1.1. General Introduction

Buddhism is known as the religion of enlightenment or the path of understanding. It was founded in India in the sixth century BCE by Gautama Buddha. In the beginning, Buddhism only spread and developed within the Indian subcontinent. But few centuries after, it spread to the South-east Asian countries and to the most parts of Asia. Today, Buddhism has become an international religion with adherents all over the world.

Over the course of twenty-five centuries, Buddhism has not only brought peace and happiness to people but also provided a basis of humanism and has made great contributions to the development of society. Buddhist practice is the way of self-improvement by the training in Śīla, Samādhi, and Prajñā; and its aim is to relieve people from worldly suffering and help them attain true happiness.

During its propagation, Buddhism underwent many changes. It had to present its message in means (upāya) understandable to the masses. It had to adjust itself to new modes of thought as well as practice to suit for local conditions and circumstances in different phases of time. This is one of the motivations that led to the rise of different Buddhist schools. Though Buddhism has many different forms, all these forms are based on the
Buddha’s life experiences and his teachings. Today, Buddhism has two main schools; namely, Theravāda and Mahāyāna. Though each of the schools has its own opinions about interpretation and practice the of Buddha’s teaching, their aim is not different. But in this study, we will only mention Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Theravāda is known as the original form, whereas Mahāyāna is known as the developed form of Buddhism. The term ‘Mahāyāna’ or “Great Vehicle” is the distinctive name of Buddhist philosophy and practice. It is called “Great Vehicle” by its adherents, in comparison to the narrowness of its opponent school, Hinayāna or “Small Vehicle,” and at the same time, for conveying the sense of superiority and universality of its doctrine and aim.¹

Mahāyāna Buddhism rose in South-India between the 1st century BCE and the 1st century CE with the appearance of some new sūtras.² But in the 2nd century CE, Mahāyāna became clearly defined by Nāgārjuna through the philosophy of Śūnyatā (Emptiness) expounded in his great work, Mādhyamika-śāstra. After that (from the 2nd to the 6th century CE) the renowned philosophers like Āryadeva, Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, Sthiramati, Dharmapāla, Diṅnāga, Dharmakīrti, and so on, contributed immensely to systematize and develop its thought. These efforts made Mahāyāna Buddhism develop fast and spread widely.

In the course of its development, Mahāyāna Buddhism spread from India to various Asian countries such as China, Japan, Vietnam, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan and Mongolia. Major traditions of

² Because almost scholars saw that, around the 1st century CE, teachings of a different style appeared, and the terms ‘Mahāyāna’ also appeared in the new sūtra, the Saddharma Pundarika Sūtra. See Skilton, Andrew, A Concise History of Buddhism, New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2000, p. 102.
Mahāyāna Buddhism today include Chan, Pure-land, Tiantai, Nichiren, and the Esoteric tradition of Tibetan Buddhism.

Taken as an overview, Mahāyāna is very complex and difficult to understand. Even the practitioners of Theravāda think that Mahāyāna deviated from the Buddha’s ways and teachings. But in fact, the Mahāyāna movement is only the means (upāya) of communication for the welfare of human beings. Mahāyāna and Theravāda both originated from Early Buddhism with the same goal to achieve enlightenment. However, the methods and practices of the two schools are very different. The quality of the enlightenment in the former is more comprehensive as well as inclusive than that of in the latter. The followers of Theravāda embarked upon a path with a narrow vision; they believed that the teachings as recorded in the Pāli canons were the original words of the Buddha, so they were not interested to make any change in those teachings. Consequently, they were concerned mainly with their own enlightenment by the way of Arhantship, but not necessarily with full enlightenment or Buddhahood. So, the highest attainment in Theravāda tradition is Arhant. On the contrary, the Mahāyānists went further; they comprehended the Buddha’s implication in a different way. They tended towards Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings through the practice of Bodhisattva path. Their goal was not only to get rid themselves of suffering, but also to help all sentient beings out of misery. They worked for the benefit of others upholding the view that, to do something for others is also to do something for oneself. This is not to mean that, the practitioners of Theravāda never think about compassion and altruism. These attitudes may be there, but only to some extent. In other words, they did not give special importance to the benefit of

4 Ibid., p. 37.
all sentient-beings as the Mahāyānists did. Therefore, the highest attainment in Mahāyāna tradition is Buddhahood.

