Chapter II

ORIGIN OF BODHISATTVA PHILOSOPHY

INTRODUCTION

Bodhisattva (Pali: Bodhisatta) is a being who aspires for Bodhi or Enlightenment. The concept of Bodhisattva (meaning Buddha-to-be) is one of the most important concepts in Buddhism. Etymologically the term can be separated into two parts, bodhi and sattva: bodhi from the root budh, to be awake, means 'awakening' or 'enlightenment' and 'sattva' derived from sant, the present participle of the root as, 'to be', means 'a being' or, literally, 'one who is', 'a sentient being. Hence, the term is taken to mean 'one whose essence is Enlightenment' or 'enlightened knowledge. By implication it means a seeker after enlightenment, a Buddha-to-be. There is also a suggestion that the Pali term may be derived from bodhi and satta, (Skt. sakta from sanj) 'one who is attached to or desires to gain enlightenment.' In original Pali Buddhism, the term Bodhisatta is used more or less exclusively to designate Gautama Buddha prior to his enlightenment.

THE BODHISATTVA CONCEPT

The concept of Bodhisattva, along with that of Buddha and of the Cakravartin (world-ruler), was in vogue in India even before the appearance of Gautama Buddha. When Prince Siddhartha, who later became Gautama Buddha, took conception in the womb of Queen Maya, a seer predicted that Suddhodana's future son would be either a world-ruler (Cakravartin) or a Buddha. Once, answering a question by a Brahmin, Buddha himself admitted that he is neither a God nor a yakka, but a Buddha, meaning thereby one of a succession of Buddhas (A. II, p. 38).
The well-known Pali stanza

\[ \text{sabbapapassa akaranam} \]
\[ \text{kusalassa upasampada,} \]
\[ \text{saicitapariyodapanam} \]
\[ \text{etam buddhana sasanam} \] -- (Dhp. stz. 183; Nett. p. 43).

States that the teaching it contains is not of a single Buddha but of all Buddhas. The Amagandha Sutta is similarly recorded as a discourse not of Gautama Buddha but of a past Buddha named Kassapa (Sn. vv. 239 ff.).

Sammasambodhi or Perfect Enlightenment is an impersonal universal phenomenon occurring in a particular context both in time and in space and a Buddha is thus a person who \textit{re-discovers} the Dhamma, which had become lost to the world and proclaims it anew (Pug. p. 29). When Gautama Buddha appeared, however, he himself as well as others used the term Bodhisattva to indicate his career from the time of his renunciation up to the time of his enlightenment. Later, its use was extended to denote the period from Gautama's conception to the enlightenment and, thereafter, to all the Buddhas from their conception to Buddhahood. By applying the doctrine of \textit{karma} and of rebirth, which had general acceptance even in pre-Buddhist India, the use of the term was further extended to refer to the past lives not only of Gautama Buddha, but also of those rare beings who aspire for Perfect Enlightenment.

The oldest Theravada tradition, as contained, for example, in the Mahapadana Suttanta (D. ii, p. 1) gives details of Six Buddhas prior to Gautama. This discourse is attributed to the Buddha himself, who gives the time, caste, family, length of life etc. of these predecessors of his. In the Buddhavamsa, a later work belonging to the Khuddaka
Nikaya, the number increases to twenty-five with Gautama Buddha as the last and this number remains fixed in Theravada tradition.

However, these enumerations by no means imply that they are exhaustive. In the Mahapadana Suttanta the Buddha starts the story of the Six Buddhas merely by saying that ninety-one kappas ago there was such and such a Buddha, implying thereby that such beings were not limited in number. From this it follows that, if the Buddhas are innumerable, the Bodhisattvas too must be innumerable.

When after prince Siddhartha attained Enlightenment he lived a human being and lived and passed away as such. As mentioned earlier, he himself admitted that he was a Buddha and not a deva or any such supernatural being. He was only the discoverer of a lost teaching. His greatness was that he found out what his contemporaries could not discover at all or discovered only incompletely. He was a genius by birth who achieved the highest state possible for man. Both intellectually and morally he was a great man, a superman (mahapurisa). In all the stages of his life, from conception onwards, something extraordinary was seen in him.

BUDDHA

In order to understand who a Bodhisattva is, it would be useful to explain briefly who a Buddha is. The Buddha-concept in Theravada Buddhism is not a personality cult; neither is the Buddha an object of glorified devotion. He is neither a theoretical metaphysician nor a materialist. He is not a religious teacher who demands unquestioned loyalty like a Messiah. He is a man who has perfected himself by realising his 'self' to the highest degree possible for man. Only a man can become a Buddha.
There may be other supernatural beings inhabiting perhaps other planets in a given solar system. But they are not capable of becoming fully enlightened unless there are planets similar to our own where the humans live. Even if such beings are leading happier lives in their non-human spheres, still they are subject to the laws of change and evolution (anicca or vaya-dhamma), and as such not free from birth and death and their attendant conflicts: hence they are not released from dukkha.

A Buddha is a human being who has realised that there is a happier state than this world of conditioned phenomena. After a persevering mental struggle, he realises this unconditioned state (asankhata) which is free from duality. This freedom from duality implies the absence of any conflict (Dukkha). Therefore, this state is described as free from both sorrow and happiness in the ordinary sense. It is the highest happiness (Parama-Sukha) in the transcendental sense. As such it is not subject to change and is, therefore, imperishable (avyaya) and, therefore, permanent (dhuva). It is this that is described as Nirvana. The Buddha is the person who realised this for the first time by his own effort and proclaimed it to the world and hence, he is the Teacher (sattha) and Arhants are his disciples who follow his teaching. Bodhisattvas are those who aspire to be fully enlightened ones or Buddhas, in preference to merely becoming arhants.

Strictly speaking, the life of the Buddha commenced only from the time of his enlightenment and his life before this event was that of the Bodhisattva. The Buddha himself used the term in this sense and, it is more than probable that he occasionally referred to his previous existences in his discourses to the people in order to elucidate a particular doctrinal point. The Jatakas found in the Sutta Pitaka such as the Mahagovinda Sutta (D. II, pp. 220 ff.), the Mahasudassana Sutta (D. II, pp. 169 ff.) and the Makhadeva
Sutta (M. II, 74 ff.) etc. bear out this view. Besides these, there seems to have been neither a Jataka collection as such, nor the developed concept of the Bodhisattva practising paramitas, until a much later period. Hence it would appear that the concept of the Bodhisattva could be divided into two parts, the original concept and the concept developed by later Buddhists.

THE SECOND COUNCIL

The division of schools which began at the second council with the separation of the Mahasanghikas also made its contribution to the development of the Bodhisattva cult in later literature as it marked the remote beginnings of Mahayana Buddhism.

The earliest use of the term Bodhisattva in literature seems to be when the Buddha refers to the days prior to his enlightenment, in such contexts as "in the days before my enlightenment" or "when as yet I was only a Bodhisattva" (M. I, pp. 114, 163; M. III, p. 119). Then, we have the Pali suttas referred to above, in which the Buddha recounts a previous existence of his after the fashion of the later Jataka stories. In the Buddhavamsa and in the later commentaries we see how the concept has been extended not only in relation to Gautama's own previous lives, but also as a general concept.

In the Buddhavamsa which belongs to the Khuddaka-nikaya of the Pali Canon, are the life-stories of twenty-five Buddhas of whom Gautama was the last are found. The names by which he was known during his "apprenticeship" as a Bodhisattva under each of the twenty-four Buddhas, are also given. The chronicle describes the ten paramitas, the eight conditions necessary for the fulfillment of Buddhahood and the Bodhisattva's decision to postpone his entry into Nibbana. The other early work that describes the
Bodhisattva's career is the Mahavastu (circa 1st or 2nd Century B.C.), a Sanskrit work of the Mahasanghikas.

Since the Buddha's teaching is not fatalistic but a course of mental training implying constant change until the realisation of the unconditioned state of Nirvana, everyone has the ability not merely to attain release but also to be authoritative teachers (i.e., perfect Buddhas) as well. People with lesser ability may rest content with mere arhantship or by becoming Pratyeka Buddhas.

