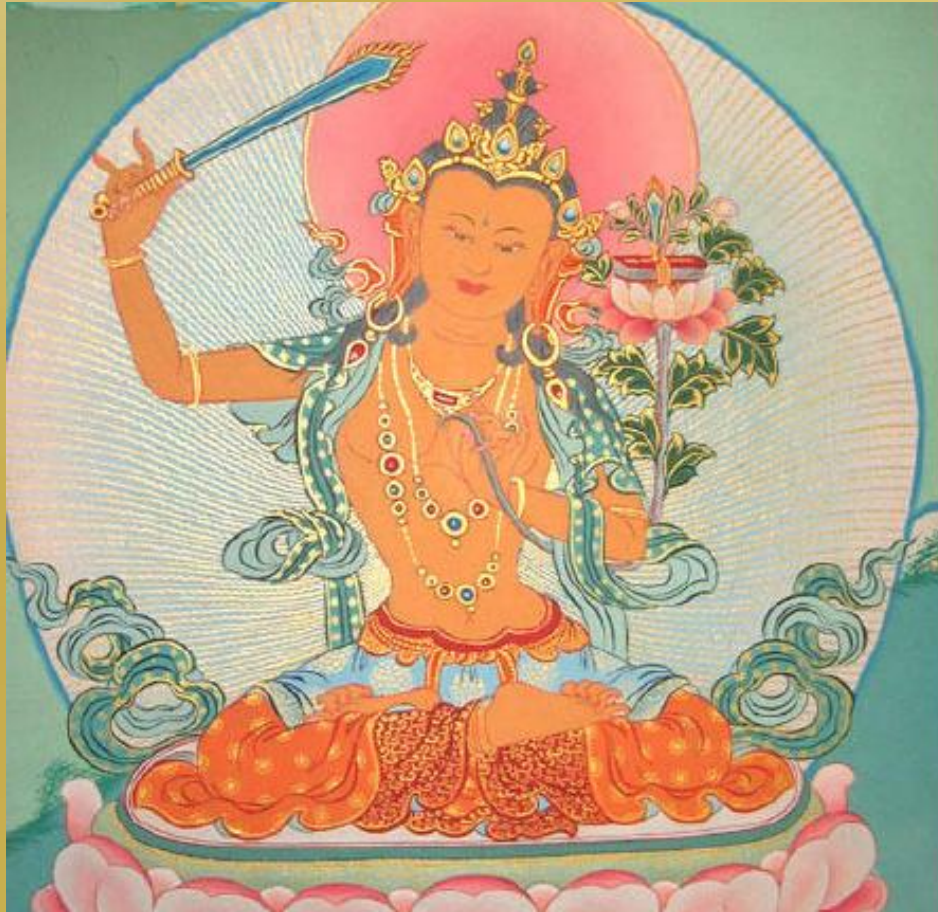


Buddhism and Literature in South Asia

ACCBAL 15W1 – Winter 2015



**Mon 10:00 AM–
12:30 PM**

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Overview of Syllabus

Week 1: Introduction to Buddhist Literature, Jāataka Tales

Week 2: Indian Buddhist Sūtra Literature

Week 3: Life story of the Buddha in Indian poetry

Week 4: Indian Buddhist Poetry and Drama

Week 5: Tibetan Buddhist Inspirational poetry

Week 6: Buddhist Biography and Hagiography in Tibet

Week 7: Modern Buddhist Biographies: the 14th Dalai Lama's Autobiography

Week 8: Buddhist-inspired fiction in the 20th century

What can learners expect of the instructor?

- She will answer emails and communication about the course promptly, respectfully, and efficiently.
- She will answer questions about the material clearly, honestly, and to the best of her capacity, admitting when she does not know the answer.
- She will facilitate a learning environment that is collaborative and respects and supports the diversities of the group.

What does the instructor expect of the learners?

- For learners to find something in the readings for each class that either puzzles you, interests you, or bothers you in some way. We all have different reactions to readings—I want to hear what interests *you*!
- For learners to feel safe communicating their needs and interests regarding the material or course goals.

Think, Pair, and Share:

1. What expectations do you have for either yourselves or the instructor?

2. What expectations do you have about the class?

3. What motivates you to want to learn more about Buddhism? Literature in South Asia? How can your instructor facilitate this?

