3.1. Interpreting the Term ‘Mahāyāna’

The term ‘Mahāyāna’ is combined from two words ‘mahā’ and ‘yāna.’ The word ‘mahā’ means ‘great’ and ‘yāna’ means ‘vehicle.’ Thus, ‘Mahāyāna’ means ‘Great vehicle,’ it is a term for classification of philosophy and practice of Buddhism.

As we know, ‘yāna’ or vehicle implies at least two things; one, the vehicle itself, and another, the traveler (who uses the vehicle to go from place to place). From the religious standpoint, ‘yāna’ itself indicates doctrines; while the traveler is the practitioner of the doctrines. Again, in relation with another, the term ‘Mahāyāna’ has the implication of “superiority and inferiority”; “praise and depreciation” between the two schools. And the word ‘mahā’ (or great) is used by way of striking, a note of superiority and praise of one school over the opposite school, namely Hinayāna. Japanese scholar, Eyun Mayede, hold that the term ‘Mahāyāna’ and ‘Hinayāna’ is only implication a particular relation on the viewpoint of ‘practitioner,’ but not definitely on that of the ‘doctrine.’\textsuperscript{155} However, some others hold quite a

contrary view. But I agree with Kimura’s view that, these terms indicate both the features, ‘practitioner’ and ‘doctrine.’ And that is precisely why in the Mahāyāna sūtras and śastras, we find many other terms such as, ‘Ekayāna’ contrasted to ‘Dviyāna’ (twofold vehicle), ‘Śrāvakayāna,’ ‘Pratyekabuddhayāna,’ ‘Bodhisattvayāna’ and ‘Buddhayāna.’ When there is a necessity to show a relation of doctrine, then the terms ‘Ekayāna’ and ‘Dviyāna’ are used; when there is a necessity to show a relation of practitioner, then the terms ‘Śrāvakayāna,’ ‘Bodhisattvayāna’ and ‘Buddhayāna’ are applied respectively.\(^{156}\)

Again, because Mahāyāna teachings outline the paths for practitioners to reach the purified state of the Bodhisattvas, and the vow of the Bodhisattva is to carry all living beings to nirvāṇa, so Mahāyāna was known as “Bodhisattvayāna,” or the “Vehicle of the Bodhisattva.”\(^{157}\) The path of Mahāyāna was also known as the path of Bodhisattva. According to Dr. Mizuno, Hinayāna (Theravāda) aims at the improvement and advancement of single individual, while Mahāyāna aims at the improvement of society as a whole and for the salvation of all sentient beings. Therefore, meaning of Mahāyāna is the “Great Vehicle” which conveys all sentient beings to salvation; Hinayāna is the “Lesser Vehicle” which is suitable only for the salvation of the single individual. This terminology is not only expressive of the sole invention of Mahāyāna school, but also is applied to the earlier schools of Buddhism.\(^{158}\)

Besides, the connotation of the term ‘Mahāyāna’ also refers to the scope of aspiration, the methods applied and the depth of insight. The

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\(^{157}\) The Mahāyāna, ‘Great Vehicle’ or ‘Great Carriage’ (for carrying all beings to nirvāṇa), is also, and perhaps more correctly and accurately, known as the Bodhisattvayāna, the bodhisattva’s vehicle. See A. K., Warde, *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 338.

\(^{158}\) Baruah, Bibhuti, *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 72.
greatness of the term ‘Mahāyāna’ is elaborated in The Diamond Hermit’s Treatise (Chinese Chin-kang-hsien-lu) as follows:¹⁵⁹

(1) The great essence: it holds that Mahāyāna embraces all merits, avoids the lesser destinies of the five Vehicles (pañcayāna).

(2) The means of great men: it holds that through Mahāyāna the great Bodhisattvas can attain the same enlightenment as the Buddha has attained.

(3) The realization of great men: it means only the Buddhas ultimately comprehend the Mahāyāna doctrine.

(4) The ability for realization of the many: it means the Buddhas exist eternally in order to teach and to bring salvation to all living beings.

In fact, Mahāyāna is known as a developed form of Early Buddhism. Its formation is possibly the consequence of adaptation and development of Buddhism after a long period of time. The Mahāyāna partisans hold that, Mahāyāna Buddhism can be presented as a reformation, in which the decayed parts of the old tradition are rejected in favor of the new ones, although these innovations are fully in concert with the authentic intentions of Buddha’s teachings.¹⁶⁰ Sir Charles Eliot writes in this matter thus: “Mahāyāna was a great movement, in which its various phases may be regarded as a philosophical school, a sect and a church of Buddhism.”¹⁶¹

Another view says, Mahāyāna did not originate with any individual reform or emerged at a specific place and time, but it was formed and grew with the social changes and religious belief. It partially had roots in a pan-Indian movement of devotion (bhakti) where had a dramatic impact on the Hindu tradition of India around 150 BCE and in the next centuries.¹⁶²

According to P. Pathak, perhaps the best way to envision Mahāyāna

¹⁵⁹ T. 25, No.1512: 805a.
¹⁶² P., Pathak, Early Buddhism and Indian Thoughts, Delhi: MD Pvt Ltd, copyright 2011, p. 235.
Buddhism in its earliest years is through a set of new texts that introduced new doctrinal elements into Buddhism. Those who accepted the canonical legitimacy of these new texts were Mahāyānists.\textsuperscript{163} Of course, these new texts were supposed have originated from the Buddha’s teachings. They were regarded as “turnings of the wheel of Dharma” which taught deeper meanings of the Buddha’s message to disciples who were more capable.

The distinctive teaching of Mahāyāna was a new conception of the goal of Buddhism. The Theravāda tradition holds that, the attainment of nirvāṇa was theoretically possible for anyone, but the attainment of Buddhahood was unique Gautama Buddha. Therefore, they regarded the Buddha as existing on an incomparably higher level which they could not possibly hope to attain, so they confined their efforts to the attainment of the relatively level of Arhant, the “perfect being.”\textsuperscript{164} But the Mahāyāna tradition holds that, the enlightenment and Buddhahood as the ultimate goal for all practitioners, and regarded nirvāṇa as a lower attainment for those of a “lesser vehicle” (Hinayāna).\textsuperscript{165} Because the Mahāyānists believe that, all human beings have the transcendent nature of a Buddha. They have ready inner of them what is called Buddha nature, (the intrinsic purity of consciousness to become a Buddha), so they are capable to attain enlightenment and become a Buddha. And the way of attainment of the Buddhahood is known as the “Path of the Bodhisattva” through the development of Bodhicitta (mind of enlightenment) and the practice of full six pāramitās (six perfections of certain virtues of a Bodhisattva).\textsuperscript{166}

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., p. 236.
\textsuperscript{164} This view seems to have been a particular characteristic of the Buddhist Order in its earliest stages. See Baruah, Bibhuti, \textit{op. cit.}, 2000, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{165} P., Pathak, \textit{op. cit.}, 2011, p. 236.
\textsuperscript{166} Six Pāramitās are the practice-path of Bodhisattva to attain enlightenment (Buddhahood), namely: Dāna (giving, generosity, liberality), Śīla (virtuous conduct, morality, righteousness), Kṣānti (forbearance, patience), Vīrya (diligence), Dhyāna (rapt musing, concentration), and Prajñā (wisdom).
Therefore, the chief ideal of Mahāyāna is the Bodhisattva ideal; an ideal with a great vow “to postpone entry into nirvāṇa (although meriting it) until all other living beings are similarly enlightened and saved.” This ideal supplanted the earlier ideal of the Arhant (limits the release to oneself) in the Theravāda tradition. The Mahāyāna practitioner is person who practises the vows and acts of the Bodhisattva, in order to attain the Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings. It is an unselfish quest of enlightenment. The aim of the Mahāyāna practitioners is not only to get rid of suffering, but also to help all others out of misery. So, Mahāyāna Buddhism accepts all doctrines and practices that are conducive to the benefit of all living beings. That is why the Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra says that “Mahāyāna is as big as the sky that could accommodate all the humans and divine beings and carry them to nirvāṇa.”

In addition, the Theravāda tradition always emphasizes the law of karma. They hold that suffering of humans is the law of karma, so they try to cut off delusions and escape from the world of transmigration and suffering, to reach a peaceful realm. Therefore, they practise to attain the goal of nirvāṇa. In contrast, the Mahāyāna tradition emphasizes the vow and practice. The Mahāyāna followers look upon the sufferings of human as something which they have willfully vowed to undergo in order to help others to attain salvation. They do not try to escape from the suffering of the world, but instead encounter suffering in order to fulfill the vow and practice of the Bodhisattva to reach Buddhahood. In the Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra, the famous layman, Vimalakirti, expressed this sense of mission of the Bodhisattva when he said, “Because all sentient beings are sick, therefore I too am sick.” The Buddha, of course, also taught that the existence of human beings should be marked by suffering, but that is not the sum of his message. He went on to urge that his followers “should not try to escape

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168 This sūtra will mention in chapter 5 of the thesis.
from the sufferings of birth, old, sickness, and death, but have to face to overcome them.” This is the essential message of Buddhism. And it could be taken as a strong proof against the misunderstandings that “Mahāyāna is not true teachings of the Buddha.”

From what has been said above, the term ‘Mahāyāna’ deserves with its meaning – “Great Vehicle,” the vehicle that can convey all sentient beings to salvation. Therefore, it is easy to see that, why the Mahāyāna teachings have a great popular appeal and the mass of lay-believers with the enthusiastic support. Thus, Mahāyāna was able to override the criticisms and attacks of the older schools and to rise to a position of dominance in India Buddhism.

3.2. Origin of the Term ‘Mahāyāna’

3.2.1. The Coining of the Term ‘Mahāyāna’

Actually, it is very difficult to trace the coining of the term ‘Mahāyāna.’ This matter has caused many controversies among scholars. Some scholars think that the term ‘Mahāyāna’ originated from the term ‘Mahāsaṅghika,’ but I have a different opinion. As mentioned before, after the contradiction in the Second Buddhist Council at Vaisālī, the group of progressive monks held another Council which consisted of 10000 monks. Because of the large number comprising of their Saṅgha, they called themselves as Mahāsaṅghika, or Mahāsaṅgīti (Great Council). Thus, the word ‘Mahā’ in Mahāsaṅghika means ‘Greatness with regard to the quantity of community’; while the word ‘Mahā’ in Mahāyāna means ‘Greatness in connection with thought, aim and act of religious practitioner.’ Therefore, it is irrational to say that, the term ‘Mahāyāna’ originated from the term ‘Mahāsaṅghika.’

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170 P. V., Bapat (ed.), *2500 Years of Buddhism*, Delhi: 1960, p. 100.
Thus, where did the term ‘Mahāyāna’ was originate, by whom was it coined, and at what time was it in use, all these questions need to be analyzed in this section.