Just as the Theravadins in course of time began to lay greater stress on intellectual development than on religious practice and realisation, those who advocated the Bodhisattva ideal, as a protest against the theoretical teaching of the Theravadins, went to the other extreme of making it too practical by making the Bodhisattva somewhat like a savior as exemplified by Avalokitesvara. Everyone tries to be a Buddha to save others while passively believing in the saving grace of the Bodhisattvas. The pendulum swung from one extreme to the other. Gautama Buddha's teaching of practical psychological ethics and that of the avoidance of extremes was falling into oblivion.

In this evolution of thought the altruistic motives which had become more or less mere intellectual concepts among the Theravadin began to be greatly emphasised. As a result, individual responsibility, on which the Buddha has laid great stress, began to be overlooked. This tendency was developed to its extreme, especially in the Far East, the results of which are to be seen in the concept of Buddha Amitabha and of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara as embodiments of compassion, an all-merciful divine father, whose sole aim is to deliver all living beings from suffering.
This development was the natural result of the intrinsic human nature which seeks for external protection and consolation either in a male or a female divinity. It is an extension of the father-mother concept and can be found in any developed religious system. But Gautama Buddha firmly believed that Buddhas are only pathfinders and teachers who, out of compassion for all living beings, preach the doctrine of deliverance which has to be individually realised by the wise. As such, the idea of salvation, except through the teaching which every person has to follow individually, is foreign to him. This is why the Buddha's teaching is regarded as too demanding in practice.

It was shown earlier how, by the application of the doctrines of karma and rebirth, the life of the Bodhisattva was extended backwards to an innumerable number of existences. The doctrine of karma implies that intellectual and moral greatness cannot be produced without great effort. The necessary training and discipline cannot be practiced to perfection in a single lifetime. However, this did not mean that enlightenment could not be obtained in a given time. On the contrary, it was often asserted that such attainment is possible in this very life (dittheva dhamme) provided the devotee has the required qualification for arhantship and it is the duty of every follower to attempt such achievement.

THE BODHISATTVA SIDDHARTHA

It is of interest to see how the concept of the Bodhisattva has developed down the ages. The historical facts about the Buddha are not difficult to determine. He began his life as Siddhartha, son of a local rajah in north India in the 6th Century B.C.E. At first he quite enjoyed sensual pleasures but his attitude to such self-indulgence was quite different from that of the ordinary man. Even while enjoying pleasure, he intuitively felt that true
and lasting happiness could never be found by giving into each and every sensual attraction. That would lead to moral and intellectual ruin, resulting in becoming subject to more and more suffering. He was sure of this.

He got married and begot a son and still he felt that that was not the ultimate fulfillment of human life. His inner urge could not stop at anything short of full and complete self-realisation, not only for his own private release, but also for the good of humanity as a whole. This made him think. First he took to a self-mortifying life, and when that failed, he, after a severe mental struggle, achieved perfection by becoming a Buddha and then a teacher.

During the rest of his career of forty-five years, he gave his findings to the rest of humanity by oral preaching (dhamma-desana), which was the best method of disseminating knowledge in those days when writing and reading of books were not common. There was nothing mystic about the Buddha. He was a practical man, a psychiatrist who, after realising the cause of man's troubles, was eager to convey the benefits of his realisation to the rest of humanity, which he did quite successfully.

There is no reason to doubt these simple facts of history. But, in course of time, these facts became mixed up with much legend and the Buddha's teaching became more or less a devotional cult. Its rationalistic and practical nature began to go underground. The higher life (brahmacariya) was thought of as something impracticable and gradually Buddhism lost its pragmatic character. Coupled with these tendencies there was the inborn human need for a father-figure or a mother-figure to fall back upon. All these led to the creation of a Buddhology.
THE PARAMITAS

For the artist, literary as well as plastic, the Buddha became an object of study and devotion. He was analysed from every possible angle and various theories regarding his career were evolved as for instance, when the original triple classification of the path of release *sila* (morality), *samadhi* (mind-culture) and *panna* (wisdom) was resolved into ten *paramitas*. The Bodhisattva became a special kind of God like character, the like of whom could hardly be an actuality. It was as a part of this development that the main events of the Bodhisattva's life were portrayed as being accompanied by miracles.

A Bodhisattva's career should start with his making a resolution before a Buddha (*abhinihara-karana* or *mslapranidhana*) to become a Buddha for the welfare and liberation of all creatures. In later literature this *abhinihara* is preceded by a period during which the Bodhisattva practices *manopranidhi*, when he resolves in his mind a desire to become a Buddha without declaring his intention to others.

Even for the *abhinihara* or the first resolve to become a Buddha to be effective, eight conditions have to be fulfilled. These are that the aspirant should be a human being, a male, sufficiently developed spiritually to become an arhant in that very life, a recluse at the time of the declaration, that he should make the resolution personally before a Buddha, that he should possess the *jhanas* and be prepared to sacrifice even his life. The resolution has to be absolutely firm.

There are eighteen inauspicious states into which a Bodhisattva is not born. He is never born blind, deaf, insane, crippled, among savages, as a slave or as a heretic. He never changes his sex, is never guilty of the five heinous crimes which become
immediately effective (anantarika-kamma) and he never becomes a leper. Should he be born as an animal he is never born bigger than an elephant or smaller than a quail. He is not born as a peta or in Avici nor in the hells known as lokantarika, which are eternally dark. He is not born as a Mara nor as a Suddhavasa deva, nor in the Formless (arspa) worlds, nor in another cakkavala (SnA. I, pp. 50 ff.).

According to J. VI, p. 552 all Bodhisattvas must make the five great sacrifices (mahaparicca) of giving up wife, children, kingdom, life, and limb.

The Buddha, before whom the abhihihara is made, looks into the future and, if satisfied, declares the fulfillment of the wish, giving all the particulars of such fulfillment. This declaration is called veyyakarana (Skt. vyakarana) and is also made by all subsequent Buddhas whom the Bodhisattva meets during his career. From here onwards, till he attains Enlightenment, all his activities are directed towards the practice of the perfections (paramitas). As mentioned earlier, these perfections were later enumerations and there are slight differences between the Pali and the Sanskrit lists. However, their theme is the same, which is ethical perfection.

Originally, there seem to have been only Six paramitas which were later made into a group of ten. The earlier six, as given in Buddhist Sanskrit works, are as follows: dana (liberality), sila (morality), khanti (patience), viriya (energy), dhyana (concentration) and panna (wisdom). The four supplementary paramitas are upaya or upaya kausalya (skill in means), pranidhana (resolution), bala (strength) and jnana (knowledge: Har Dayal, The Bodhisattva Doctrine In Buddhist Sanskrit Literature, London, 1932, p. 168). In the Pali list there is nekkhamma (renunciation) instead of
dhyanā while upaya, bala and jnana are replaced by sacca (truthfulness), metta (loving-kindness) and upekkha, (equanimity) respectively.

The length of a Bodhisattva's career varies: some practise the paramitas for at least four asankheyyas and one hundred thousand kappas, others for at least eight asankheyyas and one hundred thousand kappas and yet others for sixteen asankheyyas and one hundred thousand kappas. The first of these periods is the very least required and is intended for those who excel in wisdom (panna), the middle period for those who excel in faith (saddha) and the last and the longest for those whose chief feature is perseverance.

THE EMERGENCE FROM TUSITA HEAVEN

An important event in the Bodhisattva's life that occurs when he spends his penultimate life in the Tusita heaven in which he comes to the conclusion that he should leave the Tusita heaven and be reborn as a man. As this moment arrives, there is much excitement (halahala), because of various signs appearing in the ten-thousand world-systems.