Week 1: Introduction to Buddhist Literature, *Jāataka* Tales



Slab with the Shibi Jataka, Gandhara,
2nd–3rd century AD, British Museum

Why ‘Buddhism’ and ‘Literature’?

- Why would a class exploring ‘Buddhism’ and ‘Literature’ together be interesting or important?
- Can you think of other examples of a religion influencing literature?
- Is this important? How does literature influence or impact us?

Why Buddhism in South Asia?

Buddhism and South Asian Literature
have a unique relationship
historically....

As we will see, many ‘genres’ of Indian
literature were highly influenced by
Buddhist authors and Buddhist-flavored
works

So, what do we mean by 'South Asia'?

For the purposes of this class we will consider 'South Asia' to include: India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Tibet.

The Literature we look at is similarly diverse: written in Pali, Sanskrit and Tibetan

But what is Buddhism anyway?

Historically speaking, 'Buddhism' began after the birth of the Buddha in Ancient India (what is modern-day Pakistan)...

- **624-560 BCE: Birth of Siddhartha Gautama**
- **589-525 BCE: Enlightenment of the Buddha in Bodhgaya** (at age 36). During the full-moon night of July, the Buddha delivers his first discourse near Varanasi, introducing the world to the Four Noble Truths and commencing a 45-year career of teaching the religion he called "*Dhamma-vinaya*".
- **544-480 BCE: Passing away of Gautama Buddha.**

**To understand the basic ‘tenets’ of
Indian Buddhism, we need to
understand what is ‘suffering’:**

Four Noble Truths

1. There is suffering, i.e. *dukkha* (pain, anxiety, unsatisfaction, etc.)
2. Suffering has a cause
3. Since suffering has a cause, there must be a cessation of suffering
4. There is the path leading to the cessation of suffering (the Eightfold Path)

What is 'suffering' in Buddhism?

Dukkha is commonly explained according to three different categories:

- The obvious physical and mental suffering associated with birth, growing old, illness and dying.
- The anxiety or stress of trying to hold onto things that are constantly changing.
- A basic unsatisfactoriness pervading all forms of existence, because all forms of life are changing, impermanent and without any inner core or substance.

Three types of suffering common in Buddhism throughout South Asia

- **Suffering of suffering:** (Pali: *dukkha-dukkha*; Skt: *duhkha-duhkhata*;)
Pain, suffering of ordinary activities; suffering from ageing, illness and dying, etc.
- **Suffering of change:** (Pali: *viparinama-dukkha*; Skt: *vipariṇāma-duhkha*;)
Suffering arising from the anxiety or stress of trying to hold onto what is desirable; the frustration of not getting what you want.
- **Suffering of conditioned existence:** (Pali: *sankhara-dukkha*; Skt: *samskara-duhkha*;)
The fact that suffering is pervasive; it exists everywhere. The deepest most subtle level of suffering)

What are Buddhist practices for eliminating 'suffering' ?

Ultimately, suffering is considered to be mental. Thus the way to eradicate suffering is through practices that 'fix' the mind:

- Since suffering is partially based on intellectual ignorance of reality, philosophical inquiry is a valid means to eradicate suffering
- Meditation!

Meditation as a way to eliminate suffering?

- Meditation (Pali: *jhana*) is considered to be an essential tool for developing insight into the nature of suffering. Many Buddhists believe that without the insight gained from meditation practice, one will not be able to clearly see reality and hence eliminate suffering.
- We'll look at different Buddhist meditation practices later!

Eightfold Path

(i.e. the path to the cessation of suffering)

1. **Right Understanding** (*Samma ditthi*)
2. **Right Thought** (*Samma sankappa*)
3. **Right Speech** (*Samma vaca*)
4. **Right Action** (*Samma kammanta*)
5. **Right Livelihood** (*Samma ajiva*)
6. **Right Effort** (*Samma vayama*)
7. **Right Mindfulness** (*Samma sati*)
8. **Right Concentration** (*Samma samadhi*)

What are some qualities that Buddhists strive to nourish?