As discussed above, the meaning of the term ‘Mahāyāna’ has the implication of a sense relative to “superiority and inferiority”; “praise and depreciation” between Mahāyāna and Hinayāna. Obviously, as we can easily imagine, such terms speaking from an emotional viewpoint, cannot come from the followers of Hinayāna schools. In other words, the followers of Hinayāna cannot depreciate themselves same like that. This is exactly the reason why the terms ‘Mahāyāna,’ ‘Hinayāna’ and other allied terms occurred in Mahāyāna Sūtra and Śāstras many times, but there is not a single instance of them in the Pāli Nikāya.\(^{172}\)

Moreover, in the Paramārtha’s commentary on Nikāya-avalamābana-śāstra (Pu-chih-i-lun) of Vasumitra, we see that, Prajñāpāramitā and Avatamsaka-sūtra existed for two hundred years after the Buddha’s nirvāṇa, and these had been used by Mahāsaṅghika schools. Of course, those sūtras would not have been in the same form as they are at present, but they were certainly an original nucleus.\(^{173}\) Thus, Buddha’s Introspectional and Ontological doctrines (which were embodied first in Mahāyāna Sūtras), were brought to light by Mahāsaṅghikas. And they manifested and remained in the Sūtra form afterwards. Therefore, it can be said that the followers of Mahāsaṅghika schools coined the term ‘Mahāyāna’ in order to manifest their doctrines. Bibhuti Baruah also asserted that: “the Mahāsaṅghikas found out the term ‘Mahāyāna’ for themselves in order to show their doctrinal superiority, and at the same time they found out the term ‘Hinayāna’ for their opponents to indicate more inferior. Hence the term ‘Mahāyāna’ and ‘Hinayāna’ came into existence.”\(^{174}\)

\(^{172}\) Ryukan, Kimura, \textit{op. cit.}, 1978, p. 69.
\(^{173}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 71.
\(^{174}\) Baruah, Bibhuti, \textit{op. cit.}, 2000, p. 93.
But, according to historical records, the first great Buddhist writer that used the term ‘Mahāyāna’ was Aśvaghoṣa, who is believed to have lived at the time from the latter half of the 1st century BCE to about 50 or 80 CE in Kaniṣka’s dynasty. Aśvaghoṣa is regarded as a poet-philosopher. In his works, the term ‘Mahāyāna’ occurs many times, but it was used not to denote a separate system of religion and philosophy, but it was used only in the sense of the law of perfect Buddha. However, in his writings, especially in the Buddhacarita, there are clear indications of transition from Hinayāna to Mahāyāna. In this work, Aśvaghoṣa explains the theory of anātman and says that “this is the Mahāyāna, the instrument of the law of the perfect Buddha.” Hirakawa Akira, in his work, seems to have assumed this and says: “Though the thought of Mahāyāna Buddhism was issued earlier, but the term ‘Mahāyāna’ was not used in a text until the 2nd or 3rd century CE.”

However, according to Suzuki, the term ‘Mahāyāna’ was first used by Aśvaghoṣa in the Mahāyānaśraddhotpatti-śāstra. Originally, it was not a name given to any religious doctrine, nor had anything to do with doctrinal controversy, but it used to designate the highest principle of things by which the universe and all sentient beings are manifested, through which only they can attain final salvation (mokṣa, vimukti or nirvāṇa). The designation ‘Hīnayāna’ (Small Vehicle) was used by the group of progressive monks to refer to the group of conservative monks or Nikāya Buddhism. Actually no Buddhists group ever introduced themselves as Hīnayānists.

The earliest Mahāyāna texts often use the term ‘Mahāyāna’ as a synonym for ‘Bodhisattvayāna.’ Among the earliest and most important Sūtras which deal with the term ‘Mahāyāna’ is the Lotus Sūtra

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(Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra) dating between the first century BCE and the first century CE. According to Seishi Karashima, the term first used in an earlier Gandhāri Prakrit version of the Lotus Sūtra was not the term ‘Mahāyāna’ but the Prakrit word ‘Mahājāna’ in the sense of ‘Mahājñāna’ (great knowledge). At a later stage when the early Prakrit word was translated in Sanskrit, this word ‘Mahājāna,’ being phonetically ambivalent, was mistakenly converted into ‘Mahāyāna.’ 181

Jan Nattier also assumes that the term ‘Mahāyāna’ was originally an honorary synonym for Bodhisattvayāna (the vehicle of a Bodhisattva seeking Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings). He says: “the term ‘Mahāyāna’ therefore was formed independently at an early date as a synonym for the path and the teachings of the Bodhisattvas, so it was an honorary term for Bodhisattvayāna.”182 In the Chinese versions, the term ‘Mahāyāna’ itself is translated “Great Way,” but it is very rare. The using of the term “Bodhisattvayāna” is more frequent, which may or may not render Bodhisattvayāna or Bodhisattvamārga in the original Sankrit text.183

However, according to Bibhuti Baruah, in the oldest Mahāyāna Sūtras, such as the Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra, some portions of the Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra and some portions of the Avatamsaka-sūtras, we saw the terms ‘Ekayāna,’ ‘Bodhisattvayāna’ and ‘Buddhayāna,’ more frequently than the term ‘Mahāyāna’ which is used not in the sense of comparison. While in the later Mahāyāna Sūtras, the term ‘Mahāyāna’ occurs more frequently than those terms. Based on such an application, Bibhuti Baruah holds that, the term ‘Mahāyāna’ came in its current sense at a much later time. For, according to him, when the Mahāsaṅghika found out the term ‘Ekayāna’ which was common to both Sthaviravādas and Mahāsaṅghikas school, they began to search for another suitable term to serve their purpose.

181 Karashima, Seishi, Mahāyāna, from the Wikipedia (the free encyclopedia).
183 Paul, Williams, op. cit., 2005, p. 112.
As a result, the term ‘Bodhisattvayāna’ and ‘Buddhayāna’ were coined. After some time they came to be known that it indicated Buddha’s Introspectional and Ontological perception upon the ‘cosmic existence’ as well as ‘human life.’ Ven. K. L. Dhammajoti also found out the link between Abhidharma and Mahāyāna. He claims that the term ‘Mahāyāna’ was not originally coined to be a contrast of Hīnayāna. It was actually interchangeable with Boshisattva-yāna and Buddhayāna. Dhammajoti studied Abhidharma-mahāvibhaṣa and found that Mahāyāna threefold scheme: sravaka-yāna, pratyebuddha-yāna and bodhisattva-yāna, was derived from earlier pre-Mahāyāna scheme. And some distinctions of Buddha-logical doctrines in Mahāyāna, such as great compassion and perfect wisdom, had already been well articulated in Abhidharma.

Thus, the term ‘Mahāyāna’ was for the first time coined and used by the followers of Mahāsaṅghika schools about two hundred years after the Buddha’s nirvāṇa. And it was coined just after the term ‘Buddhayāna’ or ‘Bodhisattvayāna’ and sometimes it has been used to signify these terms. But we should bear in mind that the indication of the term ‘Mahāyāna’ at that time was different from that of its latter use. That is to say, at first, it was used in the place of the term ‘Ekayāna’ as well as in the place of the term ‘Buddhayāna.’ However, in the later Mahāyāna Sūtras, the term ‘Mahāyāna’ has been used in comparison with the term ‘Hinayāna.’

### 3.2.2. The Using of the Term ‘Mahāyāna’

As discussed in the previous section, the term ‘Mahāyāna’ could not be originated from Hinayāna schools, but were undoubtedly coined and used by the followers of Mahāsaṅghika schools; and early Mahāyāna doctrines were manifested and formed by them. Now the question that necessarily arises is,
for what reason did the followers of Mahāsaṅghika school coin and use that term? The reason is not a far-fetched one. The conflict between the Sthaviravādins and the Mahāsaṅghikas could be regarded as the most satisfied reason to the coinage of the term.

According to the records of Southern as well as Northern Buddhism, it was the historical event that, even in the Buddha’s lifetime, the disciples of the Buddha held different opinions on his doctrine, and consequence disputes arose among them. But at that time the conflict was limited to individuals only, and the Buddha immediately explained and satisfied them. After the Buddha’s passing away, due to the lack of Buddha’s authority, such disputes were not resolved. Therefore, there were two distinct tendencies in preservation of the Buddha’s teachings, one conservative and the other one progressive. Until after the Second Buddhist Council at Vaiśāli, it was for the first time, in the history of Indian Buddhism, the Buddhist Saṅgha were divided into two schools (Sthaviravāda and Mahāsaṅghika), and different opinions of schools were afloat. That is to say, Mahāsaṅghika group was liberal and advanced; while Sthaviravāda group was conservative, who loyally stuck to the Original Buddhism preached by the Buddha himself in general. Hence, they had always a conflict of opinion.

The Mahāsaṅghikas were not rest satisfied with the Buddha’s doctrine of Phenomenology, in general, so they wanted to rightly manifest the Buddha’s Introspectional and Ontological perception upon the ‘cosmic existence’ as well as ‘human life.’ Consequently, the Sthaviravādas hold that the Mahāsaṅghikas introduced heretical views to the Buddha’s doctrine. Not only that, the Sthaviravādas even called the Mahāsaṅghikas by the bad epithets, ‘Adharma-vādin’ (holder of the heretical doctrine) and ‘Pāpa-bhikṣu’ (sinful monk).

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187 According to the *Dipavamsa*, p. 36; & the *Mahāvibhāsa-śāstra* of Sarvāstivāda school. See Bundle, Shou, Vol. 4, pp. 96-8 (of Chinese *Tripiṭaka*).
Again, after the time of Vaiśāli, the Mahāsaṅghika school was gaining power and popularity among the Buddhist communities. R. Kimura holds that, though the Mahāsaṅghika school was more popular, it pained to have had such epithets like ‘Adharma-vādin’ and ‘Pāpa-bhikṣu.’ Hence, they harboured much rage upon the Sthaviravādas, and began to search for such a term that could display the superiority of their own doctrine, and disparage the doctrine of their opponent. There were many terms that were invented by them, but the most suited are the terms ‘Mahāyāna’ and ‘Hinayāna.’ Firstly, it fit epithet for their opponents, Sthaviravāda; secondly, it conveys a sense of superiority that they reserved for themselves. Thus, the term ‘Mahāyāna’ and ‘Hinayāna’ came into existence.\(^{188}\)

According to Bibhuti Baruah, if Buddha’s full Introspectional and Ontological perceptions are to be expressed by a single term, it should be necessary to find out such a term which can indicate both the aspects of Buddha’s perception on the ‘cosmic existence’ as well as on ‘human life.’ Thus the Mahāsaṅghika began to seek for a suitable term and at last they coined the term ‘Mahāyāna’ to be applied to them and the term ‘Hinayāna’ for their opponent. It seems that these terms fulfilled their intentions for both doctrine and practices.\(^{189}\) Hence, the term ‘Mahāyāna’ and ‘Hinayāna’ came into existence.

But, Edward Conze believes that: “In its original meaning, ‘Hīnayāna’ is a term of abuse, and the early Mahāyānists used it but very rarely. The Mahāyānists usually referred to their opponents as ‘the Disciples and Pratyekabuddhas.’ In present, when its original connotation is dimly felt, the term ‘Hīnayāna’ can be used for purposes of description.”\(^{190}\)

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Thus, it seems, still, rather adequate that the term ‘Mahāyāna’ was coined and used by the followers of Mahāsaṅghika schools as a sort of retaliation against the Theravādin who called them ‘Pāpa-bhikṣu’ (sinful monk) and heretics. On the other hand it was intention to liberate from the conservative and old-fashioned thoughts; and to exalt their ultimate and universal doctrine, namely the interpretation Buddha’s Ontological perception upon the ‘cosmic existence’ as well as on ‘human life.’

