



The Origin of the Bodhisattva

Ven. Tejavanta (Researcher)
Dr. Champalal (Bhante Chandrakitti)
Swami Vivekand Subharti University
Meerut, U.P, India

Introduction

When we are talking about Buddhism so we have to talk about concept of Bodhisattva also, Bodhisattva is stage of follow the perfection and follow path of Buddhahood. Many peoples are following Theravada, Vajrayana and Mahayana Buddhism. As we known, there is currently not the consensus among scholars about the chronological of the *Bodhisattva* doctrine. N. Dutt gives that be around the 2nd or 1st century B.C. Nakamura and A.K Warder have maintained that *Bodhisattva* doctrine might have come into existence probably towards the beginning of Christian era.

The Encyclopedia of Religion¹ holds that the concept of *Bodhisattva* apparently emerged between the beginning of the first century B.C and the middle of the 1st century AD. Such are several representative ideas on the chronology of *Bodhisattva* doctrine accepted and used by scholars. It may, however, be supposed that these views actually refer to the outburst of the worship of *Bodhisattva* ideal assignable to the development of *Bodhisattva* doctrine philosophy in *Mahāyāna*.

The concept of *Bodhisattva* as depicted in the *Majjhima Nikāyas* compiled around the fourth and third centuries B.C.² The admission of *Siddhārtha Gotama* of being a *Bodhisattva* before enlightenment should be taken to be a simple statement of the *Bodhisattva* ideal in the *Pāli Nikāya*: “before awakening, while I was still the *Bodhisattva*...”³ In this, we meet with the idea of the transform development of the *Arahant* ideal to the *Bodhisattva* ideal. The central conception in early Buddhism is interpreted by Th. Stherbatsky as the

concept of the plurality of ultimate element. The Central conception of *Mahāyāna* is there relatively. The *Buddha* had reiterated again and again, that one should strive to save the other beings, as it is the *Bodhisattva* ideal. In *Mahāyāna*, we accept the *Bodhisattva* ideal instead of the objective of the *Arahant*. For it is in *Mahāyāna*, indeed, that by following the practices of the *Mahāyāna* it is possible to transport the entire sentient world to Buddha-hood.

Supported by new converts and by many *Abhidharma* Buddhists to whom the revisionist position appealed, *Mahāyāna* spread rapidly throughout India. At about the beginning of the first century A.D., scriptures based on *Mahāyāna* principles began appearing in a swelling stream that included a group of texts of various lengths called the Perfection of Wisdom *Sūtra* (*Prajñāparamitā Sūtras*), the *Vimalakīrtinirdesa Sūtra*, the Flower Garland *Sūtra* (*Avataṃsaka Sūtra*) and The Lotus *Sūtra* (*Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra*)... All destined to become great religious classics. Though these *sūtras* are presented as having been preached by *Sakya muni* himself, the oldest of them could have been written no earlier than about 450 years after his death. It is impossible to know who the authors were, but they were no doubt devout Buddhists convinced that their writings revealed the Buddha's true message. With the *Mahāyāna* four points were prominent: (1) They were progressive and affirmative (2) Whereas the *Hīnayāna* developed with the Order as the center, the *Mahāyāna* concentrated rather upon the individual. (3) While the *Hīnayāna* laid the greatest stress upon the *Tripitaka* (*Tipitaka*), the *Mahāyāna* was content to propagate the Buddha's fundamental teaching wherever



found. Compared with them, the *Hīnayānists* were both formal and systematic in their scholastic orthodoxy. (4) Whereas *Hīnayāna* was a forest or mendicant denunciative way, while *Mahāyāna* not excluding this feature, wished to make the Buddhist life open to all, priest and layman alike. With it, the ideal became not the *Arahant* bent upon his own salvation but the *Bodhisattva* to which all may aspire. The *Bodhisattva* takes a vow to attain perfect knowledge and to save all sentient beings. This was remains the most important of many important points in *Mahāyāna*.

The kernel of *Mahāyāna* is deliverance for all, for all stand in the relationship, which is causation, and mind is the origin of all causation. Yet mind, *Buddha*, and beings are one. The real object of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism is to obtain enlightenment, to get rid of delusion, and to benefit others without hope of reward. *Bodhi*, *Bodhicitta*, *Bodhisattva*, *Pāramitā*(*pāramī*) are the words most frequently met with in *Mahāyāna* literature. When these are established, the notion of the vow (*Prāṇidhāna*) is inevitable. Maybe, because of it, Sir. C. Eliot ⁴ also stated that two conspicuous features of *Mahāyāna* were the worship of *Bodhisattvas* and the idealist philosophy.