All the devas come together and request the Bodhisattva to seek birth as a human being, where upon the Bodhisattva makes the five great investigations (panca-mahā-vilokana) regarding the time, the continent, the place of birth, his mother and the life span left to her. The time (kala) has to be investigated because Buddhas do not appear in the world when men live for more than one hundred thousand years or less than one hundred. Buddhas are born only in Jambudvipa (north India) and only in the brahmana or the khattiya clan. Once these investigations are made the Bodhisattva proceeds to the Nandanavana where he formally disappears from among the devas.
The conception of the Bodhisattva is attended by various miracles. Both in Pali and Sanskrit sources an attempt is made to show that at the actual moment of conception there is no physical union of father and mother. With regard to the general life of a Bodhisattva as given in the books, the following account from the Dictionary of Pali proper Names, G.P. Malalasekera (II, pp. 3247), may be quoted: "On the day of his conception, the Bodhisattva's mother takes the vows of fasting and celibacy at the conclusion of a great festival, and when she has retired to rest she dreams that the Four Regent Gods take her with her bed, bathe her in the Anotatta lake, clad her in divine garments and place her in a golden palace surrounded by all kinds of luxury. As she lies there the Bodhisattva in the form of a white elephant enters her womb through her right side. The earth trembles and all the ten thousand world-systems are filled with radiance. Immediately the four Regent Gods assume guard over mother and child.

Throughout the period of pregnancy, which lasts for ten months exactly, the mother remains free from ailment and sees the child in her womb sitting cross-legged. At the end of the ten months she gives birth to the child, standing in a grove, never indoors. Suddhavasa Brahmas, free from all passion, first receive the child in a golden net and from them the Four Regent Gods take him on an antelope skin and present him to his mother.

Though the Bodhisattva is born free of the mucous otherwise present at birth, two showers of water, one hot, the other cold, fall from the sky and bathes mother and child. The child then takes seven strides to the north, standing firmly on his feet, looks on all sides, and seeing no one anywhere to equal him, announces his supremacy over the whole
world and the fact that this is his last birth. Seven days after birth his mother dies. She dies because she must bear no other being.

The Bodhisattva's last birth is attended by miracles. Sooth sayers, being summoned, see on the child's body the thirty-two marks of a Great Man (mahapurisa) and declare that the child will become either a Cakkavatti or a Buddha. His father, desiring that his child shall be a Cakkavatti, rather than a Buddha, brings him up in great luxury, hiding from him all sin and ugliness of the world. But the destiny of a Bodhisattva asserts itself, and he becomes aware of the presence in the world of old age, disease, death, and the freedom of mind to be found in the life of a recluse. Urged by the desire to discover the cause of suffering in the world and the way out of it, the Bodhisattva leaves the world on the day of his son's birth.

Having left the world, the Bodhisattva practices the austerities, the period of such practices varying... On the day the Bodhisattva attains to Buddhahood, he receives a meal of milk-rice (payasa) from a woman and a gift of kusa-grass, generally from an Ajivaka, which he spreads under the Bodhi tree for his seat. The size of this seat varies.

Before the enlightenment the Bodhisattva has five great dreams: (i) that the world is his couch with the Himalay as his pillow, his left hand resting on the eastern sea, his right on the western and his feet on the southern; (ii) that a blade of tiriya (kusa) grass, growing from his navel touches the clouds; (iii) that white worms with black heads creep up from his feet, covering his knees; (iv) that four birds of varied hues from the four quarters of the world fall at his feet and become white; (v) that he walks to and fro on a heap of dung, by which he remains unsoiled.
Next day Bodhisattva sits cross-legged on his seat facing the east, determined not to rise till he has attained his goal. The gods of all the worlds assemble to do him honour, but Mara comes with his mighty hosts and the gods flee. All day, the fight continues between Mara and the Bodhisattva; the parami alone are present to lend their aid to the Bodhisattva, and when the moment comes, the goddess of the earth bears witness to his great sacrifices, while Mara and his armies retire discomfited at the hour of sunset, the gods then returning and singing a paean of victory.

"Meanwhile the Bodhisattva spends the night in deep concentration; during the first watch he acquires knowledge of past lives, during the second watch he develops the divine eye, while during the last watch he ponders over and comprehends the Paticcasamuppada doctrine. Backwards and forwards his mind travels over the chain of causation and twelve times the earth trembles. With sunrise, omniscience dawns on him, and he becomes the Supremely Awakened Buddha, uttering his udana of victory while the whole world rejoices with him."¹

THE HINAYANA & MAHAYANA IDEALS OF ARAHANT & BODHISATTVA

If the Bodhisattva ideal of the Mahayana be regarded as a protest against the arhant ideal of the Hinayana, there is an important fact that needs clarification. This is the charge of selfishness brought against the arhant. In this connection there is much misunderstanding. The charge of selfishness has to be leveled not against the arhants but against those Theravada monks who have portrayed arhantship as a selfish ideal by their own behaviour and writings and thereby made the higher religious life (brahmacariya or adhisila) appear as something unpracticable.
The Buddha has clearly shown, both by example and precept, the value of working for the welfare of others. The spirit of his teaching is that one should enlighten oneself first and then try to help those that can be helped as clearly expressed in the well-known words of the Buddha when he addressed the first sixty arhants to devote themselves to the service of others (Vin. 1, pp.1920). He also discouraged mere philosophy and speculation if it had no practical value.

But, quite in contrast to this noble example of the Teacher, his later followers, instead of following by practice the religious life he discovered and promulgated, began to make mere academic study thereof as an end in itself. They became speculators and philosophers, with very little practice. The Hinayana monk became more or less a fossilised antique living in a world of his own.

The protest of the Mahayanist was against this fossilisation and resultant indolence and not against the arhant ideal as such. The Buddha and arhants who helped mankind after they had achieved their own release, have to be absolved of this charge of selfishness. Yet, on the other hand, when the Bodhisattva ideal was advocated, the pendulum swung to the other extreme of mere Bodhisattva worship. The extreme intellectualism of the Hinayana was replaced by the extreme emotionalism of developed Mahayana. The true spirit of the Buddha's teaching lies in between, in a harmonious combination of intellect and emotion, of head and heart, of theory and practice. That would be the perfection of character as understood in Buddhism.

The Pali Canon shows little interest either in philosophical speculation or in the personality of the Bodhisattvas who are simply treated as "larval forms" of the Buddha.
Gautama himself would not have denied the possibility of becoming a Buddha to anyone who is intellectually and morally mature. The significant fact is that it became quite incredible that a superior being such as a Buddha should suddenly be produced in a human family. He was not to be explained as an incarnation. Hence it was quite logical and edifying to treat him as a product of a long evolution of virtue, extending over several existences of good deeds and noble aspirations, culminating in a being superior to both gods and men.

Such a being remains in the Tusita heaven in his penultimate existence biding the appropriate time to be born among men. In this manner the Pali Canon, quite logically, recognises the Bodhisattva as a rare type of man appearing at a certain stage in time and space. It leaves the matter at that. But later works like the Buddhavamsa, Cariyapitaka, the Pali commentaries and the Mahayana sutras went on developing the Bodhisattva concept in such a way that he became an object of devotion and his human nature gradually disappeared. The Mahayanists, in trying to remedy the situation, ended up by making him a saviour.

According to the Hinayana view, the Bodhisattva's penultimate life is spent in the Tusita heaven where he enjoys the power and splendor of any Indian deity. But, as it did not admit more than one Buddha at a time, there was evidently also only one Bodhisattva at a time in Tusita. In Mahayana, however, the multiplication of not only celestial Buddhas but also of celestial Bodhisattvas became such a popular theme that as time went on their numbers became endless.
THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL AND EVERYDAY LIFE

The Bodhisattva ideal, with its more practical attitude to life, emphasises the value of family life. Renunciation of household life never meant running away from life. Nirvana was to be sought not outside Samsara but within it. Gautama Buddha never recommended a 'life of aloofness or of perennial seclusion.' He was not an escapist and wanted none to be so. What he taught was that owing to ignorance (Avijja), people do not see things as they really are, and as such they are given to their desires, which in turn prolong their suffering. His method was to remove this veil of ignorance so that there would be light.

It is the removal of mental illusion, resulting in a psychological revolution, which makes one free from the trammels of ordinary birth, disease and death. This cannot be achieved by running away from life. The problem has to be solved by facing and overcoming it, by changing the inner self, the mind where lies the cause of the problem. It is a change of attitude and outlook, resulting from the removal of ignorance. Such a person lives in the world, but is not of the world.