Non-Mahāyāna schools think the term ‘Hīnayāna’ is a highly derogatory term, because it does not simply mean “Lesser vehicle”, but could also mean “low, undesirable and despicable.” Therefore, in 1950, the World Fellowship of Buddhists unanimously decided the term ‘Hīnayāna’ should not be used to refer to Buddhism existing in southern countries, such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Comododia, etc. So, we do not find ‘Hīnayāna’ schools in these countries today. The conservative Buddhism in these southern countries should only be called ‘Theravāda.’

3.3. The Relation between Mahāsaṅghika and Mahāyāna Buddhism

3.3.1. History

As previously mentioned, Mahāsaṅghika is one of the two Buddhist schools that were separated from initial schism of the Saṅgha after the Second Council at Vaisālī (376 BCE). Some scholars say that Mahāyāna is in special relationship with Mahāsaṅghika, and Mahāsaṅghika as the progenitor of Mahāyāna. However, modern scholars have shown that Mahāyāna did not result from schisms, but it was formed through a long time after that.

191 According to Ryukan, Kimura
192 The Mahāyānists themselves said that the Hīnayāna doctrines only taught on the emptiness of the individual entity (anātmā), while the Mahāyāna doctrine taught on the emptiness of both the individual entity and that of all dharmas (anātmā-adharma).
193 B. Chan Khoon San & Kare A. Lie No, Hīnayāna in Buddhism, Bro Chan Khoon San, Malaysia 2011, p. 3.
Historically, our information on Mahāsaṃghika is very scanty. The records of the Chinese pilgrims, who traveled to India as Fa-hien (399 – 414 CE), Hsuan-tsang (629 – 645 CE), and I-tsing (671 – 695 CE), seem to indicate that Mahāsaṃghika flourished in Magadha, in general, and Pāṭaliputra, in particular. In the Kathāvatthu, one text was composed at the third Buddhist Council in 250 BCE (under the reign of Aśoka), had recorded the views coincident with specific Mahāsaṃghika doctrines and mentioned phrases like ‘Mahāsaṃghika.’ Nevertheless, given certain limits, we can state with assurance that within several century Mahāsaṃghika divided internally, resulting in eight sects or more, but the most important of which are Ekavyāvahārikas, Lokottaravādins, Gokulikas, Bahuśrutīyas, Prajñaptivāda sect, and three Śaila sects of Vasumitra and Bhavya, namely, Caityaśaila, Uttaraśaila and Aparaśaila. Until now, the origin of the Mahāsaṃghika sects are still extremely uncertain, and thus a subject of debate among scholars.

According to Paramārtha (an Indian monk in the 6th century CE), 200 years after the Buddha’s nirvāṇa, Mahāsaṃghika moved to the north of Rājagṛha (belonging to Magadha). There, three other sects of Mahāsaṃghika arose, namely, Ekavyāvahārika, Lokottaravādin and Gokulika. The Kathāvatthu and the Ceylonese traditions mention that the Gokulikas separated into two sub-sects, viz., Bahuśrutīyas and Prajñaptivāda. However, according to Vasumatra and Bhavya, these two sects directly issued out from the Mahāsaṃghika. About the end of the second century after the Buddha’s nirvāṇa, from the Mahāsaṃghika three more sects arose, namely, Caityaśaila, Uttaraśaila and Aparaśaila.

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199 Akira, Hirakawa, op. cit., 1993, p. 112.
Historical sources show that the Mahāsaṅghika migrated from Magadha in two streams, one towards the north and the other towards the south. The first group, earlier sects, viz., the Ekavyāvahārika, Lokottaravādin, Gokulikas, Bahuṣrutīyas and Prajñaptivāda belonged to Pāṭaliputra with their adherents scattered all over the northern and the north-western India. While the second group, latter sects, viz., the Caityaśaila, Uttaraśaila and Aparaśaila got settled in the Guntur district around Amarāvatī, Jaggayapeta and Nāgārjuna-konda in the southern India. This fact is fully supported by the inscriptions discovered at Nāgārjuna-konda and Amarāvatī. The inscriptions indicate that a magnificent stūpa was erected here and its grandeur and sanctity attracted devotees from places all over India and Ceylon.\textsuperscript{200}

Since, two branches of the Mahāsaṅghika developed and spread toward two ways, the northern and the southern India. Perhaps, due to the geographical locations, thought of these two groups gradually became differently visibly. The Kathāvatthu records that, the branch of North-Mahāsaṅghika defied and universalized the Buddha and held that the Absolute (reality) was indescribable (anirvacanīya); it neither exists nor non-exists; it is devoid of all attributes; it is without origin and decay. On the contrary, the branch of the South was more conservative in its views, and had a slight trace towards North-Mahāsaṅghika.\textsuperscript{201}

After that, the northern sects also disagreed to some views of the doctrine. Due to minor doctrinal differences among them, their sub-sect, Lokottaravādin, developed leanings towards Mahāyānism, and, in fact, prepared the ground for the advent of Mahāyāna school.\textsuperscript{202} It is, in fact, very difficult to differentiate the main doctrine of Lokottaravāda from the doctrines of other Mahāsaṅghika sects. Even historical sources do not mention much about that. In the 6\textsuperscript{th} century CE, Paramārtha states that: “the

\textsuperscript{200} N., Dutt, \textit{op. cit.}, 1978, pp. 58-64.
\textsuperscript{201} Ibid., p. 65.
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., p. 64.
Gokulika sect did not accept the Mahāyāna sūtras as *Buddhavacana* (words of the Buddha), while the Lokottaravādin sect and the Ekavyāvahārika sect accepted the Mahāyāna sūtras as *Buddhavacana*.”203 It is said that Lokottaravāda sect and Mahāyāna are the same thought. In this matter, Nalinaksha Dutt’s also says that, Mahāyāna was known as developed school from Lokottaravādin sect of the North-Mahāsaṅghika.

However, a number of scholars have proposed that the *Prajñāpāramitā* teachings of Mahāyāna were first developed by Caityaśaila, one sect of the South-Mahāsaṅghika. They believe that the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* originated from the South-Mahāsaṅghika schools of the Āndhra region, because these schools had two famous monasteries near the Amarāvati and the Dhānyakataka, which gave their names to the schools of Uttaraśaila and Aparaśailas. And each of these schools had a copy of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* in Prakrit language. Guang Xing also assesses the view of the Buddha given in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* as being that of the South-Mahāsaṅghika, and this *sūtra* originated around 100 BCE.204

Moreover, B.E. Brown, a specialist in *Tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of Mahāyāna, also writes that: “it has been determined that the composition of the Mahāyāna *Śrīmālādevī-simhanāda-sūtra* occurred during the Īkṣvāku’s dynasty in the 3rd century CE, as a product of the southern Mahāsaṅghika sects, i.e. the Caityaśaila sect.”205 A. W. Barber has outlined eleven points of complete agreement between Mahāsaṅghika and the *Śrīmālādevī-simhanāda-sūtra*, along with four major arguments for this association.206

203 Padma, Sree, & A. W., Barber, *Buddhism in the Krishna River Valley of Andhra*, University of New York, 2008, p. 68.
Sree Padma and A. W. Barber also associate the earlier development of *Tathāgatagarbha* doctrine with the southern Mahāsaṅghika, and conclude that: “the Mahāsaṅghika sects of the Āndhra region in the south-India were responsible for the inception of the *Tathāgatagarbha* doctrine of Mahāyāna Buddhism.”²⁰⁷

André Bareau also mentions that, according to Hsuan-tsang and I-tsing in the 7th century CE, the Mahāsaṅghika schools had essentially disappeared, and they found things what they described as ‘Mahāyāna.’ Then the region occupied by Mahāsaṅghika was an important center for Mahāyāna Buddhism. André Bareau has proposed that Mahāyāna grew out from the Mahāsaṅghika schools, and the members of the Mahāsaṅghika schools also accepted the teachings of Mahāyāna.²⁰⁸ Additionally, the extant Mahāsaṅghika *Vinaya* was originally procured by Faxian in the early 5th century CE where we find a mention of Mahāyāna monastery in Pāṭaliputra.²⁰⁹

Thus, historically, it is very difficult to say whether Mahāyāna originated from the northern or the southern Mahāsaṅghika. But, it is certain that the Mahāyāna doctrines originally came from Mahāsaṅghika schools. Many scholars, ancient as well as modern, also look at the Mahāsaṅghika branches for the initial development of Mahāyāna Buddhism. A. K. Warder assumes in his work that: “among the Mahāsaṅghika groups, the transcendentalist ideas continued to grow in influence until they gave birth to the ‘Great Vehicle.’”²¹⁰ André Bareau also stated that, Mahāyāna’s Ontology is found in the Mahāsaṅghika schools, and he offered an array of the evidences to support this conclusion. Not only does André Bareau trace

²⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 155-6.
the origin of Mahāyāna in the older Mahāsaṅghika schools in regions, such as, Orissa, Kosala, Koṅkana, and so on, he also holds that Bahuṣrutīyas and Prajñaptivādins were as sub-sects of Mahāsaṅghika, and they may have played an important role in connection of Mahāyāna teachings between the northern and the southern Mahāsaṅghika schools.\textsuperscript{211}

3.3.2. Doctrine

After the schism at the second Buddhist Council, the two groups, Sthaviravāda and Mahāsaṅghika, gradually began to differ on a number of views of their doctrines. Many scholars hold that the cause which led to this difference was the new views of Mahādeva. Perhaps, the five views of Mahādeva paved the way for the separate emergence of Mahāsaṅghika doctrine. Mahādeva holds that (1) the Arhant may be sexually tempted, (2) Arhant might have a residue of ignorance, (3) Arhant may have doubts, (4) Arhant may attain enlightenment through the help of others, and (5) the path attained to Arhantship may be by an exclamatory remark.\textsuperscript{212} These five views indicate that Mahādeva had a low opinion of the enlightenment of Arhant, and seem Arhant’ ideal has been limited. Therefore, a new thought has been raised. This is likely an embryonic sign of Mahāyāna thought. The doctrines that have the relationship between Mahāsaṅghika and Mahāyāna Buddhism are: The Supramundane-nature of the Buddha, Concept of Bodhisattva, Theory of Tathāgatagarbha and Principle of Dependent Origination.

a. The Supramundane-nature of the Buddha

The supramundane-nature of the Buddha is an exaltation of the Buddha’s superiority status corresponding with the lowering status of an Arhant. This is one the most important doctrines which has a close relationship between Mahāsaṅghika and Mahāyana Buddhism.