According to Kogen Mizuno the history of Indian Buddhism may be divided in detail with five periods as below: (1) The age of primitive Buddhism, which lasted from the time of *Sakyamuni* (560 - 480 B.C) until the division of Buddhism into sects about 300 B.C. (2) The age of sectarian Buddhism, which lasted from about 300 B.C, until the beginning of the first century A.D. (3) The early period of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, which lasted from the beginning of the first century A.D. until about 300. (4) The middle period of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, which lasted from about 300 to about 700 (5) The late period of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, which lasted from about 700 to the early thirteenth century.⁵

Moreover, the teachings of Lord *Buddha* should neither be regarded as dogma, nor creed, nor formulated golden words

absolutely obeyed and revered, but it had better use as a means ridding of the cycle of birth and death. As a result, the indispensable and inevitable improvements in due course of Buddhism for the sake of living beings at certain historical times leading to the present reality of the so-called *Theravāda* Buddhism and *Mahāyāna* Buddhism are but the active and living pictures of the only one Buddhism through ages with one aim to awaken all worldly beings and objects are transient (*Anitya*), momentary (*Kṣanika*) perpetual flux (*Santāna*) and without any real substance (*Anātmakam*) in order to follow the Buddha's teaching dependent origination (*Skt: Pratītyasamutpāda; P: Paṭiccasamuppāda*), to get rid of attachment (*Rāga*), hatred (*Skt: Dveṣa; P: Dosa*) and delusion (*Moha*) and enlightenment. Therefore, here we should have a proper look at what we call the true meanings of *Hīnayāna* and *Mahāyāna* in order to consider them as brothers in the same family of Buddhism just as Beatrice Lane Suzuki in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism suggested :

Are we not losing ourselves in a forest of brambles when we spend so much time on the problem of the historicity of *Hīnayāna* or *Mahāyāna* ? Why not accept both as representations of the same truths, and take that one to ourselves, which is best, suited to our own minds.⁶

And return to *Mahāyāna* part, we can conclude that to meet the potential of association with the contemporary knowledge and need of people at all times, *Mahāyāna* was formed and developed out. And it is *Mahāyāna* played a main and important role in arising the new doctrine of *Bodhisattva* in *Sanskrit* and Chinese sources which succeeded in the *Bodhisattva* concept in *PāliNikāya*, to which Edward Conze has said that the two great contributions which the *Mahāyāna* had made to human thought were the creation of the *Bodhisattva* ideal and the elaboration of the doctrine of emptiness.⁷

Bodhisattva Concept in Mahāyāna Sūtras



Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra

According to *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, the *Bodhisattva* will become thoroughly conversant with the noble truth of self-realization, will become a perfect master of his own mind, with conduct himself without effort, will be like a gem reflecting a variety of colors, will be able to assume the body of transformation, will be able to enter into the subtle minds of all beings, and, because of his firm belief in the truth of mind-only, will, by gradually ascending the stages, become established in Buddha-hood.

Herein, the *Bodhisattva* ideal is described those *Bodhisattva- Mahāsattva* who have reached the sixth stage as well as all the *Srāvakas* and *Pratyeka Buddhas* in perfect tranquillization. At the Seventh stage, the *Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva*, giving up the view of self-nature as subsisting in all things. The *Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva* attains perfect tranquillization in every minute of their mental.⁸ At the Eighth stage the *Bodhisattva-Mahāsattva*, *Srāvakas*, and *Pratyeka Buddhas* cease cherishing discriminative ideas that arise from *Citta*, *Manas*, and *Manovijana*... At the eighth stage there is *Nirvāṇa* for the *Srāvakas* and *Pratyeka Buddhas* and *Bodhisattvas*; but the *Bodhisattvas* are kept away by the power of all the *Buddhas* from the bliss of the *Samādhi* and thereby they will not enter *Nirvāṇa*, but the *Srāvakas* and *Pratyeka Buddha*, engrossed in the bliss of the *Samādhi*'s, therein cherish the thought of *Nirvāṇa*.¹⁹ Here, the *Bodhisattvas* are different to *Srāvakas* and *Pratyeka Buddhas* that they are kept away by the power of all the *Buddhas* from the bliss of the *Samādhi*, and thereby they postpone entering into *Nirvāṇa*.