Four Immeasurables (*Brahma-vihara-s*)

- Loving-Kindness
 - Compassion
- Sympathetic Joy
 - Equanimity

Practiced through specific meditation practices and eventually assimilated into one's daily action and perception

→ Considered to be antidotes to negative mental states

Some questions to ponder:

So what are Buddhists in India doing with Literature?

What kinds of literature are they producing?

How does Buddhism spread throughout South Asia?

Spread of Buddhism within India: The legacy of King Asoka

(Gupta period in India)

297 BCE: King Asoka (274-236 BCE) converted to Buddhism; Buddhism developed from small local group to state religion.

Asoka allegedly sent missionaries to **Sri Lanka** (his son Mahindra), **Kanara, Karnataka, Kashmir, Himalaya region, Burma, Afghanistan and even Egypt, Macedonia and Cyrene.**

Buddhism Spreads south To Sri Lanka

- **240 BCE Sri Lanka:** Ven. Mahinda establishes the Mahavihara (Great Monastery) of Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka. The Vibhajjavadin community living there becomes known as the **Theravadins**. Mahinda's sister, Ven. Sanghamitta, arrives in Sri Lanka with a cutting from the original Bo tree, and establishes the first order of nuns (bhikkhuni-sangha) in Sri Lanka.

94 BC Sri Lanka: 4th Buddhist Council (acc. to Theravadins) at Cave Aloka in Malaya district - see also 2nd Century India for another '4th Council'.

- **35 BCE Sri Lanka** (or 100BCE?): King Vattagamani orders the Buddhist teachings (Theravada canon) to be committed to writing.

‘Northern’ Vs. ‘Southern’ schools of Buddhism

The geographically-based terms ‘**Northern schools**’ and ‘**Southern schools**’ are usefully neutral ways of distinguishing between two general trends in the development of Buddhism in India and its spread outside the Indian subcontinent:

Southern Schools	Northern Schools
Traditions in modern-day Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) , Thailand, Burma, Laos, Cambodia	Traditions in modern-day China, Tibet, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Nepal, Bhutan
Based in Pāli textual traditions	Based in Sanskrit textual traditions
sometimes referred to as <i>Theravāda</i>	Sometimes referred to as <i>Mahāyāna</i>

Literary activity in India

- Buddhism began in India ~400BCE where it prospered, developed, and remained quite active until 11th-13th century CE (Mongol invasions of India)
- Much of these first 1,000 years of Buddhism's history in India coincided with a time when India's literary productivity more generally was rapidly growing. The Golden age of Classical Sanskrit Literature, for instance dates from roughly 3rd to 8th centuries CE. Indian literary production saw a late bloom in the 11th century before declining after 1100 CE

(Valmiki) *Rāmāyaṇa* : 5th/4th century BCE – 2nd Century BCE

Mahābhārata : compiled ~400BCE through 4th century CE

Aśvaghoṣa's works : ~1st-2nd century CE

Kālidāsa's works: ~5th Century CE

*What forms / genres of Indian literature
existed during this time?*

*How did Buddhism contribute to
Literature in India?*

Traditional Indian six-fold classification of “literature”(*belles lettres*)

- A. Drama (*nāṭaka*)
- B. Ornate epic (*sargabandha* “poetry [divided into] chapters or cantos”, also called *mahākāvya* “great ornate epic”)
- C. Compositions in verse (*anibaddha* or *muktaka* “isolated stanzas”, and *khaṇḍakāvya* “short poems (without chapter-division)”)
- D. Mixed forms (*campū*)
- E. Biography (*ākhyāyikā* “report” usually dealing with living or recently deceased persons)
- F. Novel (*kathā* “fictitious story” – admitted as subsection of *ākhyāyikā*)

Buddhist Contribution to Indian Literature

1. Many or almost all genres of *belles lettres* (formal literature) in India have its oldest specimens in Buddhist literature.
2. Buddhist literature contains many genres that have not been described by the poetic theoreticians) of India.
3. Sanskrit treatises on poetry, such as Bhāmaha's *Ornamentation of Poetry* and the first chapter of Daṇḍin's *Mirror of Poetry (Kāvyaadarśa)* describe literary genres (but only very generally) → we have to look at literary examples for classification

Examples of Buddhist contribution to Indian 'literature'

A. Works in prose

B. Verse compositions

C. Mixed style



The battle of Kurukshetra, folio from the Mahabharata.