If a person can become enlightened after leading a family life, as prince Siddhartha himself did, he would certainly be a more useful man than a sanctimonious ascetic living in the jungle. And it is this kind of pure social life that the Bodhisattva ideal recommends. The ancient emphasis on inward life is given a new application. The godly and efficient layman so envisaged is exemplified in the figure of Vimalakirti, described in the Vimalakirtinirdesa.
This wealthy householder who was residing at Vaisali, lived "only for the sake of the necessary means of saving creatures; abundantly rich, ever careful of the poor, pure in self-discipline, obedient to all precepts, removing all anger by the practice of patience, removing all sloth by the practice of diligence, removing all distractions of mind by intent meditation, removing all ignorance by fullness of wisdom; though he was but a simple layman, yet observing the pure monastic discipline; though living at home, yet never desirous of anything; though possessing a wife and children, always exercising pure virtues; though surrounded by his family, holding aloof from worldly pleasures; though using the jewelled ornaments of the world, yet adorned with spiritual splendour; though eating and drinking, yet enjoying the flavour of the rapture of meditation; though frequenting the gambling house, yet leading the gamblers into the right path; though coming in contact with heresy, yet never letting his true faith be impaired; though having a profound knowledge of worldly learning, yet ever finding pleasure in the things of the spirit as taught by the Buddha; though profiting by all professions, yet far above being absorbed by them; benefitting all beings, going where so ever he pleases, ever teaching the young and ignorant, when entering the hall of learning; manifesting to all the error of passion when in the hours of debauchery; persuading all to seek the higher things when at the shop of the wine-dealer; preaching the law when among wealthy people; teaching the katriyas patience; removing arrogance when among Brahmans; teaching justice to the great ministers; teaching loyalty and filial piety to the princes; teaching honesty to the ladies of the court; persuading the masses to cherish virtue."^{2}

The Bodhisattva concept had its influence in the evolution of kingship in Sri Lanka, too. For some time between the fourth and the 11th Centuries C.E, the kings of Sri Lanka began to be regarded not as ordinary human beings but as Bodhisattvas. The
Jetavanarama slab-inscription of Mahinda IV and the Pritidanakamanapa inscription of Nissanka Malla are instances where the rulers refer to themselves as Bodhisattvas. The Rajatarangani (p. 470 and the Nikayasamgrahava, ed. Kumaranatunga, p. 24) also bear evidence to this. Parakramabahu II says that he would become a Buddha (Mahavamsa, ch. 86, stz. 7).

Charles Eliot mentions that in China there is a system of admission into the Order consisting of three stages: admission (pabbajja), higher ordination (upasampada) and the acceptance of the Bodhisattva vows (shou-pu-sa-chich). The burning of the candidate’s head from three to eighteen places is said to be an essential part of the ceremony of taking the Bodhisattva vows (Hinduism and Buddhism, Ill, p. 328).

The worship of Bodhisattvas needed iconographical representation and this need has been more than fulfilled by the creation of an abundance of Bodhisattva images, especially in those countries that accepted Mahayana. Buddhist art became the richer through these artistic creations. In the subsequent phases of the Bodhisattva-cult these deified personages were given many forms in order to symbolise their multifarious functions. Sometimes they were given many heads and many arms which practice has sometimes led to the creation of such figures as exemplified by the thousand-armed Avalokitesvara from Japan.

GAUTAMA AS A BODHISATTVA

Gautama’s Progress to Awakening

In the discourses collected in the Pāli Nikāyas of the Theravāda tradition, the term Bodhisattva (or more precisely its Pāli counterpart bodhisatta) is used predominantly by
the Buddha Gautama to refer to his pre-awakening experiences, the time when he was ‘the Bodhisattva’ par excellence. Such usage occurs as part of a standard formulaic phrase, according to which a particular event or reflection occurred “before (my) awakening, when still being an unawakened Bodhisattva”, pubbeva (me) sambodhā anabhisambuddhassa bodhisattass’ eva sato (henceforth referred to as the ‘before awakening’ phrase).

Counterparts to this phrase in texts belonging to the Sarvāstivāda tradition(s) do not employ the term Bodhisattva. The term Bodhisattva does, however, occur in relation to the Buddha’s pre-awakening experiences in the Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra. Similarly, the Mahāvadāna-sūtra uses the same term in relation to the pre-awakening experiences of the Buddha Vipaśyī. For occurrences of the term Bodhisattva in relation to the Buddha’s pre-awakening experiences in Āgama discourses, in addition to the passages discussed. Bapat takes this to be a deliberate omission in order “to show greater respect to the Buddha” by applying a honorific term like ‘the Blessed One’ already to the period of his life that preceded his awakening. The same tendency can in fact be seen in several Pāli discourses. In passages where the Buddha is not the speaker, the Pāli term bodhisatta tends to be replaced by expressions like ‘Blessed One’ or ‘Buddha’, even though the period in question clearly precedes his awakening.

The majority of occurrences of the ‘before awakening’ phrase in the Pāli discourses are related to various aspects of the Bodhisattva Gautama’s meditative development. The relevant instances cover three main themes:

- the Bodhisattva’s overcoming of unwholesome states of mind,
- his development of mental tranquillity,
• the growth of his insight.

An aspect of the Bodhisattva’s struggle with unwholesome mental qualities is taken up in a Pāli discourse and its Ekottarika-āgama parallel, which describe how he faced fear that had arisen while he was living in seclusion. Another Pāli discourse and its Madhyama-āgama parallel record how the Bodhisattva developed a clear distinction between those of his thoughts that were unwholesome and those that were wholesome. Out of various possible types of unwholesome thoughts, several discourses highlight in particular the Bodhisattva’s struggle with sensuality.

The Bodhisattva’s development of mental tranquility appears to have stood in close relationship to the roads to [psychic] power (rddhipāda), as three Pāli discourses mention these as central aspects of his pre-awakening development. As a meditation technique, according to a discourse in the Samyutta-nikāya he predominantly engaged in the practice of mindfulness of breathing. Other discourses report that, with deepening concentration, he experienced mental light and meditative forms, whose stabilization enabled him to attain full absorption (dhyāna).

The growth of the Bodhisattva’s insight appears to have been based on his pre-awakening investigation of the dependent arising of duhkha. Other discourses describe his examination of the true nature of feelings, of the four elements, of the five aggregates, of the six senses and their objects, and of the world. These passages thus highlight various aspects of Gautama’s development of insight, which in turn became facets of the comprehensive realization he attained on the night of his awakening.
In sum, the above surveyed texts, in which the ‘before awakening’ phrase occurs, depict the Bodhisattva Gautama’s struggle with unwholesome thoughts – in particular fear and sensual desire – as well as his development of tranquility and insight. These stand out as the central aspects of his progress to awakening.

The Concept of Bodhisattva as found in the Pāli Nikāyas

Several centuries after Gotama Buddha’s death, Bodhisattva may be regarded as the final outcome of the tendencies that were at work in India and contributed to the rise and growth of the new doctrine of Bodhisattva.

Bodhisattva is one of the most important ideas of Mahayana Buddhists. However, it would be a mistake to assure that the concept of Bodhisattva was a creation of the Mahayana. The term Bodhisattva had been mentioned in the Pali Canon and it stems from the original Pali Buddhism which is used more or less exclusively to designate Goutama Buddha prior to his Enlightenment. Nonetheless, if we go through the Pali texts such as the Majjihima Nikaya, the Dīgha Nikaya, the Sutta-Nipata and the Jataka of Khuddaka Nikaya, it may be shown out that the concept of Bodhisatta has four shades of meanings as given in the following paras.

From the time of the Buddha’s Renunciation up to the time of his Enlightenment

First of all, the term Bodhisatta reflects concretely the life of Gotama Buddha from renunciation up to the time of his Enlightenment when he was prince Siddhattha of the Kingdom Kapilavatthu, who was also suffering in the cycle of birth and death as we are, then there was a day as he went out of the palace to the city to see the world outside, he came in direct contact with the stark realities of life. His observant eyes met the
strange sights of a decrepit old man, a diseased person, a corpse and a dignified hermit. The first three sights convincingly proved to him the inexorable nature of life and the universal ailment of humanity. The fourth signified the means to overcome the ill of life and to attain calm and peace. Then he decided to abandon his homely life, and became a wandering ascetic in search of truth.

