

THE DEVELOPMENT OF BUDDHOLOGY IN THE
EARLY MAHAYANA AND ITS RELATION
TO THE PALI NIKAYAS

by

Tilak Kariyavasam (B.A.Hons.)

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
University of Lancaster

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Abstract

As a general pattern, diversities in religious systems emerge, from the earliest times, around the personality of the founder. This, at least, is true in relation to Buddhism in as much as many of the differences among Buddhists originated about the Buddha, his personality, his mission, his wisdom, his place in the cosmos etc.

To the Buddhists of the Pali Nikayas, the Buddha was a human being and a compassionate teacher who encouraged people to liberation. However, this simple portrait did not suffice the early Mahayana Buddhists, and so they made him into supernatural being who appeared in human form for the benefit of human beings. Having achieved this, they developed a whole system of Buddhology which is rich in content and religious commitment.

The Buddha's wisdom or Prajna, which was the understanding of causality and the Noble Truths for the early Buddhist, became an elaborate and complex concept in the hands of early Mahayana Buddhists. Prajna, then, was explained in relation to the understanding of Sunyata. A complete literature is compiled in order to describe and admire this new concept of Prajna. The Omniscience of the Buddha is also a theme connected with this. Although the Buddha was not proclaimed as omniscient in the Pali canon, in Mahayana Buddhist literature the claim to his omniscience is clearly stated, but understood in relation to Sunyata.

Upayakausalya is the axiomatic concept which is used to bring almost all new development into an organic whole. It explained the worldly existence of the Buddha and his teachings of Sravaka and Pratyeka-Buddhayana in terms of skill in means. The superiority of Bodhisattvayana over Hinayana was thus achieved and the concept of Ekayana was established.

The concept of Kaya is another line along which Buddhism developed beyond the Pali canon. In this doctrine, the Dharma or Truth itself was identified with the Buddha. The appearance of the Buddha in time and space was explained as the different Kayas of the Buddha.

Since the Buddha became a great compassionate super being, the field in which he was doing his great work was also to be expanded. For this concept of the Buddha-field was developed. The Buddha thus becomes a Super being working for the salvation of innumerable beings.

Acknowledgements

The development of the ideas in this essay set out here have their origin in a longstanding interest of mine in Buddhism, an interest greatly fostered by the opportunity of working in the Department of Buddhism at the University of Sri Lanka (Vidyodaya Campus). The research for the dissertation however was carried out under the encouragement and much appreciated supervision of Professor Ninian Smart at the University of Lancaster. Thanks also are due to Mr Michael Pye of the Department of Religious Studies at Lancaster both for his encouragement in undertaking this study and his help in various ways.

I would also like to express my appreciation to Mr Nik Macleod who kindly assisted me by reading the entire manuscript and gave many valuable suggestions to improve the study. I should also like to thank Sister Monique Donnofoy, Miss Eleanor Nannestad and Mrs Abhaya Sankar who have translated important works on Buddhism from the French for me.

There are many more friends and colleagues who have been helpful in various ways. It is however impossible to mention them all by name. However I would like to thank them specially. Finally I should like to thank Miss Helen Moore for her invaluable help in improving my English while in England and Mrs Deirdre Grant, the secretary of the Department of Religious Studies, whose help and kindness over the years has been much appreciated.

Abbreviations

A	Anguttara Nikaya
AA	Anguttara Nikaya Atthakatha
Asta	Astasahasrika Prajnaparamita
Astadas	Astadasahasrika Prajnaparamita
Bhoga.gita	Bhagavat Gita
Bo.Bu	Bodhisattva Bhumi
Buddhist Theory	Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge
D.	Digha Nikaya
DA	Digha Nikaya Atthakatha
Divya	Divyavadana
J	Jataka
JOTS	Journal of the Pali Text Society
K	Kathavatthu
Lal	Lalitavistara
Lanka	Lankavatara Sutra
M	Majjhima Nikaya
MA	Majjhima Nikaya Atthakatha
MK	Madhyamika Karika
Mand.up	Mandukya Upanisad
Mahava	Mahavamsa
Mahva	Mahavastu
Milinda	Milindapanha
NBPS	Nalanda-Devanagari-Pali-Series
Natti	Nettipakarana
Panca	Pancavimsatisahasrika Prajnaparamita

Puggala	Puggala Pennatti
Pa	Patinambhidanagga
S	Samyutta Nikaya
Sad.pu	Saddharma Pundarika
SB	Sacred Books of the Buddhist
SBE	Sacred Books of the East
SIB	Simon Newavitarne Request
Sn	Sutta Nipata
Sutra	Mahayana Sutralankara
Thera	Theragata
Vajra	Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita
Vij.Ma.Tri	Vijnaptinatrata Sidhi Trisika
Vism	Visuddhisagga

Introduction

Buddhological study is important for an understanding of the gradual development of Buddhism within its various sects. Of the two main traditions in Buddhism, Sthaviravad (Hinayana) and Mahayana, the latter played a very important part throughout the centuries in analysing the doctrine of the Buddha in so many ways, while the former claimed that, as the earliest sect, it alone was the protector of the real words of the Buddha.

In their analysis of concepts of the Buddha, Mahayanists explained the Buddha as the one important universal character, who from time to time emerges in the world to bring understanding to mankind. This appearance is the greatest incident which can happen in the world. Emergence of the Buddha in the world is connected with the concept of the Bodhisattva. A Bodhisattva strives to become a Buddha for innumerable ages before finally achieving Buddhahood. We have studied in detail the difference between the Buddha and Arhant. In the early period of Buddhism there was not much difference between an Arhant and the Buddha, except that the Buddha was the founder of the path, and the Arhant was the follower of the Buddha. The concept of the Bodhisattva was one of the major developments of the Mahayanists, together with the popularisation of Buddhism. We have not devoted a special part of our study to the concept of the Bodhisattva, though from time to time it is mentioned. The Bodhisattva concept has been thoroughly examined by Har Dayal

in his study: 'The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature'.