Examples of Buddhist contribution to Indian Lit

A. Works in prose

Prose narrations (rare); e.g. some tales in the Avadāna literature (*Avadānaśataka*, *Karmaśataka*, *Divyāvadāna*) or in the *Vinayavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivādins*

~Which we will not get a chance to read for this
class ☹ ~

Examples of Buddhist contributions to Indian Lit

B. Verse compositions

- 1. Ornate epic (*sargabandha*)
 - 1a. Primarily poetic compositions like *Buddhacarita*, etc.
 - 1b. Philosophical poems like *Pāramitāsamāsa* or *Bodhicaryāvatāra*
 - 1c. Verse epics like the *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā* or the *Mañicūḍajātaka*
- 2. Hymns (*stotra*); many sub-types
- 3. Sermons (*kathā*, *parikathā*); a great variety of forms
- 4. Epistles (*lekha*); a great variety of forms
- 5. Moral maxims (*nīti*)
- 6. Riddles (*prahelikā*)
- 7. Metrical exercises (*chandaḥśāstroḍāharāṇa*)

From Michael Hahn, “The Buddhist Contribution to the Indian Belles Lettres” (455–471)



*The Story of King
Mandhatar; The Story of
King Candraprabha; The
Tale of the Island of
Vadaradvipa*, Painting from
an Avadana Kalpalata Jataka
Series

Eastern Tibet, Kham region,
18th century



C. Mixed style

1. Drama (*nāṭaka*)
2. The elaborate form of Buddhist legends (*Jātakamālā*)
3. Sermons (*kathā*, *parikathā*)
4. Epistles (*lekha*)

From Michael Hahn, “The Buddhist Contribution to the Indian Belles Lettres” (455–471)

Bhutanese painted thangka of the Jatakas, 18th-19th Century, Phajoding Gonpa, Thimphu, Bhutan

What is a *Jātaka* Tale?

“A Jataka is a story about a birth, and this collection of tales is about the repeated births— and deaths—of the Bodhisatta, the being destined to become the present Buddha in his final life.

Written in Pali, the language of the Theravada Buddhist canon, the tales comprise one of the largest and oldest collections of stories in the world.

The earliest sections, the verses, are considered amongst the very earliest part of the Pali tradition and date from the fifth century BCE; the later parts were incorporated during the period up to the third century CE. Partly because they arose at a time when literature was transmitted orally and partly because storytelling tends to extemporize, the stories were shaped and developed over this period before the final version became settled.”