\textsuperscript{212} Akira, Hirakawa, op. cit., 1993, p. 82.
In Buddhist theory the result of good deeds is merit. And the Buddha had developed such immense stores of merit from his previous lives before he became Buddha. So there grew up the idea that the Buddha’s birth and life could not really be like that of ordinary human.\(^{213}\) In fact, in the earliest Buddhist literature, the Pāli Nikāya, the Buddha is portrayed in two aspects: the ‘ordinary human’ and the ‘superhuman One.’ In the first aspect, the Buddha is seen to have constantly interacted with his disciples as well as with adherents of other religions in his lifetime. In the second aspect, the Buddha is considered as an object of religious worship for his followers, or a savior of the world.\(^{214}\) After vigorous research of both literary and archaeological sources, most Buddhist scholars today accept the historicity of Gautama Buddha. However, the superhuman and supernormal elements of the Buddha may have coexisted from the very beginning of Buddhist literature or even during Gautama’s lifetime. Moreover, the Mahāsaṅghika’s doctrines were basic more on faith than on reason. They were faithful followers and believed whatever was said by the Buddha, or more precisely, whatever was taught in the Nikāya.\(^{215}\) As a result, they developed the concept of a supramundane (Lokottara) Buddha based on the superhuman qualities of the Buddha. This point was recorded in the Samyuktāgama and the AN. that: “Although the Tathāgata was born in the world and abided in the world, he was not defiled by the worldly Dharma.”\(^{216}\)

In the Kathāvatthu also asserts that although the Buddha was born in the world, he was not tainted by it even a bit. All his actions which are manifested in the world were not the same as those of ordinary human. He

\(^{213}\) Paul, Williams, \textit{op. cit.}, 1989, p. 18.

\(^{214}\) According to the \textit{Acchariyābbūtasutta} of the MN., soon after the Buddha was born he said: “I am the highest in the world; I am the best in the world; I am the foremost in the world. This is my last birth; now there is no renewal of being for me.” (MN. III, p. 123). This clearly shows the superhuman aspect of the Buddha.

\(^{215}\) The Mahāsaṅghika asserted that all the words of the Buddha preach the Dharma and contain nothing which is not in conformity with the truth. Vasumitra’s \textit{Samayabhedavyūhacakra} translated by Xuanzang, T. 49: 15b.

\(^{216}\) T. 2: 28b12; AN. II, p. 37; SN. III, p. 140.
was said to have various miraculous powers and thirty-two major marks and eighty minor marks of a superman. He was not worldly, but was rather extraordinary and ‘supramundane.’ Therefore birth of the Buddha on earth was a wondrous event with the definite aim of liberating suffering of all sentient beings. This doctrine was regarded as main characteristic of Mahāsaṅghika school. It survives in Sankrit, primarily from a work known as the Mahāvastu which describes itself as the Vinaya text of the Lokottaravādin, one branch of Mahāsaṅghika.

We have already seen that Mahāsaṅghika held a thoroughly progressive view. They advocated the transcendental and supramundane nature of the Buddhas and the fallibility of Arhats. They deprecated the Arhant ideal and offered a new interpretation of the path to the goal. Whereas, in the orthodox thought, there was only one Bodhisattva or one Buddha and that was Siddhartha Gautama. In other words, Sthaviravāda and their sects conceived of the Buddha as a human being, who attained perfection (Buddhahood) and became omniscient at Bodhgayā. Until then, he was subject of all human frailties common to a pious and meritorious person. However, Mahāsaṅghika did not subscribe to this view. They contended that how he could become the best of all divine beings in merit and knowledge in his previous lives before he was Prince Siddhārtha (an ordinary human being). Hence, his embodiment was only fictitious in order to follow the ways of the world. He had really achieved all the perfections in his previous existences as a Bodhisattva. Mahāsaṅghika school notes that others can follow this path and can attain enlightenment similarly. Therefore, in the Mahāvastu a path has been established that consists of ten-steps for a Bodhisattva to follow. Although the stages outlined in the Mahāvastu do not at all coincide with the ten stages in Mahāyāna Buddhism. They only represent a fundamental point of departure from which Mahāyāna

\[218\] N., Dutt, op. cit., 1978, p. 72.
developed its mature Bodhisattva doctrine. They also represent the first school of Buddhism to speculate about the nature of the Buddha. This speculation of Mahāsaṅghika was founded in statement made by the Buddha: “Whoever sees the Dharma, sees me; whoever sees me, sees the Dharma.”\textsuperscript{219} And thus, this concept (supramundane-nature of the Buddha), it later on became a part of the doctrine of Tripāṭha,\textsuperscript{220} one of the basic doctrines of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

b. Concept of Bodhisattva

The next, Mahāsaṅghika bring out the doctrine of the concept of Bodhisattva. This concept is a ground for the emergence of Bodhisattva doctrine in Mahāyana Buddhism. The concept of Bodhisattva is found in the Mahāvastu and further evidenced in the works of Vasumitra, who describes the doctrines of Mahāsaṅghika.\textsuperscript{221} Edward J. Thomas said that, there is a Bodhisattva doctrine also in Theravāda works. It first appears in the two latest books of the Canon, the Buddhavamsa and the Cariyāpiṭaka.\textsuperscript{222} It is an evident truth that the term Bodhisattva (Pāli: Bodhisatta) has occurred frequently in the Pāli Nikāyas.\textsuperscript{223} To cite an example that illustrates the universality of the term ‘Bodhisatta’ in this literature, the MN. repeatedly recorded the term ‘Bodhisatta’ in the language of the Buddha that: “sambodhā anabhisambuddhassa bodhisattasseva sato,” that is, that “before my awakening, while I was still the Bodhisattva.”\textsuperscript{224} Moreover, during centuries after the Buddha’s nirvāṇa, we find the Buddhist literature, the

\textsuperscript{220} The doctrine of Tripāṭhas of the Buddha will be mentioned in the next section (The Basic Doctrines of the Mahāyāna Buddhism.)
\textsuperscript{221} Xing, Guang, \textit{op. cit.}, 2004, p. 66.
Jātakas, which became very popular. This work consists of stories that depict the Buddha’s previous lives before he got enlightenment at Bodhgaya. It recounts many virtuous deeds in the Buddha’s previous lives as a Bodhisattva, who had embarked on the spiritual path and was progressing toward perfect enlightenment, the Buddhahood. The Theravādins hold that, there is unique Supreme Buddha (samyaksambuddha) in our age and i.e. Gautama Buddha. It is not possible for each and every human being to achieve this stage. Therefore, the highest aspiration that could be cherished is to have faith and follow the Dharma laid down by the Buddha to become an Arhant.

At the outset, it should be noted that the various sects of Mahāsaṅghika recognized only one Bodhisattva – the previous existence of Siddhartha Gautama, who had to pass through numerous existence in order to attain the Buddhahood. Hence, the views mentioned here refer only to the Bodhisattva stages of Gautama Buddha. (1) The Bodhisattva takes any form of lower existence for enlightening the beings of the world. (2) The Bodhisattva enters his mother’s womb as a white elephant symbolic of his great physical strength combined with softness. It is not an intermediate existence but may be regarded as a created form.

According to the Mahāsaṅghikas, if the Buddhas are lokottara and if Gautama Buddha is only a created form (nirmānakāya) of the real Buddha, the Bodhisattva also cannot be an average being, he must also be supramundane. In Vasumitra’s treatise the following account of the Bodhisattva is given: “The Bodhisattva does not pass through the embryonic stages. They assume the form of white elephants when they enter their mothers’ wombs and come out of the same by the right side.” The stories of

225 Jātakas are a textual division of the Pāli Canon, included in the KN. of the Sutta Piṭaka.
the white elephant seen by Maya Queen in a dream at the time of her conception and the birth of the Bodhisattva by bursting through the right side mother’s womb are too well-known to need any comment. The incorporation of these legends in the doctrines of Mahāsaṅghika shows that the concept of Bodhisattva in the Mahāyāna was not yet in the course of development.\(^\text{229}\)

The only doctrine that can be described as Mahāyānist is the Bodhisattva doctrine which takes birth with his own free will in any form of existence for imparting the Buddha’s Dharmas to all sentient beings. This is an idea well illustrated in the Jātakas, and developed in the latter Mahāyāna works. This topic has been taken up for discussion in the Kathāvatthu (XXIII.3): “Bodhisatto issariyakāmākārikahetu vinipātam gacchati ti,” but the arguments put forward completely ignore the standpoint of Mahāsaṅghika and attempt to show the untenability of the opponent’s proposition by treating a Bodhisattva as an average adept human, toiling along the path towards the attainment of bodhi.\(^\text{230}\) For this view, later on, a few Mahāyāna works stated that a person by the development of Bodhicitta can become a predestined Bodhisattva, who by fulfillment of the Six-pāramitās and practice of the various forms of asceticism can become a Buddha.

\textbf{c. Theory of Tathāgatagarbha}

The third doctrine which has relationship between Mahāsaṅghika and Mahāyana is the theory of Tathāgatagarbha. The Tathāgatagarbha theory is said to be held by some early Buddhist schools, especially the Mahāsaṅghika schools. The earliest text of Tathāgatagarbha literature was the Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra composed c. 200-250 CE. However, the most important texts of this literature are the Śrīmālā-devī Siṃhanāda-sūtra (the

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\(^{230}\) Ibid., p. 15.
The word ‘Tathāgata’ is interpreted as the combination of ‘tathā’ and ‘gata’ (thus gone and thus come) which is used for the Supreme or Excellent Person (uttama-puriso or parama-puriso),\(^{232}\) who has destroyed the cankers, whose foot-prints are untraceable (ananuvejja).\(^{233}\) The word ‘Garbha’ means womb, or a container. The compound Tathāgatagarbha thus means embryonic ‘Perfect One’ or ‘Perfect One Matrix.’ The term Tathāgatagarbha implies the meaning that the nature of a Buddha potential resides within all living beings.\(^{234}\) The Tathāgatagarbha is a reservoir of things good and bad, pure and defiled, from which the cycle of birth and death of all living beings arises. It is also the source at where the Buddha, the Saint, and the Brotherhood can arise. Expressed differently, the Tathāgatagarbha, in itself, is immaculate, but because of its external dirt (āgantukkeśa), it is soiled.\(^{235}\)


\(^{234}\) Peter, Harvey, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 114.

The characteristics of Tathāgatagarbha are detailed as the following:236

(1) The own nature (svabhāva) of the embryo.

(2) The cause (hetu) of its purification.

(3) The result (phala) of its purification.

(4) The function (karma) towards the purification.

(5) The union (yoga) of the embryo.

(6) The manifestation (vṛtti) of the embryo.

(7) The various states (avasthapra-bheda) of its manifestation.

(8) All-pervadingness (sravatraga) of the embryo.

(9) Unchangeability (avikāra) of the embryo through various states.

(10) Non-differentiation (abheda) of the embryo with the Reality.

Especially, the own nature (svabhāva) of the embryo corresponds to Dharmakāya, Tathatā, and Tathāgata-gotra, which are either the medium (pratyaya), or the cause (hetu) or the effect (phala) of one another:237

(1) The Absolute Body (Dharmakāya) of the Tathāgata penetrates all living beings.

(2) The Tathāgata being the Reality (tathatā) himself, is the undifferentiated whole.

(3) There exists the Embryo of the Tathāgata (tathāgata-gotra) in every living being.

The Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra says that, the Tathāgatagarbha is the same as the ālaya-vijñāna.238 Also, it is pointed out in the Ghanavyūha-sūtra that the

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ālaya-vijñāna manifests the myriad Dharmas, and the ālaya-vijñāna and the Tathāgatagarbha are neither the same nor different.\textsuperscript{239} Likewise, Vasubandhu in the Triṃśika-vijñāptimātratā-kārika states that the absolutely accomplished nature (parinispanna-svabhāva) and the other dependent nature (paratantra-svabhāva) are not really two different beings, but only two phases of the same being.\textsuperscript{240} Nevertheless, Paramārtha assumed that imagined nature (parikalpita-svabhāva) and the other dependent nature (paratantra-svabhāva) are inseparable. For him, parinispanna is a transcendent real, forever removed from the other two natures.\textsuperscript{241}

Moreover, the natures of the Tathāgatagarbha are illustrated metaphorically through three particular natural categories, such as the wish-fulfilling jewel, the sky, and water. First of all, the nature of the ‘Absolute Body’ of the Tathāgata is illustrated through the characteristic of the wish-fulfilling jewel, such as, the own nature of powers, fulfillment of desired objects, and so on. The nature of ‘Reality’ of the Tathāgata is illustrated through the characteristic of sky, i.e. the own nature of identity everywhere. The nature of the ‘Embryo’ of the Tathāgata is illustrated through the characteristic of water, that is, it represents its moist nature of mercy towards living beings.

\textsuperscript{238} T. 16, No. 670: 512b. Because of the influence of habit-energy that has been accumulating since beginningless time, what here goes under the name of the Ālayavijñāna is accompanied by the seven Vijnānas which give birth to a state known as the abode of ignorance. It is like a great ocean in which the waves roll on permanently but the (deeps remain unmoved; that is, the Ālaya) body itself subsists uninterruptedly, quite free from fault of impermanence, unconcerned with the doctrine of ego-substance and thoroughly pure in its essential nature. Laṅkāvatāra, pp. 220-1; D. T., Suzuki (tr.), \textit{op. cit.}, 2009, p. 190.

\textsuperscript{239} T. 16, No. 682: 751ff, 766ff.


In the Ratnagotra-vibhāga, there are also metaphors used to illustrate the relationship between the intrinsically pure of Tathāgatagarbha and the stains of defilements. For example, the germ of a seed inside the fruit of trees; a precious image of the Buddha made of jewels wrapped in the tattered rags of bad smell; an inexhaustible treasure under the ground within the house of a poor man, and so on. It is not able to see as the intrinsically pure of Tathāgatagarbha and the stains of defilements through the mind of the living beings of the world, but it is to be seen by both the proper cultivation and perfection of the mind.

In the Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra, the Tathatā is characterized with respect to the ontological aspect of the Tathāgata as the following ten different ways:

(1) The Tathatā of the Tathāgata has no coming and going.
(2) The Tathatā of the Tathāgata is the Tathatā of all the dharmas, and vice versa.
(3) The Tathatā of the Tathāgata is eternal and has no differentiation.
(4) The Tathatā of the Tathāgata is neither existent nor non-existent.
(5) There is no hindrance to the Tathatā of the Tathāgata or to that of all the dharmas.
(6) The Tathatā of the Tathāgata and that of all the dharmas are one and the same, there is nothing that is not the Tathatā because it is unmade.
(7) The Tathatā of the Tathāgata is eternal and undifferentiated, and so it is the Tathatā of all the dharmas.
(8) The Tathatā of the Tathāgata is neither apart from nor one with all the dharmas.
(9) There is no past, present and future in the Tathatā of the Tathāgata, or in that of all the dharmas.

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242 Ratnagotra-vibhāga, pp. 96-7.
(10) There is no difference between the Tathatā of the Tathāgata and that of the past, that of the present, that of the future, and that of all the dharmas.

The conviction in the genuineness of Tathatā depends upon the nature of faith. If faith is weak and fragile, the conviction of the revelatory insights of the Tathāgata and the Tathāgatagarbha will be wavering. At the first stage of the progress of liberation, faith represents a provisional state of knowledge. Faith enables the practitioner to open his mind and to start his searching. Faith, therefore, is elevated to an indispensable condition of liberation, the initial step to attain Bodhicitta.\(^{244}\)

Later on, Mahāyāna embraces the theory of Tathāgatagarbha of Mahāsaṅghika and states that all living beings are already of the nature of a Buddha. This theory became the doctrine of Buddha nature in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

d. Theory of Praṭītya-samutpāda

The fourth doctrine which has relationship between Mahāsaṅghika and Mahāyāna is the Praṭītya-samutpāda (principle of Dependent Origination). Later on, Nāgārjuna based on this principle to developed the concept of Emptiness (Śūnyatā) and Buddhist ontological theory in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

As aforementioned, Tathatā is the basis for enlightenment of the Buddhas, and the principle of Dependent Origination (Pratītya-samutpāda) is the content of enlightenment. Emptiness, therefore, is the essence of the enlightenment or the insight of the Buddhas.

Buddhism does give neither an idea of the first cause of all inherent existences nor an idea of cosmology, but the idea of a manifestation of living being as relative to their causes and conditions in three sections (past,

present and future) like a chain, which contains the Twelve Divisions of Causations and Becomings.\(^{245}\)

The term *Pratītya-samutpāda* is used as various manners in relations with space and time. From the perception of spatial relations, it is used in four distinct manners which combine to give a complete explanation of things and events corresponding to the two categories of truth:\(^{246}\)

(1) Causation by Action-influence or *Karma*-causation.
(2) Causation by the Ideation-store or *ālaya-vijñāna*-causation.
(3) Causation by Suchness (*Tathatā*) or *Tathāgata-garbha*-causation.
(4) Causation by the Universal Principle or *Dharma-dhātu*-causation.

From the perception of temporal relations, the term *Pratītya-samutpāda* is regarded with four manners:\(^{247}\)

(1) Momentary (*kṣaṇika*): the life of the present thus is equal to the momentary life of individual at the time of mentioning.
(2) Prolonged (*prākarṣika*): extending over many moments of existence.
(3) Serial viewpoint (*sāṃbandhika*): through the union of causes and effects.
(4) Static (*āvasthika*): embracing twelve states or periods of the five elements, namely, matter (*rūpa*), feeling or perception (*vedanā*), ideas (*saṃjñā*), mental formations or will to live (*saṃskāra*), and general consciousness or subconscious mind (*vijñāna*).

These four manners of space and time cohere into twelve conceptions of *Pratītya-samutpāda*, in which, that pertains to living beings is the


causation by action-influence, which is corresponding to the static one. This is an exoteric manner of the principle of Dependent Origination.

The Pratītya-samutpāda, in this manner, is representation of the Buddhist conception of a sentient being in relations with both space and time. Thus, time is relative. It is not regarded as progressing in a straight line from the infinite past through present to infinite future, but a circle with no beginning and no end. The birth is not the beginning and the death is not the end, because once a life is death, it begins to go through a similar process of birth and death, and thus it repeats the round of life forever. Then, a living being forms the endless continuum. From the perception of spatial relations, it is impossible to identify what a living being is, because it is always changing and progressing through the divisions of stages of life; the whole series of stages must be taken in their entirety as representing the one individual being; thus, it forms a complex of five elements.

Through the Pratītya-samutpāda, the idea of Karma is represented symbolically by the twelve links (nidāna) or stages (avasthā) of an endless continuum that is called the wheel of life (samsāra) or the twelve links of causal relations, namely, (1) Ignorance (avidyā), (2) Mental formations (samskāra), (3) Consciousness (vijñāna), (4) Name and form (nāmarūpa), (5) Six sense organs (saḍāyatana), (6) Sensory impingement (sparśa), (7) Sensations (vedanā), (8) Craving (trṣṇā), (9) Grasping (upādāna), (10) Coming into existence (bhāva), (11) Birth (jāti), (12) Aging and dying (jarāmarana). These twelve links are interdependent, and its dependent production is summarized by the Buddha as follows:

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The very first is ignorance of, mistaken beliefs in, confusion about, or misunderstanding of all kinds that play their part in the mental formations of afflicted virtues and non-virtues.

Conditioned by ignorance, mental formations come to pass.

Conditioned by mental formations, consciousness comes to pass.

Conditioned by consciousness, name-and-form comes to pass.

Conditioned by name-and-form, the six sense organs come to pass.

Conditioned by six sense organs, sensory impingement comes to pass.

Conditioned by sensory impingement, sensations come to pass.

Conditioned by sensations, craving comes to pass.

Conditioned by craving, grasping comes to pass.

Conditioned by grasping, becoming into existence comes to pass.

Conditioned by becoming into existence, birth comes to pass.

Conditioned by birth, ageing and dying, grief, lamentation, anguish, sorrow, and despair come to pass.

In these twelve links, it is impossible to point out which one is the first cause, because they make the endless continuum or the wheel of life. However, in the speculative phase, the cycle of life of a sentient being is ontologized into causes of effects in three tenses of past, present, and future as follows:249

1. Avidyā and saṃskāra are called two causes of the past. They are causes when regarded subjectively from the present, but they are effects of just whole life in the past.

2. Vijñāna, nāmarūpa, saḍāyatana, sparśa, and vedanā are called five effects of the present, which are successively formed corresponding to

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various stages of formation of an individual. The individual is formed in those stages but it is not entirely responsible for its own formation, because the causes of the past have effectuated the development of these stages. In other words, the formation of an individual is effectuated by its causes (hetu) and objective conditions (pratyaya).

(3) Trṣṇā, upādāna, and Bhāva are called three causes of the present. The endeavors from both hate and love attitude are functions of trṣṇā that produces attachment. The first stage of this attachment is upādāna, the effort to retain the object of the trṣṇā. The last stage of this attachment is bhāva.

(4) Jāti and jarāmarāṇa are called two effects of the future. They are effects when regarded subjectively from the three causes in the present, but when viewed in the light of the continuous wheel of life, they are considered as causes, because the future has the same constituent stages as those of the present. Also, the effects of the future contain in themselves causes for the life still further in the future.

In the light of the continuous wheel of life, a present sentient being is explained particularly with eight stage of the present, but in truth the two causes of the past and the two effects of the future have the same constituent stages as those of the present. Thus, of these twelve links of causal relation, when regarded subjectively from the present moment, avidyā, trṣṇā, and upādāna are called delusions; while saṃskāra and bhāva are called effect-causing actions; all the rest (vijñāna, nāmarūpa, ṣaḍāyatana, sparśa, sedanā, jāti, and jarāmarāṇa) are called suffering or the effects which result in suffering.

Thus, the doctrine of the Mahāsaṅghika school on the principle of Dependent Origination (Pratītya-samutpāda) has been identified with that of the Prajñāparamitā-sūtras in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Besides, the Mahāsaṅghika school has some relationships and influences on the foundation and
development of Mahāyāna ideas. Therefore, Baruah Bibhuti concludes that: The followers of Mahāsaṅghika schools were regarded as ‘forefather of the Mahāyānist.’ Through above evidences, it is proved that Mahāsaṅghika and their branches were precursors of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

3.4. The Basic Doctrines of Mahāyāna Buddhism

3.4.1. Doctrine of Trikāya

The theory of Trikāya or Three Bodies is one of the most important doctrines of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Mahāsaṅghika school advanced the conception of Buddha in the movement to react against the characteristics of the Nikāya Buddhism.