Leaving his parents, wife, son and luxury palace behind, he stole away with a light heart from the palace at midnight and rode into the dark, attended only by his loyal charioteer. Alone and penniless he set out in search of truth and peace. Thus did he renounce the world? It was not the renunciation of an old man who has had his fill of worldly life. It was not the renunciation of a poor man who had nothing to leave behind. It was the renunciation of a prince in the full bloom of youth and in the plentitude of wealth and prosperity - a renunciation unparalleled in history.

It was in his twenty-ninth year that prince Siddhattha made this historic journey. His extraordinary decision becoming a Bodhisatta in seeking for truth was just blooming as soon as he comprehended the bondage and imprisonment of the worldly life as Mahasaccaka Sutta of the Middle Length Sayings depicts:

“Now, Aggivessana, before my Self-awakening while I was still the bodhisatta, not fully awakened, it occurred to me: Narrow is the household life, a path of dust, going forth is the open, nor is it easy while dwelling in a house to lead the Brahma-faring completely fulfilled, utterly purified, polished like a conch-shell. Suppose now that I, having cut off hair and beard, having clothed myself in saffron garments, should go forth from home into homelessness? So I, Aggivessana, after a time, being young, my hair coal-black, possessed of radiant youth, in the prime of my life...So, Aggivessana, sat down just there thinking: indeed this does well for striking”.5
Or in the Ariyapariyesana-sutta recounted as follows:

“And, I too, monks, before Awakening, while I was still the Bodhisatta, not full awakened, being liable to birth, because of self, sought what was likewise liable to birth; being liable to ageing because of self, sought what was likewise liable to ageing; being liable to disease because of self...being liable to dying because of self...being liable to sorrow because of self...being liable to stain because of self, sought what was likewise liable to stain. Then it occurred to me, monks: ‘why do I, liable to birth because of self, seek what is likewise liable to birth; being liable to aging... being liable to stain because of self, seek what is likewise liable to stain? Suppose that I, (although) being liable to birth because of self, having known the peril in what is likewise liable to birth, should seek the unborn, the uttermost security from the bonds-nibbāna? Being liable to decay because of self...should seek the unageing... Being liable to decay because of self...should seek the undecaying... Being liable to dying because of self...should seek the undying... Being liable to sorrow because of self...should seek the unsorrowing... Being liable to stain because of self, having been seeking the stainless, the uttermost security from the bonds-nibbana?’

Period from Gotama Siddattha’s Conception to Gotama Buddha’s Enlightenment

Secondly, Bodhisattva was extended to denote the period from Gotama Siddattha’s conception to Gotama Buddha’s Enlightenment as depicted below: On the day of his conception, the Bodhisatta’s mother takes the vows of fasting and celibacy at the conclusion of a great festival, and when she has retired to rest she dreams that the Four Regent Gods take her with her bed, bathe her in the Anotatta lake, clad her in divine garments, and place her in a golden palace surrounded by all kinds of luxury. As she lies there “the Bodhisatta in the form of a white elephant enters her womb through her right side”. The earth trembles and all the ten thousand world-systems are filled with radiance.
Acchariyabhutadhamma-sutta which belongs to The Middle Length of Sayings depicts vividly this historical point:

“Face to face with the Lord, revered sir, have I heard this, face to face have learnt: The Bodhisatta deceasing from the Tusita group mindful and clearly conscious, entered his mother’s womb, then an illimitable glorious radiance, surpassing even the deva-majesty of devas, appeared in the world with its devas, its MÂras, its BratmÂs, among the generations recluses and brÂhmans, devas and men...cannot make their light surpassing even there there appeared the illimitable glorious radiance, surpassing even the deva-majesty of devas...”

or in the Mahapadana Sutta belonging to the Dialogues of the Buddha it has also retold that:

“Now Vipassi, brethren, when, as Bodhisatta, he ceased to belong to the hosts to the heaven of Delight, descended into his mother’s womb mindful and self-possessed. That in such a case is the rule. It is the rule, brethren, that, when a Bodhisatta issues from his mother’s womb, there is made manifest throughout the universe - including the worlds above the gods, the Maras and the Brahmas, and the world below with its recluses and brahmins, its princes and people - an infinite and splendid radiance passing the glory of the gods. And those beings who happen to be existing there, perceiving each other by that radiance, say: ‘Verily there be other beings living here!’ And the ten thousands worlds of the universe tremble and shudder and quake. And this infinite splendid radiance is made manifest in the world, passing the glory of the gods – that, in such a case, is the rule”.

Encyclopaedia of Buddhism lay it that the Bodhisatta’s last birth is attended by miracles because both in Pali and Sanskrit sources, an attempt is made to show that at the actual moment of conception there is no physical union of father and mother. This seems to be what is meant by a ‘virgin birth’.
The Period from the Conception of all the Buddhas in their Mother’s Wombs to the Attaining of their Respective Enlightenment

Bodhisattva with the meaning was all the Buddhas from the conception in their mother’s wombs to the attainment of their respective Bodhi or Enlightenment. The earlier and contemporary Indian literatures do suggest that the concept of Bodhisattva, along with that of Buddha and cakkavattī / cakravartin (global-ruler) was in vogue in India even before the appearance of Gotama Buddha on the scene. When Siddhattha / Sidhārtha, who later became Gotama Buddha, took conception in Māyā’s womb, a seer is reported to have predicted that Suddhodana’s son would be either a global ruler (Cakkavattī) or a Buddha. Once, while answering a question put up by a Brāhman, the Buddha himself is reported to have admitted that he was neither a god nor a yakkha (a category of divine being), but a Buddha meaning thereby one in a succession of Buddhas. The fact of the succession of the Buddhas is testified by the following gāthā or verse of the Dhammapada:

“Not to do any evil, to cultivate good, to purify one’s mind. This is the teaching of the Buddhas.”

which states that the teaching it contains is not that of a single Buddha, but of all Buddhas. A reference to the Āmagandha Sūtta may be made in this context which is recorded as a discourse of Kassapa Buddha and not of Gotama Buddha.

By applying the doctrine of karma and of regeneration (or rebirth), which had general acceptance in pre-Buddhist India and its neighbouring countries, the use of the term was further extended to refer to the past lives not only of Gotama Buddha, but also of those rare beings who aspire for Perfect Enlightenment.¹⁰
The earliest Theravāda tradition, as contained, for instance, in the Mahāpadāna Suttanta belongs to the Dialogues of the Buddha gives the details of six Buddhas who appeared prior to Gotama Buddha. The relevant passage may be reproduced below:


This discourse, i.e., the Mahāpadāna Sutta is attributed to the Śākyamuni Buddha himself, who gives the time, caste, family, length of life, etc. of these predecessors of his. They were the Buddha Vipassī, the Buddha Sikhī, the Buddha Vessabhū, the Buddha Kakusandha, the Buddha Koœagamana, and the Buddha Kassapa. The Digha Nikaya refers to the last life of seven Buddhas, including the Gotama Buddha with elements bearing colours of legendary events may be reproduced below:

“How, Vipassi, brothers, when, as Bodhisattva, he ceased to belong to the hosts of the heaven of Delight, descended into his mother’s womb mindful and self-possessed. That, in such a case, is the rule.”