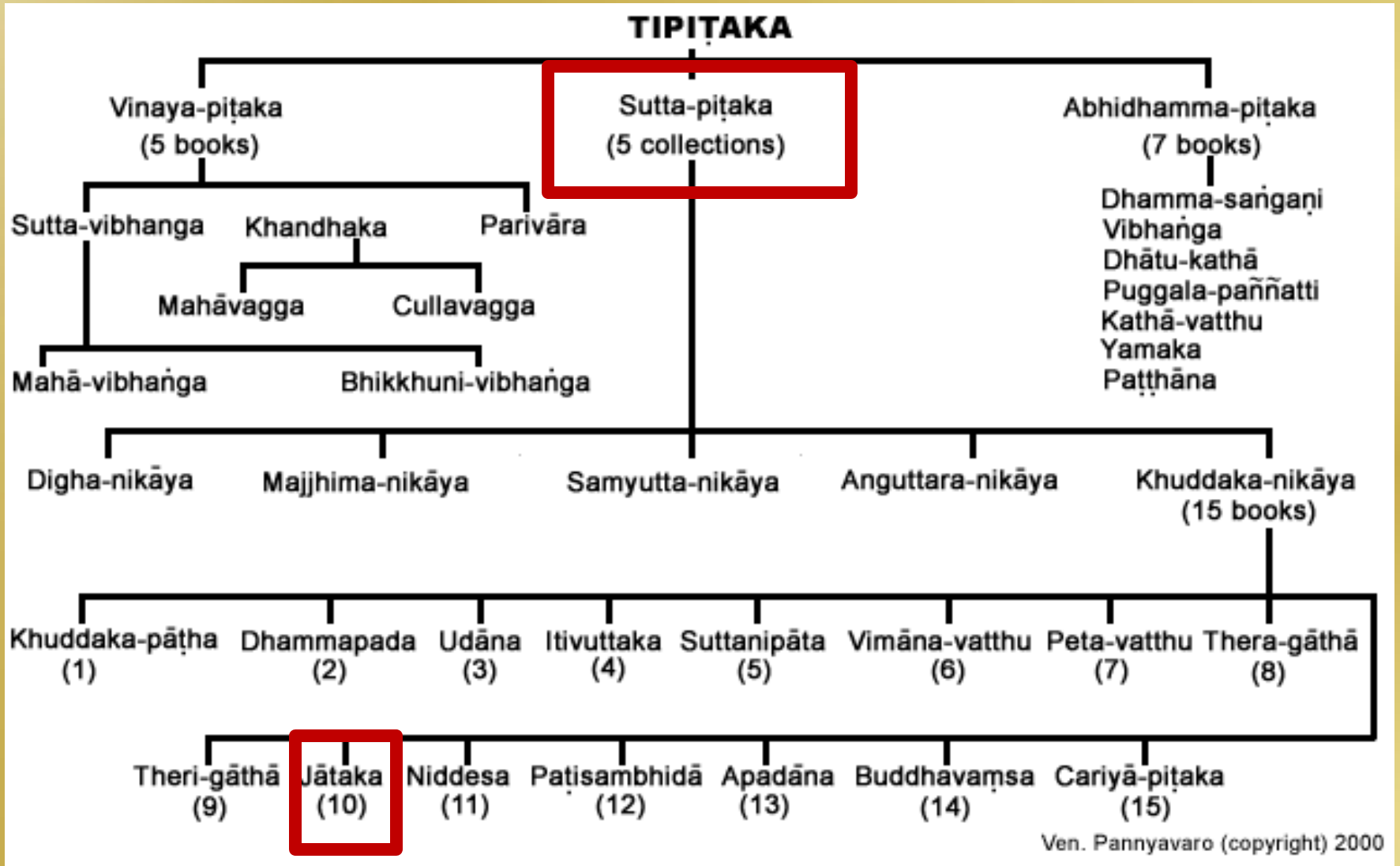
From Shaw, Sarah (2006-06-08). THE JATAKAS: Birth Stories of Bodhisatta (Penguin Classics) (Kindle Locations 182-197). Penguin Books Ltd. Kindle Edition.

What is their purpose?

“The 547 stories all evolve from one vow: the determination made by the Bodhisatta , at the feet of the last Buddha, Dipankara, to postpone his own enlightenment and freedom from the endless round of existences until he is ready to become a Buddha himself and teach others.”

According to one Jataka: “in the many aeons when there is no Buddha to teach the world—for according to early Buddhism such teachers occur only rarely in human history—the Bodhisatta tries to build the strengths, resources and experience ready for his final birth. These endeavours form the basis of the Jataka stories and confer the unusual abilities that make him in his last life not just an arahat, an awakened one, but a Buddha, capable of leaving a teaching behind for others. In the time of the Buddha and for the period in which his teaching (sasana) lasts, others may follow the path that he has left for them.”

The Pali 'Canon'



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Jataka-mala (*Garland of Jatakas*) by Aryasura (200 CE)

a Sanskrit rendering of only thirty-four Jātakas ascribed to Ārya Śūra. “While the Pāli Jātaka is written in the plainest prose style, the work of Ārya Śūra has higher pretensions, and is in fact a kind of kāvya, a work of art. It was used by the ‘Northern Buddhists’, while the Pāli Jātaka belongs to the Canon of the Southern Buddhists.

Jataka-s are stories that have captured Buddhist's imagination throughout the world

The mythological white hare making the elixir of immortality on the Moon, from Chinese mythology. Embroidered onto 18th-century Imperial Chinese robes.