While Theravāda emphasizes on individual enlightenment, Mahāyāna emphasizes on enlightenment of all sentient-beings. Therefore, the ideal of the practitioners of Mahāyāna is to become the Bodhisattva, who refuses to enter nirvāṇa (even when they have the ability to do so) until all other beings are similarly enlightened and saved. “Forasmuch as there is the will that all sentient beings should be altogether made free, I will not forsake my fellow creatures.”

So, Mahāyāna was also called “Bodhisattvayāna” or “Bodhisattva Vehicle” (the vehicle of a Bodhisattva seeking Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings). This matter was presented by K. C. Ananda thus: “The most essential part of the Mahāyāna is its emphasis on the Bodhisattva ideal, which replaces that of Arhant, or ranks before it. Whereas the Arhant strives most earnestly for nirvāṇa, the Bodhisattva firmly refuses to accept the final release.”

Mahāyāna philosophy is based on the philosophy of Early Buddhist schools, especially, Mahāsāṃghika schools. Its basic doctrines are Trikāya (three bodies of the Buddha), Śūnyatā (Emptiness), Buddha nature (the transcendent nature of a Buddha), bodhicitta (mind of seeking full enlightenment) and Bodhisattva ideal. One can say that Mahāyāna Buddhism employs all “skilful means” to communicate its thought that is suitable to each and every individual with their own mental and emotional capacity in order to guide suitability with their quality. Therefore, though Mahāyāna accepts all canons of the Theravāda tradition, it also establishes

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7 Mahāsāṃghika philosophy developed the idea of the transcendent nature of a Buddha, the ideal of the Bodhisattva, and the doctrine of Śūnyatā, or “Emptiness.”
its own literature\(^8\) in order to suit human capacity and social circumstances. This is the very developed form of Buddhism that I will try to analyse with a study of its origin in the present work.

### 1.2. Problems

Nowadays, Mahāyāna Buddhism has become thoroughly integrated with people of different cultures, civilizations, races in Asian countries. It was vigorously propagated to many colonies of Europe, America, Australia, and Africa. In addition, during the process of its propagation and development, Mahāyāna Buddhism was not only bringing the actual benefit for different communities, but also it had remarkable contribution towards culture and art of many countries over the world. In order to prove Mahāyāna Buddhism to be one of the most dominant forms of religion in this age, the study of the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism is very important.

Moreover, there are some problems that need to be explained and interpreted:

Firstly, the issue of the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism has caused many controversies among scholars old as well as modern. Such, being the case, this study is an attempt to show the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism as well as the appearance of the term ‘Mahāyāna’ in a historical perspective. It will also attempt to present an outline of the historical background and philosophical thought, by which one can have a coherent view on the transition of Buddhism.

Secondly, anybody who does not have good knowledge of Mahāyāna Buddhism may be mistaken to believe that Mahāyāna does not follow the Buddha’s teachings. As a matter of fact, most adherents of the Theravāda tradition think that Mahāyāna Buddhism is a school of heresy (vaitulyavāda);

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\(^8\) Mahāyāna literature including Sūtras and Śāstras that will be mentioned detail in chapter 5.
Mahāyāna canon was not uttered directly by the Buddha, but it was compiled by great thinkers of Mahāyāna. In order to clarify this misunderstanding, it is necessary to delve into this issue to verify that the Mahāyāna thought appeared in the Pāli Canons of Early Buddhism, as well as it originated from Early Buddhism and it has a certain interconnection with Early Buddhism.