‘Kāya’ means the corpus, the body, the tactile sense, bodily action, and any group. However, the word ‘kāya,’ when concerned to the Buddha refers to his actual body, primarily the physical body, and also to any group or collection of elements which make up some senses pertaining to the Buddha. However, the theory of Trikāya of the Mahāyānists is most common.

The early Mahāyāna along with Mādhyamika, the school of Nāgārjuna, argued that the embodiment of the Buddha could be conceptual as two kāyas, namely, the Nirmānakāya or Rūpakāya and the Dharmakāya. The Rūpakāya generally denotes the gross body and subtle body; while the Dharmakāya denotes the body of the Dharma (i.e., collection of practices) that makes a being becomes a Buddha. On the other hand, the Dharmakāya denotes the metaphysical principle underlying the universe – the Reality (tathatā/dharmatā). The Yogācāra School distinguishes the gross body from

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the subtle body, naming the former is Rūpakāya or Nirmāṇakāya and the latter is Dharmakāya or the Svabhāvakāya (the Buddha to be produced by the Dharma).

D. T. Suzuki argued that, while the theory of Trikāya is not yet developed in the Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, each of the Three Bodies is traceable in such ideas as the Dharmatā-buddha, the Vipakā-buddha, and the Nirmāna-buddha. The notion of the Nirmāṇakāya (the transformation body) inevitably follows from the Buddha’s desire to save the ignorant whose minds are not enlightened enough to see straightway into the essence of Buddhahood.²⁵³

a. Rūpakāya

The Rūpakāya or Nirmāṇakāya is the form in which the Buddha is manifested to render service to sentient beings of the world.²⁵⁴ This conception reacts against the Sthaviravādins’ argument that says that, Gautama Buddha was, in reality, in flesh and blood.

According to the Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, the words as Nirmāṇa, Nirmāṇika, and Nairmāṇika are used to call a form of Buddhahood that is generally known as the Nirmāṇa-buddha (the Transformation Buddha) corresponding to the Nirmāṇakāya.²⁵⁵ The Pañcaviṃśati-sāhasrikā-Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra (25,000-line Perfection of Wisdom sūtra) also uses the term Nairmāṇikakāya to indicate the body of a Bodhisattva, who after having acquired all the necessary dharmas and having practiced Prajñāpāramitā became a Sambuddha to render service to all living beings of all the ten corners of worlds (lokadhātu).²⁵⁶

²⁵⁶ According to the Pañcaviṃśati, see N., Dutt, op. cit., 1973, p. 159.
The Mahāyānists see the Buddha as a spiritual principle, an archetype, than a historical figure, although the historicity of the Buddha cannot be denied. They hold that, the spiritual principle incarnated Gautama Buddha and will incarnate periodically in the world, when need arises for such a manifestation.\textsuperscript{257} This is a metaphysical conception of Buddha, which certainly has relationship with the theory of reincarnation. The incarnation of Gautama Buddha is treated as the Tathāgata who have already come and gone in the past. Whatever is said to have been done and proclaimed by Gautama Buddha is accounted by the Mahāyānists as the apparent doings of a created body of the Buddha (Nirmāṇakāya-buddha) for a shadowy image created to preach the ways of the world or the Bodhisattva Path.\textsuperscript{258}

\textbf{b. Dharmakāya}

The Dharmakāya is a form of the true nature of the Buddha, which is identified with the reality (tathatā), the essential laws of the universe. The Dharmakāya represents as the Dharma (the teaching expounded by the Buddha). It is considered to be the eternal indestructible true principle, devoid of characteristics, and free from duality.\textsuperscript{259}

The Dharmakāya is the Reality that is not different from the things or beings of the worlds. The Mahāyānasutrālaṅkāra calls it as Śvābhāvikakāya, that is, Śvābhāvika-dharmakāya (the own-natural aspect of Dharma, the body of Dharma); it is the foundation of two other kāyas, a uniform for all the Buddhas.\textsuperscript{260} Meanwhile, the Trimsīka-vijñāptimātratā-kārika\textsuperscript{261} calls it as Svābhāvikakāya or Svabhāvakāya (the own-nature body). It is pure

\textsuperscript{257} See Pandit, Moti Lal, \textit{op. cit.}, 2004, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{258} See N., Dutt, \textit{op. cit.}, 1973, p. 158.
\textsuperscript{259} It is usually rendered by Western scholars as “Body of the Law,” see D. T., Suzuki, \textit{op. cit.}, 2007, p. 220f.
\textsuperscript{261} This is called the Vijñāptimātratā-trīdaśāsāstra-kārika by Swati Ganguly in the \textit{Treatise in Thirty Verses on Mere-consciousness} as bellow.
Dharma-dhātu of the Tathāgatas, it is devoid of all the mahāpuruṣa-lakṣaṇas, it is immeasurable and illimitable, is subtle and inexpressible. It is the immutable support for the Sambhogakāya and the Nirmāṇakāya. The Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra says, the Dharmakāya-buddha is unconditioned, free from conditions, has nothing to do with all doings, senses, and measurements. It lies beyond the range of function of physical and sensual organs (indryas). It does not belong to the world of the ignorant, of Śrāvakās, Pratyekabuddhas, and philosophers, those who always cling to the notion of an ego. It can be realized within one’s own self only. The Trimśika-vijñāptimātratā-kārika explains the Dharmakāya as the transformed āśraya (substratum) – the ālaya-vijñāna – the transformation being effected by knowledge and the suppression of the two evils (dausṭhulyas), viz., obstruction by mental disturbances (kleśāvarṇa) and obstruction by that is ‘mistakenly’ known (jñeyāvarṇa). Furthermore, the Ratnagotra-vibhāga also states that, the Dharmakāya takes the ālaya-vijñāna to be the medium to reveal itself.

The Dharmakāya of the Tathāgata is named “cessation of suffering.” It is not mere a philosophical abstraction, standing aloof from this world of birth and death, of joy and sorrow, calmly contemplates on the folly of mankind; but it is the spiritual existence which is absolutely one; is real and true, transcends all modes of upāya; is free from all desires and struggles or defilements-store; and stands outside the place of our finite understanding.

Thus, the Dharmakāya conceived as the metaphysical principle of real citta and rūpa of Tahtāgata, when not free from the store of defilement is

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264 Trimśika, p. 44, q.v. N., Dutt, op. cit., 1973, p. 172. Too, the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra says that, the Tathāgatagarbha (means the Dharmakāya) is the same as the Ālayavijñāna, see Laṅkāvatāra, 220f, See: D. T., Suzuki (intr. & tr.), op. cit., 2009, p. 190f.
equal to Dharma-dhātu or Tathāgatagarbha. Though the Dharmakāya is free from avidyā (ignorance), kleśa (passion), and tṛṣṇā (craving), it is revealed in the finite and fragmental consciousness of human beings, i.e., “the body of all living beings is the Dharmakāya,” and “the Dharmakāya is the body of all living beings.” Thus, on one hand, the Bodhisattvas aim to remove the avidyā, kleśa, and tṛṣṇā to understand and realize the fact that their body is equivalent to the Dharmakāya; on the other hand, the Bhodhisattvas have to achieve intelligence (prajñā), sympathy or love (karunā), and will (pranidhānabala); perform those functions themselves for all living beings as the essences of Dharmakāya.

c. Saṃbhogakāya

The Saṃbhogakāya is the form in which the Buddha is manifested, and rendered as the reward body or body of enjoyment of the merits attained at phases of the practice of Bodhisattva. The Saṃbhogakāya is also rendered as the glorious body, which is characterized by the thirty-two good marks of great man (dvātrimśad-mahāpuruṣa-lakṣaṇa), such as, eighteen feet in height, a protrusion on the forehead (ūrṇā), golden color, and heaps of illuminating light emanate from it, etc.

The Sūtrālaṅkāra says that, the Saṃbhogakāya of the Buddhas enjoy the Dharmas and embodies differently according to various lokadhātus. The Trimśika-vijñāptimātratā-kārika (Treatise in Thirty Verses on Mere-consciousness), divides the Saṃbhogakāya into two kinds, namely, the Parasaṃbhogakāya (the reward body which gives enjoyment to other) and

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267 See Wayman, Alex, op. cit.
the Svasambhogakāya (the reward body which enjoys itself). The former is seen by Bodhisattva; while the latter is seen by the Buddhas of the various worlds. The difference between these two kinds of the Sambhogakāya is that the former has the mahāpurusa-lakṣaṇa, but the citta is as unreal as that of the Nirmāṇakāya; while the latter has not the mahāpurusa-lakṣaṇa, but the citta is real.

Rather, the doctrine of Sambhogakāya of the Buddha indicates an ideal body that is possessed of the Bodhisattvas, those highly advanced beings awakened to the Truth through practice of the six-perfections. One of the most important forms of Sambhogakāya is Amitābha (Infinite Light), also known as Amitāyus (Infinite Life), which indicates the universality of the Sambhogakāya, the spiritual activity and the influence of which are unlimited by space and time.

In sum, the Mahāyānists believe in the theory of Buddha-kāyas, that is, the Buddha has three forms of body, namely, Nirmāṇakāya or Rūpakāya (the transformation body), Dharmakāya (the Dharma body), and Sambhogakāya (the glorious body). Gautama Buddha is viewed as the transformation body of the Buddha, the manifestation of the Dharma body, the reality, or the true nature of universal. While the Theravādins believe that the Buddha was essentially an Arhant who had attained nirvāṇa, the state that is beyond the reach of mortals; they assume that, there is only one Buddha in this world. This view is clearly expressed in the Milindapañha.
3.4.2. Bodhisattva Ideal

Bodhisattva is a major ideal of Mahāyāna Buddhism. However, it was not entirely a specific notion of the Mahāyānists. The term ‘Bodhisattva’ is derived from two words ‘bodhi’ (enlightenment) and ‘sattva’ (substance, existence, or being). The compound ‘Bodhisattva’ is rendered as one person who has perfect wisdom as his essence.\(^{274}\) Thus a Bodhisattva is regard to be the incarnation of intelligence-heart (Bodhicitta). In other words, essential natures of a Bodhisattva are great loving heart (mahā-karunā-citta), intelligence (prajñā), and non-grasping (anupādāna).

The Bodhisattva ideal originally emerged as the highest aspiration to achieve bodhi for themselves and for others. In the tendencies of development of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India, this ideal gradually became a practical doctrine, which was known as specific doctrine of Mahāyāna since the 2\(^{nd}\) century CE.\(^{275}\) According to this doctrine, the means (upāya) to achieve bodhi is the six perfections (ṣaṭ-pāramitā). In other words, the six perfections are the certain definite virtues to be prepared by a Bodhisattva himself for the attainment of Buddhahood.