Thai - Vessantara Jataka, Chapter 9
between circa 1920 and circa 1940 (Bangkok)



Bhutanese
painted [thangka](#)
of the Jatakas,
18th-19th
Century,
Phajoding
Gonpa, Thimphu,
Bhutan

The Four Harmonious Friends

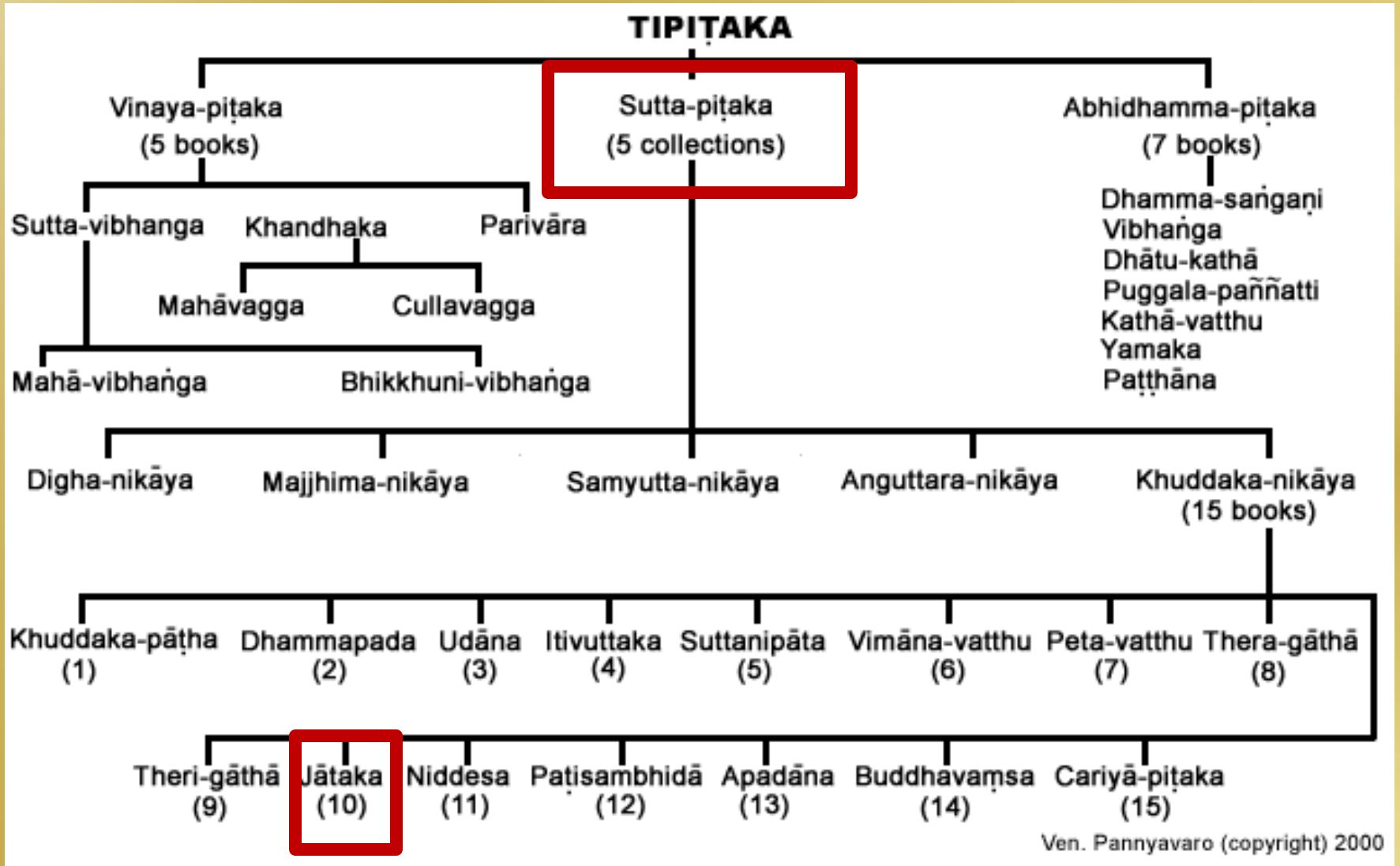
(Bird, Hare,
Monkey &
Elephant)



For story, see:

<http://fpmt.org/mandala/archives/mandala-for-2014/january/the-four-harmonious-friends//>

The Pali 'Canon'



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*Next Week in Buddhism and Literature in
South Asia:*

***Sūtra-s* and *Sutta-s* - Stories of the
Buddha and his teachings**