Thirdly, though there have been a number of researchs on the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism, yet some questions need to be answered with a scientific approach. They are as follows: Why did Mahāyāna Buddhism come into existence? What were the motivations led to the Mahāyāna movement? Where were the Mahāyāna traces? Moreover, I would like to present some new concepts in the Mahāyāna movement; the basic doctrines and the formation of its literature. Lastly, I would also like to answer why Mahāyāna Buddhism succeeded in spreading its teachings in other countries except India.

1.3. Solution

As mentioned above, the precise date of the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism is something of a mystery and is still not completely understood. It is always a question that has caused many controversies among scholars. In this study, I will show a number of different opinions regarding to the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

According to historical records, Mahāyāna emerged as a separate school between the 1st century BCE and the 1st century CE. However, most likely it had been developing gradually for a long time before that. Some scholars hold the view that, Mahāyāna developed from various schools of Early Buddhism. Andrew Rawlinson in his work claims that “Mahāyāna used various sources of early Buddhist schools in order to flesh out its teachings.”9 N. Dutt also supports this view and says that: “The traces of

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Mahāyānism are found even in the Pāli Sutta-pitaka, the earliest literature preserving Buddha’s teachings.”\textsuperscript{10} Heinrich Dumoulin also asserts the view thus “Traces of Mahāyāna teachings have appeared already in the oldest Buddhist scriptures. Contemporary scholarship is inclined to view the transition of the Mahāyāna as a gradual process hardly noticed by people at the time”\textsuperscript{11} (this opinion will be put forth as an evidence in the chapter 4, section 4.1, \textit{v. infra.} p. 111). Other scholars declare that, Mahāyāna originated from Mahāsaṅghika school, a school that separated after the first schism of Buddhist Saṅgha in 376 BCE,\textsuperscript{12} (this opinion will be put forth as an evidence in the chapters 3 & 4, \textit{v. infra.} pp. 59f, 111f). On the other hand, the Japanese scholars believe that, Mahāyāna originated from the stūpa worship among a group of lay people; the biographical literature of the Buddha,\textsuperscript{13} the practices of Abhidharma literature;\textsuperscript{14} and even foreign influences, etc., (these views will be supported by an evidence in the chapter 4, sections 4.1 & 4.3, \textit{v. infra.} pp. 111f, 143f).

The date of the emergence of Mahāyāna Buddhism is also a matter of dispute among scholars. There are evidences that “Mahāyāna appears to have been an uninfluential minority interest for centuries until well into the Common Era.”\textsuperscript{15} There are also some evidences of formative elements of Mahāyāna which are traced to the time of Aśoka (the 3\textsuperscript{rd} century BCE), when the forces of the spiritual path and goal began to crystallize, namely, the stūpa worship, yet the Mahāyāna thought had not come to surface until the fourth Buddhist Council in 100 CE. As a matter of fact, we come to know of Mahāyāna activities for the first time under the king Kaniṣka’s

\textsuperscript{12} Lamonette and Conze have suggested that “Mahāyāna is primarily an offspring of Mahāsaṅghika, a now-extinct Buddhist sect formed about 320 BCE.
\textsuperscript{14} Edward, Conze, \textit{op. cit.}, 2008, p. 50.
dynasty. This coincided with scholars’ opinions, “the Mahāyāna arose about between the 1st century BCE and the 1st century CE with the appearance some new sūtras.”\(^{16}\) Though the term ‘Mahāyāna’ for the first time appeared in the earliest Mahāyāna sūtras (such as the Saddharmapundarika-sūtra and some portions of the Prajñāparamita-sūtra) between 100 BCE and 100 CE,\(^ {17}\) Mahāyāna became powerful owing to its devotional and philosophical activities. We also find evidences that, in the 2nd century CE Mahāyāna Buddhism started to develop and became a separate school through philosophy of Śūnyatā (Emptiness) by Nāgārjuna. There are also a lot of extant evidences for the date and circumstances of the emergence of Mahāyāna which come from early translations of China. Mahāyāna texts, for the first time, were translated into Chinese language by Lokakṣema, the first translator of Mahāyāna sūtras, during the 2nd century CE.\(^ {18}\)

Again, during the process of its formation, Mahāyāna Buddhism had been criticized by the adherents of non-Mahāyāna schools. One of the key attacks from the non-Mahāyānists is that “the genuineness of Mahāyāna sūtras is questionable.” The Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṁkara, a text written in the late 3rd century or the early 4th century CE, enumerated eight reasons to prove that Mahāyāna teachings were Buddhavacana.