According to the Mahāyānasūtrālaṁkāra, the six perfections are formulated as follows:\(^{276}\)

1. Dāna (giving, generosity, liberality): to accomplish the quality of generosity.
2. Śīla (virtuous conduct, morality, righteousness): to accomplish the quality of harmlessness.
3. Kṣānti (forbearance, patience): to accomplish the quality of not to be perturbed by anything.

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\(^{274}\) See Dayal, Har, op. cit., 1999, p. 5.
\(^{275}\) Ibid., p. 30f.
(4) *Vīrya* (diligence): to accomplish the quality of joy in what is virtuous, positive, or wholesome.

(5) *Dhyāna* (rapt musing, concentration): to accomplish the quality of not to be distracted.

(6) *Prajñā* (wisdom): to accomplish the quality of perfect discrimination of phenomena, all knowable things.

These six perfections were also increased to ten. The four supplementary perfections are as follows:

(7) *Upāya* (skillfulness in the choice adaption of means for conversion or succour).

(8) *Prajñādhāna* (aspiration or resolution).

(9) *Bala* (strength, power).

(10) *Jñāna* (knowledge).

The first six perfections are really the major factors in Bodhisattva principles, which are well known and usually mentioned in Mahāyāna literature as well as in the daily practices of the Mahāyāna tradition; while the four additional ones are merely supplementary in character, which are mentioned in a few passages and almost forgot.277

In the speculative phase, the Bodhisattva doctrine was assumed to be the final outcome of the development of Mahāyāna ideal. The six perfections formula is a new combination of Buddhist ethic and the ideal harmony into a logical manner, which corresponds to practical life of contemporary circumstances. The six perfections in this formula are fundamentally related to the triad *Śīla* (virtuous conduct), *Samādhi* (concentration), and *Prajñā* (wisdom), which are known as the *tri-śikṣā*

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277 According to the *Jātaka*, the ten previous birth perfections (*dasapāramīs*) required for the *Buddhahood* are described in corresponding the length of stories [Serivaniya (Ja. 3), Rohinī, Ārāmadūsaka, Vedabbha (Ja. 45-7), Guttila (Ja. 243), Sāsa (Ja. 316), Kusa (Ja. 531), Ummagga (Ja. 546), and Vessantara (Ja. 547)] as follows: *śīla* (virtuous conduct), *nekkhamma* (renunciation), *paññā* (wisdom), *viriya* (energy), *khanti* (forbearance), *sacca* (truthfulness), *adhiṭṭhāna* (resolution), *metta* (love or friendliness), and *upekkhā* (equanimity). See Dayal, Har, *op. cit.*, 1999, p. 167.
(three trainings), namely, adhi-śīla (higher virtue), adhi-citta (higher mind), and adhi-prajñā (higher wisdom);\(^{278}\) In the six perfections, the first three perfections (Dāna, Śīla, and Kṣānti) correspond to the training in the order of Śīla; the fifth and sixth (Dhyāna and Prajñā) correspond to the two trainings in the orders of citta and prajñā; while the fourth (Vīrya) is a neutral principle which corresponds to all of the three trainings.\(^{279}\)

Among the four supplementary perfections, the \textit{upāya} is the most important. It is especially related to a Bodhisattva’s function. The \textit{Bodhisattva-bhūmi} writes that, the duty of Bodhisattva is to be an effective preacher.\(^{280}\) The \textit{Śata-sāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā} says that, all perfections are fulfilled by preaching.\(^{281}\) The \textit{upāya} is also mentioned along with the six perfections in the \textit{Aṣṭa-sāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā},\(^{282}\) subsequently, it was raised to the rank of the perfections. The \textit{Bodhisattva-bhūmi} states that, the object of the \textit{upāya} is “the conversion of those who are hostile or indifferent to the faith, and the development and liberation of those who already profess Buddhism.”\(^{283}\)

The achievement of a Bodhisattva has been divided into various stages (bhūmis). The number of the stages is different, such as in the \textit{Bodhisattva-bhūmi} (fol. 136b) and the \textit{Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra} (p. 28), the number is counted to be seven, but according to the \textit{Daśabhūmika-sūtra}, the number is indicated to be ten. The Mahāyānist now supposed the \textit{Daśabhūmika-sūtra} as the standard treatise on this subject. Thus, the number of the stages of Bodhisattva is counted to be ten as follows:\(^{284}\)

\(^{278}\) \textit{Mahāvyutpatti}, section 36, \textit{q.v.} Dayal, Har, \textit{op. cit.}, 1999, p. 169.
\(^{280}\) \textit{Bodhisattvabhūmi}, p. 152a 6.2; \textit{q.v.} Dayal, Har, \textit{op. cit.}, 1999, p. 248.
\(^{281}\) \textit{Śata-sāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā}, 1324; \textit{Loc. cit.}
\(^{282}\) \textit{Aṣṭa-sāharikā Prajñāpāramitā}, 472, 373, 310, 311, 386, 379; \textit{Loc. cit.}
\(^{283}\) \textit{Bodhisattvabhūmi}, p. 116b5; \textit{Loc. cit.}
(1) First Stage is called Pramuditā (Chinese 歡 喜 – huan-xi, Enjoyment) because a Bodhisattva has a feeling of delight (moda) when he knows that he will soon attain Enlightenment (bodhi) and promote the good creatures (artha-caryā).

(2) Second Stage is called Vimalā (Chinese 離 垢 – li-gou, Free from Impurity or Immaculate World) because the Bodhisattva is free from the defilements of unrighteous conduct. He is now straightforward, tender-hearted, active, self-controlled, calm, beneficent, incorruptible, noble, magnanimous, and free from desire.

(3) Third Stage is called Prabhākarī (Chinese 發 光 – fa-guang, Light-giving or Luminous World) because the Bodhisattva diffuses the great light of the doctrine among the living beings. His thoughts are now pure, constant, unworldly, dispassionate, firm, resolute, ardent, ambitious, noble, and magnanimous.

(4) Fourth Stage is called Arciṣmatī (Chinese 焰 慧 – yan-hui, Radiant or Effulgent World) because the rays of the (37) wings of Enlightenment (bodhipakṣya-dharman) consume the veil and obstruction of sin and ignorance. The Bodhisattva now gains the entrance-light of the doctrine by reflecting on the nature of the Worlds, of Space, of Consciousness, of the Truth, of the three realms (Desire, Form and Formlessness), and noble and magnanimous of Aspiration.

(5) Fifth Stage is called Sudurjayā (Chinese 難 勝 – nan-sheng, Difficult to conquer or unconquerable) because the Bodhisattva performs the difficult feat of maturing others and surveillance his own mind, the suffering is won over.

(6) Sixth Stage is called Abhimukhi (Chinese 現 前 – xian-qian, Face to Face or Looking Straight in Face of the World) because the Bodhisattva, practicing the Perfection of Wisdom, now stands face to face with both transmigration (samsāra) and liberation (nirvāṇa).
(7) Seventh Stage is called Dūraṅgamā (Chinese 遠行 – yuan-xing, Farg- going) because it leads to the end of the Uniform-path of One-vehicle (ekayāna), to the consummation of the Discipline.

(8) Eighth Stage is called Acalā (Chinese 不動 – bu-dong, Immovable or Steadfast) because the Bodhisattva cannot be disturbed by the two ideas of Cause and Absence of Cause. He now acquires the patience (ksānti) called patient endurance of uncreated (anuttppattika-dharma-ksānti).

(9) Ninth Stage is called Sādhumatī (Chinese 善慧 – shan-hui, Good mind or Good though) because the Bodhisattva has good thought on account of the discriminating knowledge (pratisamvids)285 that he acquires.

(10) Tenth Stage is called Dharma-meghā (Chinese 法雲 – fa-yun, Cloud of the Doctrine) because it is pervaded by the modes of concentration (samādhi) and continuance in rectitude (dhārani), as space is occupied by clouds.

It is noteworthy that, in the notion of nirvāṇa, the Bodhisattva ideal is different from the Śrāvaka ideal of Therāvāda tradition. The stage of nirvāṇa for the Śrāvakas is identified with Arhatship while for the Bodhisattvas it is equal to Buddhahood. However, nirvāṇa is never to be neglected nor devaluated among the Mahāyānists. On the other hand, the Theravādin hold that, in freedom, an Arhat is freed and comprehended that: “The birth is end, what need to done, they has done, and there is nothing future here.”286 But for a Bodhisattva, thereby wishing to help all living beings to attain nirvāṇa, he continues to work in all worlds with the vow that: “Not as one that is hurried do I undertake to gain enlightenment, I will remain until the end of the chain of being for even a single living being’s sake.”287

285 The four pratisamvids, see Dayal, Har, op. cit., 1999, p. 259f.
Through the practice of Bodhisattva, one can achieve bodhi for oneself and for others. The Bodhisattvas are to regenerate and return to this world, they are in a way “not dwelling in samsāra and nirvāṇa” (apratiṣṭhita-samsāra-nirvāṇa). While through the practice of Śrāvaka one strives and struggles for one’s own liberation. Therefore, the Bodhisattva ideal was regarded as the way of the practitioners of Mahāyāna. This is one of the basic doctrines of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

3.4.3. Emptiness (Śūnyatā)

Emptiness (Śūnyatā, Pāli Suññatā) is a key concept in Buddhist philosophy, or more precisely, it is basic characteristic of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Emptiness is identical with the ultimate nature of inherent existence, the insight of Enlightened One, and the ultimate truth. It is equivalent with the concept of anatta (non-self) in the Theravādin tradition.

The doctrine of Emptiness (Śūnyatā), received fullest elaboration by Nāgārjuna (150 – 250 CE), who wielded it skillfully to destroy the substantial conceptions of the Abhidharma schools of Theravāda. Through Emptiness, Nāgārjuna elaborated a theory of Middle-Way (Mādhyama pratipadā) which is considered as the foundation in order to syatemetise the whole Mahāyāna sūtras.

According to the Mahāyāna teachings about Emptiness, all beings and things have no intrinsic existence in themselves. All phenomena come into being because of conditions created by other phenomena. Thus, they have no existence of their own and are empty of a permanent self. The Heart Sūtra

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points out that, the Dharmas are marked with Emptiness, that is, all things are non-arising, non-ceasing, non-permanence, non-annihilation, non-identity, non-difference, non-coming, and non-exiting.\textsuperscript{290} Through the view of Emptiness, one can realize the temporariness of all existence, and then gets the right view about the conventional world. Therefore the Buddha said: “For this is the abiding of the great man, Sāriputta, that is to say emptiness.”\textsuperscript{291}

It is noteworthy to remark that, the emptiness is not nihilism. The nihilists argue that, emptiness means that nothing exists, or reality based on emptiness is unknowable, it will have nothing meaningful to say about reality and the universe.\textsuperscript{292} However, the Buddhist notion of emptiness is meant for just the opposite. As mentioned above, ultimate reality is inexpressible, beyond verbal expression; it can be understood and shared between those who had obtained the realization of nirvāṇa. In other words, the ultimate truth cannot be seen with the physical eyes, nor attained by the worldly intelligence of those who has deviated from the concept of Non-substantiality, who are fallen into the erroneous conception maintaining the existence of individuality, who are attached to delusion. However, from the viewpoint of conventional truth, the notion of emptiness can be expressed and communicated, and from it, we can realize our own reality and all manifestations of the universe around us.