In the BuddhavaÚsa, possibly a later work belonging to the Khuddaka Nikāya, the number increases to twenty-five and this number remains fixed in the Theravāda literature. This literature is as follows:

1. Dīpacekara BuddhavaÚso,
2. Koœñãña BuddhavaÚso,
3. MaÜgala BuddhavaÚso,
4. Sumana BuddhavaÚso,
5. Revata BuddhavaÚso,
6. Sobhita BuddhavaÚso,
7. Anomadassī BuddhavaÚso,
8. Paduma BuddhavaÚso,
9. Närada BuddhavaÚso,
10. Padumuttara BuddhavaÚso,
11. Sumedha BuddhavaÚso,
12. Sujāta BuddhavaÚso,
13. Piyadassī BuddhavaÚso,
14. Atthadassī BuddhavaÚso,
15. Dhammadassī BuddhavaÚso,
16. Siddhattha BuddhavaÚso,
17. Tissa BuddhavaÚso,
18. Phussa BuddhavaÚso,
19. Vipassī Buddhavamso,
20. Sikhī BuddhavaÚso,
21. Vessabhū BuddhavaÚso,
22. Kakusandha BuddhavaÚso,
23. Koœāgamana BuddhavaÚso,
24. Kassapa BuddhavaÚso,
25. Gotama BuddhavaÚso.
It may be noted here that the enumerations given above is by no means exhaustive. The proof of this fact lies in the Mahapadana Suttanta itself, the Buddha starts the story of the six Buddhas merely by saying that ninety-one kappas ago, there appeared such and such a Buddha implying thereby that such Buddhas were not limited in number. There might have appeared some Buddhas prior to ninety-one kappas and later than ninety-one kappas. In fact, it was this concept that was fully developed and enriched in later Mahayana Buddhism. From this it follows that if the number of the Buddhas can be innumerable, the number of Bodhisattvas could also be innumerable. It is indeed, based upon a logical corollary itself as it is the Bodhisattvas alone who in due course of kalpas/kappas (Kalpa is the period of time between the creation and recreation of a world or universe; also the kalpas of formation, existence, destruction, and non-existence, which form as a complete period are called Mahakalpa. Each great kalpa is subdivided into four asaṃkhyeya i.e., numberless, incalculable) turn into Buddhas.

In order to understand who a Bodhisattva is, it would be worthwhile to explain more who a Buddha is. The Buddha concept in Theravāda Buddhism is not a personality cult; nor is the Buddha an object of glorified devotion. He is neither a theoretical metaphysician nor a hard-headed materialist. He is not that sort of religious teacher who demands unquestioned loyalty like a Messiah. He is a man who has perfected himself by realising his ‘self’ to the highest degree as is possible for a human being. The fact is that the Buddha’s teachings are man-centred in the sense that only a man can become a Buddha and none else. There may be other supernatural beings inhabiting perhaps other lokas or realms. But they are not capable of becoming a fully-Enlightened One. Even though there may be such beings who lead happier lives in their non-human spheres, still they are subject to the laws of change and evolution (anicca/vaya-dhammā), and as such not free from birth and death and their attendant conflicts and hence they are not released
from dukkha or sufferings. A Buddha is a human being who has realised that there is a happier state than the state obtained in this world of conditioned phenomena. After a persevering struggle, he realises this unconditioned state (asaũkhata) which is free from duality. This freedom from duality implies the absence of any conflict (dukkha).

The psychological state under reference is, therefore, described as free from both sorrow and happiness in the ordinary sense. It is the highest happiness (paramam-sukham) in the transcendental sense. As such it is not subject to change and is, therefore, imperishable (akālika and amata). It is a state of changelessness (avyaya) and, therefore, permanent (dhuva). It is this very state which has been described as the Nibbāna/Nirvāṇa. The Buddha is the person who realised this state for the first time in the whole history of human race, by his own efforts and hence he was designated the Teacher (Satthā/Sāstā) and continues to be so for all those who have unquestioned faith in Him (the Buddha), Law (the Dhamma/Dharma) and the Fraternity (the Sangha). Arahantas are His disciples who follow his teachings. Bodhisattvas are, on the other hand, those who aspire to become the Buddhas (the Fully Enlightened Ones).

The life of the Buddha, strictly speaking, commenced only from the time of His Enlightenment and His life before that event was that of the Bodhisatta (called Siddhattha). The Buddha himself used the term in this sense and it is more than probable that Gotama Buddha occasionally referred to his previous existences in His discourses to the people in order to elucidate a particular doctrinal point.

The Various Previous Lives of Goutama Buddha

Fourthly, Bodhisatta means the various previous lives of Gotama Buddha. Jātaka is a part of Khuddaka Nikāya (Minor Work) in Pañca-Nikāya and is the later inscribed
Nikāyas as T.W. Rhys Davids has introduced the chronological table of the Pali literature as follows:

- The simple statements of Buddhist doctrine now found, in identical words, in paragraphs or verses recurring in all books
- Episodes found, in identical words, in two or more of the existing books
- The Sīla
- The Dīgha, Majjhima, Anguttara, and Samyutta Nikāyas
- The Jātaka and the Dhammapada

Bodhisatta concept in Jataka was so abundant and diverse in various forms such as deva, ascetic, brahmā, king, prince, millionaire, landlord, merchant, farmer...or there was time Bodhisatta was born as a fish, bird, bull, deer. However, because Bodhisatta played the role of previous lives of the Buddha, then Bodhisattva’s character was moral, virtuous, compassionate, intelligent and wise. Some typical stories in Jātakas usually start as below:

“Once on a time in the kingdom of Seri, five aeons ago, the Bodhisatta dealt in pots and pans, and was called ‘the Serivan’. In the company of another dealer in the same wares, a greedy fellow who was also known as ‘the Serivan’, he came across the river Telavaha and entered the city of Andhapura. Apportioning the streets between the two of them, he set about hawking his wares round the streets of his district, and the other did the same in his district.”

Here is an important thing which we must note that it seems to have been neither a Jataka collection as such, nor the developed concept of the Bodhisatta practising paramitas, until a much later period. Hence, it would appear that the concept of the
Bodhisatta could be divided into two parts, the original concept and the concept developed by the later Buddhists.

It means that the earliest use of the term Bodhisatta in literature with the first meaning which seems to refer to from the time of the Buddha’s renunciation up to the time of his Enlightenment. This seems to be the main concept of Bodhisattva through Pali Nikaya, then the developed concept with the second, third, and fourth meanings such as the period from Gotama Siddattha’s Conception to Gotama Buddha’s Enlightenment, from the Conception in their Mother’s Wombs to the Attainment of their respective Bodhi or Enlightenment as well as the Various Previous Lives of Gotama Buddha as depicted in the Pāli Suttas inclusive of the fashion of the later Jataka stories recounted therein.

**Gautama’s Marvellous Qualities**

Instead of compassion, the emphasis in the early discourses is on a range of other qualities of the Bodhisattva. A detailed exposition of what tradition considered to be particularly inspiring about the Bodhisattva can be found in the Discourse on Wonderful and Marvellous Qualities, the Acchariyabhutadhamma-sutta of the Majjhima-nikāya, and in its Madhyama-āgama parallel, the Discourse on Marvellous Qualities. As these two discourses are of central importance for the exploration of the conception of the Bodhisattva.

The speaker of the Acchariyabhutadhamma-sutta is Ānanda, who lists a series of wonderful and marvellous qualities of the Buddha. In the Pāli version, he begins by describing that the Bodhisattva Gautama was endowed with mindfulness and clear comprehension when arising in Tusita, during his sojourn – which lasted for the whole
of his lifespan – and when departing from this realm. The Madhyama-āgama parallel does not mention his mindfulness or clear comprehension when being reborn in Tusita. Instead, this version reports that he outshone other heavenly beings (deva) with respect to lifespan, appearance and glory. The two versions agree, however, that the Bodhisattva entered into his mother’s womb with clear comprehension, an event that was accompanied by an earthquake and the manifestation of a great light.

The Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta continues by depicting the conditions of the Bodhisattva’s sojourn in his mother’s womb, reporting that four heavenly beings protected him; that his mother was virtuous, free from sensual thoughts, but at the same time endowed with the five types of sense pleasures; and that she was able to see the Bodhisattva in her womb, comparable to seeing a beryl strung on a coloured thread. None of these marvellous qualities occur in the Madhyama-āgama version. Though the Madhyama-āgama discourse also describes the conditions of the Bodhisattva in the mother’s womb, it instead notes that inside the womb he rested on his right side, with his body fully stretched.

Next the Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta reports that the mother passed away seven days after giving birth, followed by indicating that the pregnancy lasted ten months and that the mother gave birth while standing. None of these qualities is found in the Chinese parallel.

The two versions agree that on being born the Bodhisattva was not sullied by any bodily impurities and was received by four deities. They also agree that two streams of water appeared in the sky to bathe him, and that on being born the Bodhisattva took seven
steps. The Pāli version records a declaration made by the newly born Bodhisattva on this occasion, in which he proclaims his superiority in the world and his transcendence of future existences, a declaration absent from the Madhyama-āgama parallel.