Again, many people are of the opinion that the founder of Mahāyāna Buddhism is Nāgārjuna. But it is a great mistake. If we look at the great work, Mādhyamika-śāstra, of Nāgārjuna, we actually see that philosophy of Middle-way was developed from the theory of Śūnyatā (Emptiness) in Prajñāpāramitā literature (an earliest work of Mahāyāna scriptures that emerged in the 1st century BCE). Moreover, in the Prajñāpāramitā-śāstra

\(^{16}\) See Akira, Hirakawa, *op. cit.*, 1993, pp. 8, 120.
\(^{17}\) Skilton, Andrew, *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 102.
and Daśabhūmivibhāsā-śāstra of Nāgārjuna, we find many Mahāyāna sūtras quoted by the author. This may support the claim that before Nāgārjuna there were many Mahāyāna sūtras. Therefore, it is beyond doubt that Mahāyāna Buddhism already rose before the time of Nāgārjuna, and Nāgārjuna was not the founder of Mahāyāna Buddhism, but he was the only person who was responsible for the emergence of its thought. In other words, Nāgārjuna was regarded as a great systematizer or expounder of Mahāyāna Buddhism. In his study of Nāgārjuna, Joseph Walser writes “Nāgārjuna was a Buddhist philosopher of the 2nd century CE and a key figure in the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism in ancient India.”

In order to solve the above mentioned problems, I have given evidences and brought out conclusion that, the emergence of Mahāyāna Buddhism was not sudden, but it happened due to many causes and motivations. It did not emerge in one day, but it came into being through a gradual process of development for a long period of time. Mahāyāna Buddhism originated neither from Mahāsaṅghika school, nor among certain laity or from certain rebel monks, nor from certain Abhidhamists, nor due to the reason of cults. Actually, all of these had their own contributions. The contribution of each group interacted dynamically and resulted in the emergence of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Thus, Mahāyāna Buddhism, no doubt, a breakaway religion. It was not altogether a new religion, but it was only a developed form of Buddhism. Its roots are to be traced to the very life and teachings of the Buddha. Its emergence was the result of the reconciliation of Buddhism with the local religious faith and practices as well as social situation. Edward Conze rightly

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19 The former is a commentary on the Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra and the later is a commentary on the first two of the ten Bhūmis in Daśabhūmika chapter of Vatamsaka-sūtra.


21 Of the ten powers in the Avatamsaka-sūtra, there is ‘the vehicle power which is able to present all kinds of vehicles but still pursuing the Mahāyāna’ (T. 10: 295e4-5).
remarks: “Buddhism, throughout its history, has the unity of an organism, in that each development has taken place in continuity from the previous one. There is in Buddhism no innovation, but what seems so is, in fact, an adaptation of pre-existing ideas.” And the time of the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism may be the beginning of the Common Era. However, it must have gathered momentum in the 1st century BCE, but many of its basic ideas go back, may be in the 5th or 4th century BCE, if not to the Buddha’s time.

The above reasons are the cause which has inspired me to choose the topic: “An Analytical Study of the Origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism” for a research. Hopefully, this study will be a valuable work that will contribute for the study of Buddhism in the future.

1.4. Review of Literature

Though Mahāyāna Buddhism has been studied by many scholars, all of them deal with different aspects. Most of the scholars only mention the emergence and development of Mahāyāna Buddhism in its overview, but not deeply analyze the origins of Mahāyāna Buddhism, such as its trace, motivation, date, place, historical background and philosophical factors for the rise of Mahāyāna, and the formation of its literary. Hence, they are inadequate to solve the questions mentioned above. Besides, many theses have been written in the recent times on different aspects of Mahāyāna Buddhism, but they lack clarity.