In the first chapter of this study an attempt has been made to identify clearly the different categories involved in the concept of the Buddha, a process necessary to the understanding of the development of the concept of the Buddha. Buddha, Pratyeka-Buddha and Sravaka are the main categories of the concept of the Buddha.

In the second chapter an analysis of knowledge (jnana) and insight (prajna) is conducted in order to clarify the difference between the knowledge of the Buddha and that of the Arhant. Following the analysis of knowledge given in the Nikayas, the Arhant and the Buddha have three types of knowledge: Pubb-nivasanussati (recollection of previous existence), Dibbacakkhu (divine-eye) and Asava-kkhaya (destruction of defiling impulses). Through out the Pali Tripitaka we can find the development of conceptions of some aspects of the knowledge of the Buddha, corresponding to the greater elaboration of what is involved in the state of the Buddha. In this chapter a further attempt is made to study the knowledge related to the spiritual path. Details given in this chapter rely upon the Abhidharmakosa, the only text we can trace about the Sarvastivada explanation.

In the third chapter we attempt to elucidate the concept of omniscience, the later addition to the Buddha's attributes.

We have examined in detail the various ways the Patisaambhidamagga tries to explain omniscience, and attempted a possible explanation of the concept of omniscience, according to the Nikayas. An attempt is also made to combine this explanation with the Patisaambhidamagga. The concept of omniscience is studied in the early Mahayana context, and connection sought with the Sunyata theory.

In the fourth chapter the skills of the Buddha are examined. He used the skills to teach the doctrine to mankind. This Upayakausalya concept is important to an understanding of the benefits the Buddha brought to the world. As his doctrine is difficult to understand, Buddha uses skill to make these difficult matters comprehensible to ordinary men. However, in order to achieve Buddhahood the Bodhisattva also needs skills & without skills the Bodhisattva could never realise Nirvana. According to the early Mahayana texts, Prajna and Upayakausalya are important to the achievement of Buddhahood. Therefore in later time Upayakausalya came to be regarded as a Paramita (perfection).

In the fifth chapter an attempt is made to study the Kaya doctrine in relation to the development of the Buddhology. Throughout different periods of explanation of the Buddha's existence in the world, Buddhahood became an abstract concept. According to the Sad dharmapundarika Sutra, Dipankara Buddha and other previous Buddhas are creations of the one original Buddha.

The Lankavatara Sutra explains that original Buddha as Dharma Buddha, and sometimes it is referred as Dharmakaya. This is a new development of Buddhology: the uniting of the Buddha and the Dharma. The question then arises how the Buddha could appear in the human world. The answer to this question is the Nirvana Buddha form. But for beings who are spiritually developed another Buddha form is mentioned, that of Niyanda or Vipaka-Buddha. In this chapter a study is made of how these forms of the Buddha are related to each other and to the services performed by the Buddha for the people.

In the sixth chapter, the Buddhaksetra concept is analysed in order to understand the power of the Buddha in relation to the cosmos. This concept of the Buddhaksetra shows the power of the Buddha to purify beings, and thus that the Buddha is the person who is responsible for the beings in the world.

Technical Remarks:-

A few remarks of technical nature will, I think, help the reader to follow the ideas in the dissertation more closely. First, in translating Pali and Sanskrit passages into English, I have used several translations - The Pali Text Society translations, Conze's translations of the Prajnaparamita, Suzuki's translation of Lankavatara, and others - making alterations of my own where I have considered it helpful. Second, I have used Sanskrit terms throughout my thesis with English equivalents and tried to supply

Pali equivalents as well, when necessary. While I have used Sanskrit terms I have nevertheless converted them into Pali equivalents when referring to the Pali texts. In the case of certain foreign terms that are used repeatedly in certain chapters I have refrained from the usual emphasising. Third, my use of L. de La Vallee Poussin's 'L'Abhidharmakosa De Vasubandhu' is combined with reference to the actual text of Abhidharmakosa as well. (In most of the places references made are to the Sanskrit text). Fourth, in using the secondary sources I have abridged the titles of the books details of which are given in the Bibliography.

CHAPTER I

THE CONCEPT OF THE BUDDHA

The literal meaning of the word 'Buddha' is 'One who has understood'. This word was not a name of Siddhartha Gautama but rather a title which came to be used as a name. Indian history shows that the concept of 'Buddha-hood' was known in India before the birth of Siddhartha Gautama. This 'Buddha' concept was dominant in Indian society and gave rise to many religious and philosophical positions. In the 6th century B.C. everybody expected to see a Buddha in India during their life time. Reference to the Mahaparinibbana Sutta supports this -

The Wanderer Subhadda went to the Buddha, just before the great decease because he thought; "This have I heard from fellow wanderers old and well stricken in years, teachers and disciples, when they said: 'Sometimes and full seldom go Tathagatas appear in the world, the Able Awakened Ones'.¹ Kings gave much freedom to saints and Wanderers and looked after them - in fact rulers were obliged by law to protect these people.² As a result of the general sense of expectation a lot of religious leaders emerged and claimed themselves to be teachers.³ Such religious leaders had vast numbers of followers. Such was the custom in India, that one who was popular as a religious leader normally had a

1. D.iii.p.149.

2. Ibid.p.75.

3. Ibid.pp.47-ff, M,ii.p.32, S.i.p.68,