The two versions agree again that the birth was accompanied by another earthquake and the manifestation of a great light. While in the Pāli version the listing of marvelous qualities by Ānanda comes to an end at this point, in the Madhyama-āgama account he continues by mentioning several remarkable events that took place during the Buddha’s youth and after his awakening. The two versions agree in concluding the discourse with the Buddha highlighting another marvelous quality of his, namely his ability to be aware of the arising, continuity and disappearance of feelings, perceptions and thoughts.

As this brief survey shows, the two versions differ considerably from each other. The Bodhisattva’s descent from Tuṣita into his mother’s womb and the extraordinary form and circumstances of his birth seem to be their common starting points, from which the two versions appear to have developed the theme of the marvelous qualities of the Bodhisattva in independent ways.

As a result of these independent developments, their present listings of marvellous qualities show more differences than similarities. The two discourses thereby diverge from each other to a greater degree than usually found between discourses in the Majjhima-nikāya and their Madhyama-āgama parallels. This circumstance suggests a comparatively late date for the coming into being of each version in its final form.
Regarding qualities, they are found in only one of the two versions, but the presentation in both discourses conveys the same attitude towards the marvelous nature of Buddha, the possibility that a quality now found in only one version was on purposefully omitted in the parallel version can safely be set aside. Since both discourses otherwise show no sign of textual loss, it seems also improbable that one version lost a whole series of qualities, which are now found only in the other version. Thus in the case of qualities that occur in only one of the two versions, the most straightforward explanation would be that these are later additions.

A sign of later addition in the Pāli version can in fact be found in relation to the passing away of the mother seven days after giving birth to the Bodhisattva.\(^\text{18}\) The placing of this particular event in the Acchariyabhutadhamma-sutta is out of sequence, as it occurs after several marvels that, in a chronological order, depict his birth and life in Tusita, his descent from Tusita and his subsequent sojourn in his mother’s womb. In continuation of this pattern, the Bodhisattva’s birth should be the next marvel, yet in the Acchariyabhutadhamma-sutta his birth is mentioned only after the passing away of his mother has been described.

As the Madhyama-āgama parallel does not refer to her passing away at all, it seems safe to assume that the reference to the death of the mother is a later addition. In fact, one would not naturally place the early death of the Bodhisattva’s mother under the heading of being a marvel of her son. A discourse in the Udāna reckons her early death as a marvel in general, probably more straightforward way of qualifying this event. Perhaps due to a growing interest in marvelous qualities of the Buddha, at some point during oral transmission this Udāna passage may have come to be added to the account of marvels in

\(^\text{18}\)
the Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta. If that should indeed be the case, then this addition
took place without awareness of the chronological sequence of marvels otherwise
observed in this discourse.

The function of this listing of marvelous qualities in the Acchariyabbhutadhamma
-sutta and its Madhyama-āgama parallel is reflected in a peculiar feature found in both
versions, which rarely occurs in other early discourses. Both follow each quality with a
remark by Ananda that keeps this marvel in mind. In this way, each marvellous quality is
described twice, once as an actual description and again as something that Ananda keeps
in mind.

Now in the thought-world of the early discourses, Ānanda stands out as the
disciple foremost in memory. The same quality is also reflected in the circumstance that,
according to the account of the so-called first council in the different Vinayas, he had
memorized all the discourses spoken by Buddha. Thus, the fact that he keeps each of
the Buddha’s marvelous qualities in mind would not require any explicit highlighting.
Besides, this much is anyway self-evident, since otherwise he would not have been able
to list them.

In addition to stating an obvious fact, these refrain-like statements would have the
effect of indicating to the audience that each of these qualities is worth being memorized.
In this way, the pattern observed throughout both versions – where hearing that the
Bodhisattva had such-and-such a quality is followed by remembering that the Bodhisattva
had such-and such a quality – would encourage others to keep this quality in mind.
Another noteworthy feature of the Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta is its recurrent use of visual stimulants. The first of these is the description of an earthquake accompanied by a great light of such intensity that it outshines even the moon and the sun, reaching areas of utter darkness where beings for the first time are able to see each other. The second image illustrates the mother’s ability to see the Bodhisattva in her own womb with the example of seeing a coloured thread strung through a well-cut beryl of pure quality. The third image compares the newly born Bodhisattva to a gem placed on Kāśī cloth, and the fourth image again depicts the appearance of a great light together with an earthquake.  

These visual stimulants, with their symbolic allusion to the dispelling of darkness through the teaching activity of the Buddha (whom tradition considers the first of the three ‘gems’), are set in a frame that alludes to meditation: The first marvel in the Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta highlights the Bodhisattva’s possession of mindfulness and clear comprehension on appearing, remaining in and leaving Tusita. The last marvel, mentioned by the Buddha in reply to Ananda’s exposition, describes the Buddha’s awareness of feelings, perceptions and thoughts as they arise, are present and disappear – an ability elsewhere in the discourses presented under the heading of clear comprehension.  

Thus underlying the listing of qualities in the Acchariyabbhutadhammasutta a circular pattern can be discerned that moves from the Bodhisattva’s clear comprehension via the manifestation of a great light to the description of a jewel, and then continues from another jewel via another manifestation of a great light to the Buddha’s clear comprehension. That is, the recollection of the Buddha’s marvelous qualities in the Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta proceeds in an almost rhythmic pattern that takes off and concludes with meditative qualities, and whose trajectory progresses through a set of
images that have a strong visual and symbolic component. In this way, the discourse exhibits considerable evocative qualities, revealing that the purpose of the Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta is probably best understood as inviting recalling, perhaps even visualizing, in a rather lively manner the marvelous qualities of Buddha.  

The recollective and evocative message of the Acchariyabbhutadhammasutta would have been of particular importance for the early Buddhist community after their founder had passed away, especially for disciples who had never met Buddha. Lacking the experience of a personal encounter with the living Buddha, and given that during the early period the Buddha was not represented in sculpture or painting, discourses like the Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta would have enabled new converts to engage in some form of emotional contact with their teacher, by memorizing and perhaps even visualizing his marvellous qualities.

Now the act of becoming a Buddhist involves taking the three refuges. Yet, new converts would have lacked an opportunity to establish a direct rapport with the first refuge, the Buddha, once he had passed away. In line with a general trait of religious traditions, the passing away of the founder inevitably creates a vacuum not easily filled. In the case of early Buddhism, this vacuum would have been particularly challenging for those who could not find all the inspiration they needed in the teachings alone, who were in need of something more personal that touches the heart.

The Acchariyabbhutadhamma-sutta’s taking up of common events like pregnancy and birth can be understood as a means of addressing such needs by uplifting and inspiring its audience through a stimulating description of the marvellous way the
Buddha-to-be passed through these experiences, common to all human beings. By treating events familiar to anyone who had lived or still lived in an ancient Indian household, the Acchariyabhutadhamma-sutta treads common ground and at the same time creates distance and evokes awe through the medium of the marvels that accompany these events. Thus, the didactic function of the Acchariyabhutadhamma-sutta would have been to stimulate and strengthen devotion based on the superior nature of the Buddha, evident in the marvels that accompany his god-like descent from heaven to the world of human beings.

The important function that the marvels would have assumed in this respect may also help to appreciate why marvels came to be part of the traditional listings of canonical texts. Judging from the function of the marvels suggested above, it is hardly surprising that discourses on marvels should have been considered important enough to be included in the register of Buddhist texts in terms of nine or twelve “limbs”, angas.

This function of the marvels provides the background for the coming into being of a rather significant development in regard to the Bodhisattva concept that manifests in the Acchariyabhutadhamma-sutta. This occurs in the discourse’s description of how, on just being born, the Bodhisattva takes seven steps and then proclaims: “I am supreme in the world, I am the highest in the world, I am the first in the world; this is my last birth, there will be no further existence.”

THE EVOLUTION OF MAHAYANA BODHISATTVA

It is very difficult to regard the precise chronological brackets of the Bodhisattva doctrine with many ideas. The Encyclopaedia of Buddhism is of opinion that the
Bodhisattva doctrine has taken shape around 1st century B.C. with the statement: “Round about the first century A.C. the luxuriant fancy of India began to invent and multiply divinities much in the fashion of the Rigvedic poets and the Buddhist theologians of the time were no exception. When personalities of Siva and Vishnu were taking shapes in Hinduism, the figures of divine Bodhisattva were taking shape in Mahayana Buddhism.”