The Avataṃsaka Sūtra

The *sūtra* is also well known for its detailed description of the course of the *bodhisattva*'s practice through ten stages where the *Ten Stages Sūtra*, or *Daśabhūmika Sūtra*, is the name given to this chapter of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*.⁹ This *sūtra* gives details on the ten stages (*bhūmi*) of development a

bodhisattva must undergo to attain supreme enlightenment. The ten stages are also depicted in the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*. The *sūtra* also touches on the subject of the development of the "aspiration for Enlightenment" (*Bodhicitta*) to attain supreme Buddha-hood.

The last chapter of the Flower Garland *sūtra* (*Avataṃsaka sūtra*) circulates as a separate and important text known as the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, which details the pilgrimage of the youth *Sudhanakumāra* (Good Wealth) at the behest of the *Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī*. *Sudhanakumāra* would converse with 52 masters in his quest for enlightenment. The ante pen ultimate master of *Sudhanakumāra*'s pilgrimage is *Maitreya*. It is here that *Sudhanakumāra* encounters the Tower of *Maitreya*, which along with Indra's net, is a most startling metaphor for the infinite:

In the middle of the great tower... he saw the billion-world universe... and everywhere there was *Sudhanakumāra* at his feet... Thus *Sudhanakumāra* saw *Maitreya*'s practices of transcendence over countless eons (*kalpa*), from each of the squares of the check board wall.. In the same way *Sudhanakumāra*... saw the whole supernal manifestation, was perfectly aware of it, understood it, contemplated it, used it as a means, beheld it, and saw himself there.¹⁰

The pen ultimate master that *Sudhanakumāra* visits is the *Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva*, the *bodhisattva* of great wisdom. Thus, one of the grandest of pilgrimages approaches its conclusion by revisiting where it began. The *Gaṇḍavyūha* suggests that with a subtle shift of perspective we may come to see that the enlightenment that the pilgrim so fervently sought was not only with him at every stage of his journey, but before it began as well – that enlightenment is not something to be gained, but something the pilgrim never departed from. The final master that *Sudhanakumāra* visits is the *Bodhisattva Universal Worthy (Samantabhadra)*, who teaches him that wisdom only exists for the



sake of putting it into practice; that it is only good insofar as it benefits all living beings.

The *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (The Large Sūtra on Perfect Wisdom)

The literature on *Prajñāpāramitā* is a vast, deep and vital to an understanding of the *Mahāyāna*. The oldest text is the Perfection of wisdom in 8000 lines, in 32 chapters. All the many thousand lines of this *sūtra* can be summed up in two sentences: (1) One should become a Bodhisattva (a Buddha to-be), i.e. someone content with nothing less than all-knowledge attained through the perfection of wisdom for the sake of all living beings. (2) There are no such things as a Bodhisattva, or all-knowledge, or a “being”, or the perfection of wisdom, or an attainment. *Asaṅga* as the avoidance of five standpoints explains the often-repeated saying that the *Bodhisattva* should “stand in perfect wisdom by not taking his stand anywhere”¹¹: “He does not take his stand on a belief in a self, and thus does not say ‘I know’, ‘this is my wisdom’.

He does not take his stand on the conceptions of Bodhisattvas who have not seen the true reality, and thus he does not try to define wisdom in any way. He does not abide in either *Samśāra* or *Nirvāṇa*, avoiding them both as extremes. He rejects the standpoint of the disciples who are content to cut off their own passions, as well as. That is the disciples who dwell in final *Nirvāṇa* to the detriment of the welfare of beings. Here, the essence of the *Sūtra* is the idea of emptiness (*sūnyatā*) that is presented as an object of the *Bodhisattva*’s way. It brings out the deeper meaning of original doctrine, which is re-interpreted in the light of the dominant idea of Emptiness. Things are emptiness, since they are not independent arising, but exist with many causes and conditions. This is as a result of insight gained while engaged in deep meditation to awaken the faculty of wisdom (*Prajñā*). The insight refers to apprehension of the fundamental emptiness of all phenomena, known through and as the five aggregates of human existence (*skandhas*):

form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), volitions (*samskāra*), perceptions (*saṃjñā*), and consciousness (*viññāna*). In this Emptiness there can be no stopping, because one cannot speak of something as stopped if it never existed, or came into being, or originated.

Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra (The Heart Sūtra)

Various commentators divide this text into different numbers of sections. Briefly, the *sūtra* describes the experience of liberation of the bodhisattva of compassion, *Avalokiteśvara*. The *Avalokita*, the Holy Lord and *Bodhisattva*, was moving in the deep course of the wisdom, which has gone beyond. He looked down from on high. He beheld but five heaps, and he saw that in their own-being they were empty.¹²

The *Avalokiteśvarais* called *Avalokita* because he ‘looked down’ compassionately on this world. He is called Holy because he is one of the Saints who have won the spiritual Path. He is called Lord because he has sovereignty over the world and power to help suffering beings. And he is also called a Bodhisattva, the *Bodhisattva* is an enlightened being who is on the way to becoming a Buddha, but who has postponed his entrance into *Nirvāṇa*, and his escape from this world of birth-and-death, for the purpose of helping suffering creatures. In other words, a Bodhisattva is a being who strives for enlightenment, and who care for nothing but enlightenment.¹³

Engaged in transcendental wisdom *Avalokita* would, by definition, contemplate emptiness. And since emptiness is the same as *Nirvāṇa* and the same as the Buddha, it is said that he looks at the self-illuminating splendor of the emptiness of the *Buddhas* when he thus practices.¹⁴

He is thought of as a being that has made the “great vow of a Bodhisattva”, i.e. “I shall not enter final *Nirvāṇa* before all beings have been liberated”.¹⁵

According to the Heart *Sūtra*, not only the Bodhisattvas, but also all the *Buddhas* own



the attainment of their goal to the realization of the full emptiness.¹⁶

In order to win Enlightenment of the full emptiness, they had to cast everything aside, and to rely only on the perfection of wisdom. It also means that wisdom plays an important role in Buddhism.

Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra (Diamond Sūtra)

This Sūtra is mainly about the Bodhisattva-path that explains more details about the vow of the *Bodhisattva*, the practice of the perfection, the Bodhisattva's thought of Enlightenment, the Bodhisattva and his Pure Land, and the Bodhisattva's final *Nirvāṇa* as well. In this sūtra, we can find the perfect combination of two traditions that mentions about Arahantship and Bodhisattva-hood. The content of sūtra can divide as follows:

Conclusion

The vow of a *Bodhisattva*: Here, Subhūti, someone who has set out in the vehicle of a Bodhisattva should produce a thought in this manner: As many beings as there are in the universe of beings, comprehended under the term beings, – either egg-born, or born from a womb, or moisture-born, or miraculously born; with or without form; with perception, without perception, and with neither perception nor no-perception, as far as any conceivable universe of beings is conceived: all these should by me led to Nirvāṇa, into that Realm of Nirvāṇa which leaves nothing behind. And yet, although innumerable beings have thus been led to Nirvāṇa, no being at all has been led to Nirvāṇa. If in a Bodhisattva the perception of a being should take place, he could not be called a Bodhi-being.

References

- 1 Mircea Eliade, *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. II, (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1987), p. 458.
- 2 Richard F Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began*, (London: Manoharlal, Ltd, 1996), p. 9.13, I, p. 207
- 3 M, I, p. 207
- 4 Sir Charles Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul LTD, RPT, 1971), p. 27.

5 Kogen Mizuno, *Basic Buddhist Concepts*, (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co, 1994), p. 89

6 Beatrice Lane Suzuki, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, (London: 1980), p. 35

7 Edward Conze, *Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies*, (London: Bruno Cassier Publisher, LTD, Oxford, 1967), p. 54

8 Suzuki, D. T., *The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul LTD, 1959), p. 182

9 RigpaShedra, *Sūtra of the Ten Bhūmis*. (Accessed: April 10, 2009)

10 Cleary, Thomas, *The Flower Ornament Scripture 3*, (Boulder: Shambhala, 1987), p. 369.

11 *Mahāyānasamgraha*, p. 253

12 Conze, Edward, *The Diamond Sūtra and The Heart Sūtra*, op.cit., p. 78.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 78

14 Conze, Edward, *The Diamond Sūtra and The Heart Sūtra*, op.cit., p. 79.

15 *Ibid.* p. 79.

16 *Ibid.* p. 98