In the speculative phase, existent and non-existent are successive categories of one entity. They alternate, but neither is the source, nor is the effect of the other. Vasubhandhu, in the Madhyāntavibhāga-kārikā, says that, everything is described as being neither void (śūnya) nor non-void

\textsuperscript{290} Here, O Sāriputra, all dharmas are marked with emptiness; they are not produced or stopped, not defiled or immaculate, not deficient or complete. Edward, Conze (tr. & com.), Buddhist Wisdom: The Diamond Sūtra and The Heart Sūtra, 1958, New York: Vintage Books, 2001, p. 91.


\textsuperscript{292} Hemant, Gupta, Road to Digital Divine, USA: Xlibris Corporation, 2010, p. 45.
(cāśūnya). That indeed is the Middle-Way, for, there is existent as well as non-existent, and again existent.\textsuperscript{293}

In the practical phase, every inherent existence comes into existence due to the principle of DependentOrigination (Pratītya-samutpāda). In other words, the principle of Dependent Origination reflects the ultimate nature of the dharmas. It is tightly penetrating into everything and every concept. Through this principle, the Buddha explains the characteristics of universal existence positively, that is, impermanence (anitya), suffering (duḥkha), and non-self (anātman). These characteristics give a strong to understand the ultimate nature of all phenomena. We should understand that, all phenomena are impermanence, because they are changing continuously due to the vital component of a train of causes and conditions; all phenomena are non-self, because they come into existence without an independent element. They are thus the entity of Emptiness. That is why Nāgārjuna said: “It is dependent origination that we call emptiness.”\textsuperscript{294} On the other hand, the principle of Dependent Origination is the content of the Buddha’s enlightenment.\textsuperscript{295} The Buddha had stated that, whoever realizes the principle of Dependent Origination sees the Dharma, whoever sees the Dharma realizes the principle of Dependent Origination.\textsuperscript{296} The Dharma

\textsuperscript{293} Na śūnyaṃ nāpi cāśūnyaṃ tasmāt sarvam vidhīyate, sattvād-asattvāt sattvāc-ca madhyamā-pratipac-ca śa, i.e., Neither void nor non-void: so is everything described, that indeed is the middle path, for there is existence as well as non-existence, and again existence. Madhyāntavibhāga, I. 3, q.v. A. Kochumuttom, Thomas, op. cit., 1989, pp. 42, 236.


\textsuperscript{295} The content of the Buddha’s Enlightenment is given in some texts not as the Four Noble Truths and the destruction of the corruptions but as conditioned origination. R. F., Gombrich, op. cit., 2002, p. 46.

herein indicates the Dharmakāya, highest truth of the Buddhas, the ultimate truth, or Tathatā. In the Avatamsaka-sūtra, it is said that: “When the Bhuddhas attain true awakening, they acquire bodies that are equal in extent to all sentient beings, equal in extent to all phenomena, equal in extent to the Tathatā, equal to the ultimate calm realm of nirvāṇa, etc. And upon attaining true awakening, the Buddhas see within their body all sentient beings attaining true awakening, and see all sentient beings enter nirvāṇa, all of the same nature, which is emptiness. In such a manner of speaking, the emptiness is identical with the essence of the enlightenment or the insight of Enlightened One.

To sum up, from the viewpoint of ultimate truth, the emptiness is inexpressible. To resort to the ultimate, emptiness, thus is ontologized into the categories of conventional truth and the ultimate truth; however their intrinsic nature is just ultimate truth. Emptiness is identical with ultimate truth because it is both a truth and a sacred object. Being the sacred object, emptiness is the door of liberation, the realization of emptiness is identity with the liberation from the cycle of birth and death (samsāra) or the realization of nirvāṇa. Being the true object, it appears in accordance with mode of existent and non-existent. Thus, when a mind realizes directly the emptiness, inherent existence does not appear at all; and when the ultimate truth is cognized directly, the emptiness does not appear to be existent and non-existent. In short, emptiness is one of the basic doctrines of Mahāyāna Buddhism. It is the teaching that is very subtle and difficult to understand. It is the reality identical with the ultimate truth. According to the view of Emptiness (Śūnyatā), all dharmas (things) come into existence due to the

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vital component of causes and conditions, or the principle of Dependent Origination (Pratītya-samutpāda). Through this view, one can realize the temporariness of all existence as well as not to be attached to worldly conventions. The realization of emptiness is able to help one purge any bias and enjoy a genuine insight into reality. Thus, the outcome of emptiness is to remove attachment regarding conditioned world. At this level, one ought to make a distinction between the conventional truth and the ultimate truth, existence and non-existence, saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. This is the process leading to the ultimate truth, namely, nirvāṇa.

3.4.4. Buddha Nature

Buddha nature (Buddha-dhatu) is representative of universal doctrine of Mahāyāna Buddhism. It is indicated by the Buddha in a number of Mahāyāna sūtras in order to display the “absolutely final culmination” of his Dharma.

According to the Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra, the Buddha nature does not mean “the nature of the Buddha,” but it also frequently applies to sentient beings. In other words, the Buddha nature is the immutable and eternal pure nature within all sentient beings; it is the seed or potential to attain Buddhahood of all sentient beings.299 Broadly speaking, it is concerned with ascertaining what allows sentient beings to become Buddhas. According to Mahāyāna viewpoint, all sentient beings have an inherently pure nature which is equal to that of Buddhas. The Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra asserts that, all sentient being have within them a fully enlightened Buddha, or all beings have within them a Tathāgata-awareness.300

Although the term Buddha nature has been widely used in texts of Mahāyāna tradition with word Sanskrit is Buddha-dhatu, it is still a matter

300 This is in the Tathāgatotpattisambhabavanirdeśa, a sūtra which included in the Avataṃska collection. See Takasaki (1958, p. 52; 1966, pp. 35-6).
of controversy among the Buddhist scholars. In many texts of the Tathāgata-garbha literature or Mahāyāna teachings, the term Buddha nature is used to convey the meaning of the Tathāgata-garbha. Therefore, today, some scholars analyze the term Tathāgata-garbha i.e. explain the meaning of Buddha nature.

As said before, the term Tathāgatagarbha contains two parts, ‘Tathāgata’ and ‘garbha.’ The word ‘Tathāgata’ literally means “being in such a state or condition, of such a quality or nature” or “the person who comes and goes in the same way.” The word ‘garbha’ has three meanings: embryo, womb and hidden. When ‘garbha’ has the meaning of ‘embryo,’ Tathāgatagarbha means ‘embryonic Tathāgata,’ i.e. the incipient Buddha, the cause of a Buddha, or the potentiality for becoming a Buddha. When ‘garbha’ has the meaning of ‘womb,’ Tathāgatagarbha represents the fulfillment of the Buddha path, which is full and complete with all Buddha’s virtues, and is linked with the terms such as Dharmakāya, Nirvāṇa, and Buddhahood. When ‘garbha’ has the meaning of ‘hidden’ because the inherent Tathāgata or Buddhahood in living beings is still hidden and obscured by defilements. Thus, Buddha nature or Tathāgatagarbha refers to the nature of a Buddha inherent of all sentient beings.

Really, all sentient beings have within them a pure nature of a Buddha. However, it is obscured by various defilements, so it is not to be seen by sentient beings. Everyone has the potential to attain perfection but does not consider human beings as possessing a perfect nature. We cannot create Buddha nature, but this nature is already perfect and complete within ourselves. The only difficulty is that we do not realize it. Buddha nature is like a seed that is left to develop, it gives rise to a plant or sprout; it is

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302 Ibid., p. 349.
already fully formed or developed, but, due to the adventitious defilements stands between us and enlightenment. These defilements simply need to be removed through practice. In other words, the enlightenment lies in removing the taints in order to allow this inherently pure nature shine forth. Therefore, the Buddha nature is that which each living being has and it is a capacity to attain the enlightenment of each sentient being. The claim that all sentient beings have this element means all sentient beings have within them that which makes them attain full Buddhahood. In his study of “the doctrine of the Buddha nature in the Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra,” Ming-Wood Liu says that:

The Buddha uses the term “Buddha nature” to describe sentient beings not because he thinks that all of them have already achieved the characters and powers of the Tathāgata, but because with ability to learn and with their own incessant effort to teach, every one of them “will definitely attain the most supreme form of emptiness,” i.e., the true wisdom of the Buddha.

The Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra asserts that the Buddha nature is nothing other than the Self (atman). According to this sūtra, ‘Self’ is the meaning of ‘Tathāgatagarbha.’ Of course, this Self is not a Self in the worldly sense that is taught by non-Buddhist thinkers. The Buddha taught the non-Self doctrine in order to overcome the egoistic Self which is the basis for attachment and grasping. Elsewhere in the Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra, the Buddha seems rather to portray his teaching of the Tathāgatagarbha as a Self, as a strategy to convert non-Buddhists. So he does not say that all sentient beings lack a self, but he always says that sentient beings have the Buddha nature. The Buddha adds that, it is because all sentient beings do not see the Buddha nature, so he teaches impermanence, no-Self, unhappiness, and impurity. He has taught “Where is Self there is really no-Self, and where

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is no-Self there is really Self.” This is not false but a skilful means to teach a
great thing. Here the Buddha nature is really no-Self, but it is said to be a
Self from another angle.\(^\text{305}\)

It is noteworthy that, according to the Mahāyāna teachings, everyone
has Buddha nature and capacity to attain enlightenment, but capacity and
ability are not similar. We have the capacity, but we may not have the
ability. How so? For example, one may have certain talents to do a certain
thing, such as to play music, paint, write poetry, or some innate talent for
philosophizing. Nevertheless, to have ability, we must do something with
the capacity that we have. It depends upon a variety of factors, such as the
company that we keep, the situations that we are in, and the general
opportunity to develop and cultivate our innate capacity. Or if you have a
container full of wheat then you have potential seeds. If you put them into
the soil, provide water and good conditions, they have the potential to sprout
and grow. However, if you do not do that, then those grains do not have the
ability to flourish. They have the capacity, the potential to sprout, but they
need nourishment to do so. Therefore, when we talk about Buddha nature,
the situation is no different. Why? Because we already have the capacity to
attain enlightenment, but not all human beings are similar. We have to aim
at equality, we have to aspire to have equality, but we are not equal. In fact,
we are very different.\(^\text{306}\)

In brief, Buddha nature is the ultimate and true Dharma of the Buddha
which can guide all sentient beings to the Middle Way in order to realize
their inherent Buddha and to attain enlightenment like the Buddhas. It is
considered as one of the basic doctrines of Mahāyāna Buddhism. It can be
said that the doctrine of Buddha nature has supplemented the deficiency in


\(^{306}\) Kyabgon, Traleg, op. cit., 2004, p. 84.
the teaching of No-self of Early Buddhism, it has completed the theory of Emptiness (Śūnyatā) of the Madhyāmika, and it has corrected the errors in grasping of both dualistic and monistic thought as well.