In the opinion of Har Dayal29 the Bodhisattva doctrine probably originated in the 2nd Century B.C. “We may regard the second Century B.C as the chronological starting-point for the development of the Bodhisattva”. N. Dutt30 observes it to be around the 2nd or 1st Century B.C. Nakamura31 and A.K Warder32 have maintained that Bodhisattvayana might have come into existence probably towards the beginning of the Christian era. The Encyclopedia of Religion33 holds that the concept of Bodhisattva apparently emerged between the beginning of the first century B.C and the middle of the first 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 philosophy in Mahayana.

The concept of Bodhisattva as depicted in the Majjhima Nikaya was compiled around the fourth and third centuries B.C. 206 The admission of Gotama Siddhartha of being a Bodhisattva before enlightenment should be taken to be a simple statement of the Bodhisattva ideal in the Pali Nikaya: “…before awakening, while I was still the Bodhisattva”.34 In this, we meet with the idea of Tran’s development of the Arahath ideal to the Bodhisattva ideal.
According to Bimala Churn Law, his opinion the chronology of the Pali canonical literature should be classified as follows:\textsuperscript{35}

- The simple statements of Buddhist doctrine now found, in identical words, in paragraphs or verses recurring in all books.
- Episodes found, in identical words, in two or more of the existing books.
- The Sila, the Parayœa group of sixteen poems.
- Digha, Vol. I, the Majjhima, the Samyutta, the Aœguttara Nikayas.
- The Digha, Vol. II and III, the collection of 500 Jatakas

The subjoined division relating to some transformation of the chronological order of the Digha Nikaya, Vol. II and III supposed to be composed after the Majjhima Nikaya, the term ‘Bodhisattva’, which might well have been pressured by the outburst of the new Buddhist Schools, especially the Mahasanghika\textsuperscript{36} school with its philosophical progress because of disagreements with the Theravada sect about the Vinaya as well as doctrine, particularly in term of Buddhology,\textsuperscript{37} is now deified in the good omens and extraordinary characteristics when “the Bodhisatta descending from the Tusita group entering his mother’s womb”\textsuperscript{38} The second landmark in the development of the Bodhisattva ideal is the deification of the portrait of seven Buddhas by manifesting the descent of the Bodhisattva from the Tusita paradise entering his mother’s womb. The Buddha’s descent on earth is the third step of development in the Buddhist teaching.

The profusely illustrated pictures of the Bodhisattva as found in the Jatakas are assumed to be the fourth phase of the philosophical progress of the doctrine. It is a genuinely strong religious trend reclining towards a mythological scope of Bodhisattva doctrine. It is not easy to analyse the revolution in Buddhism at the time which is often
told to be caused by a marked decline in the order and exhaustion of its Arhat ideal for preaching the Dharma. That may be the reason Isaline B Horner in The Early Buddhist Theory of Man Perfected stated that: “First, there is the original and positive element of the altruism of the arahan in foregoing his meditations in order to give counsel and instruction to other members of the Order and to the laity; and secondly, there is the increasing amount of solitude sought by the later arahants, which was possibly due to the loss of the inspiring presence and example of the Master”.

The compilation of *Jatakas* has been a unique experiment in the history of Buddhism which took deep root in popular sentiment and evoked great applause among men of all countries of the world to accept the doctrine. It thus did not remain confined to Indian masses. For centuries, the ideal of Bodhisattva manifesting the power of the Buddha has been inspiring men to live up to the ideal of the Buddha in making the life of the beings peaceful and happy. That is to say, during a period of about four centuries from the 6th to the 3rd Century B.C, Buddhology of the *Pali Nikayas* with its realistic conception of the Buddha, that of Sarvastivada with its two kinds of Buddhakaya, viz., Dharmakaya and Rupakaya has still centered around and has revered the enlightenment ideal of Buddhism, and has smoothly run among the Buddhist circles without much transformation. In the fifth phase of the doctrinal dissemination a strong commotion had been felt across the world to usher into a permanent stage of philosophical contention and unequivocal growth of the meditative trends and practices based on manifestations of the divine. The preceptors genuinely looked into the affair of men benefiting them by invocations of gods and goddesses that were adored by all.
The early Mahayana teaches that altruistic activity is one of the means of attaining Enlightenment, which is the goal. But the later Mahayana seems to forget even that far-off destination and prefers to loiter on the way. A Bodhisattva need not be in a hurry to win Bodhi and become a Buddha, as he can help and succour all living beings more effectively during his mundane career as a Bodhisattva. This idea also resulted in the subordination of the Buddhas to the Bodhisattvas. There is a marked tendency to regard Altruism as an end in itself. *Avalokitesvara* does not seem to think seriously of becoming a Buddha. In the two great Bodhisattvas — *Avalokiteśvara* and *Mañjusri*, one can very well see the personifications of kindness / compassion and knowledge / wisdom respectively. They invite comparison with the Zoroastrian Amesha Spentas and with the Christian archangels. With such developments in Budhological realm, it is but natural that the number of Bodhisattvas became virtually endless. In fact, the important Mahayana scriptural texts like the Saddharma-oybdaruja Sūtra, Avatamsaka Sūtra and so on provide a very long list of such Bodhisattvas and in essence, when the Bodhisattvas could not be named or designated, the compilers of those satras simply referred to those Bodhisattvas in millions, rather innumerable.

A Bodhisattva is a person in the school of the elders who is desirous of acquiring the characteristics of a perfect being, the enlightened-one. It appears as such in the *Pali Nikayas*. The accomplishment of such a state makes him content. But the ideal of Mahayana induces him to greater effort based on dynamic activity to help the other beings attain ultimate bliss; before that he does not lay ore to save beings from the state of suffering. Not satisfied with his own mitigation of desire some actions that make him subjected to malice and all kinds of cravings, he strives up on helping all other beings to come over the affray.
REFERENCES


2. Ibid.


5. MLS, I, No. 36 Mahasaccaka Sutta, 295.


9. The Middle Length Sayings, the Acchariya-abbhuta-dhamma-sutta, III, 165.

10. Loc.cit


12. The Dialogue of the Buddha, II, No. 14 Mahapadana Sutta, 8 (also see DB, II, No. 17, the Mahasudassana sutta, 192; No. 19, the MahāGovinda sutta, 253).


14. T.W. Rhys Davids, Buddhist India, Motilal, rpt.1993, p.188.


16. MN 123 at MN III 118, 9; where the discourse’s title in Be and Ce dispenses with dhamma. The title of the Madhyama-āgama parallel agrees with Ee and Se, MĀ 32 at T I 469c20.

17. MN 123 at MN III 119, 21.

18. MN 123 at MN III 122, 1.
AN 1.14 at AN I 24, 32 and EĀ 4.7 at T II 558a26; cf. also Th 1024.

Dharmaguptaka Vinaya, T 1428 at T XXII 968b15.

MN 123 at MN III 120, 6, MN III 121, 20, MN III 123,1 and MN III 123,28.

0 SN 47.35 at SN V 180, 27.


For a study of the contrast between the suffering associated in ancient Indian thought with birth and the depiction of the marvels that accompany the same event in the case of the bodhisattva cf. Hara 1980. On the miracles accompanying the bodhisattva’s birth, Griffiths 1994: 88 comments that such “miraculous signs are generally meant … to inculcate astonishment in the … hearer of the legend.” Robinson 1970/1982: 7 remarks that “the purpose of all the mythical elements in the nativity cycle is to show that the Bodhisattva was innately different from ordinary man.”

Senart 1882b: 432 comments that “le Buddha, avant sa naissance, est un dieu, le chef des dieux, à vrai dire il ne naît point, il s’incarne parmi les hommes en vue de leur bien et de leur salut.”

DN 16 at DN II 145, 3 and AN 4.129 at AN II 132,17.

MN 123 at MN III 123,21.

Encyclopaedia of Buddhism, III, 231.

The Bodhisattva Doctrine In Buddhist Sanskrit Literature, 43.


38 The Middle Length Sayings, III, 165.