1.4.1. Ryukan Kimura’s A Historical Study of the Terms of Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna and the Origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism


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consists of two parts. The first part is mainly devoted to a full discussion of the terms ‘Hīnayāna’ and ‘Mahāyāna’ from various points of views. In the second part the author has discussed different applications of the terms ‘Hīnayāna’ and ‘Mahāyāna’ in the two periods of the making of Mahāyāna Buddhism (Mahāyāna sūtras period) and of Mahāyāna teachers (Mahāyāna school period). Though Kimura has elaborated of significance and origin of the terms ‘Hīnayāna’ and ‘Mahāyāna’ and pointed out different applications of the terms, he has not shown the origins or sources of Mahāyāna Buddhism as mentioned in the title.

1.4.2. Nalinaksha Dutt’s Mahāyāna Buddhism

N. Dutt wrote a book entitled Mahāyāna Buddhism that was published by Bharatiya Kala Prakashan in Delhi, India. This work consists of detailed and dependable account of various historical events relating to the rise and development of Buddhism in general, and Mahāyāna in particular, which propagated and flourished in India and abroad from the reign Aśoka up to the 12th century CE. Though N. Dutt has elaborated the growth of philosophy and doctrines of Buddhism as well as Mahāyāna Buddhism in a clear manner to understand, and he has also found out the traces of the Mahāyāna in the Nikāyas, nevertheless it is insufficient to solve the problems of the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

1.4.3. D. T. Suzuki’s Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism

Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism of D. T. Suzuki is one of the finest introductory manuals to date on Mahāyāna Buddhism. In his introductory essay, Suzuki has endeavored to be as comprehensive as possible with the limitation of space. Written in a style that is lucid, transparent and easy to read, the book sets out to present the most intricate and complex Mahāyāna philosophies in such a manner that an average reader can grasp them. With
some exceptions, this book is very technical and very dry reading, but it is full of informative details and makes an excellent work of reference about Mahāyāna Buddhism. In his noble mission the author has greatly succeeded. However, in this work, though Suzuki has defined and explained the original meaning of Mahāyāna, and defended the genuineness of the Mahāyāna teachings, it still lacks the information about the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

1.4.4. Hirakawa Akira’s *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Śākyamuni to Early Mahāyāna*

Hirakawa Akira has written a work entitled “*A History of Indian Buddhism: From Śākyamuni to Early Mahāyāna.*” This work is an exceptionally comprehensive discussion of Indian Buddhism, with detailed chapters on its history, doctrine and bibliography. This is the primary material not only for the research on the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism but also for all the Buddhist studies. In his work, Hirakawa mentioned topics that relate to Early Buddhism, Nikāya Buddhism and Early Mahāyāna Buddhism. Especially, the transition from Early Buddhism to Sectarian Buddhism; the origin and emergence of Mahāyāna Buddhism; and the contents of early Mahāyāna scriptures. Though he has strived to make the history of Mahāyāna more accessible to the reader than previous histories and has specially skillfully elucidated the sources of Mahāyāna, but it is inadequate or insufficient to solve the problems of the origins of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

1.4.5. Paul Williams’ *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*  


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in 1989. This book is an introduction to the doctrines and ideals of Mahāyāna Buddhism. It also reflects on some of the recent scholarly works in the field. Particularly the book seems to convey the diversity and richness of Mahāyāna Buddhism. With his careful academic style, Williams elucidated subtleties in connection with the evolution of Buddhist thought as well as Mahāyāna thought. Especially, in the opening chapter, Williams has elaborated on factors which tend to promote change of Buddhism; the origin of Mahāyāna and its concerns with activities of the laity. But the book does not provide enough information about the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

1.4.6. Paul Harrison’s “Searching for the Origins of the Mahāyāna: What are we looking for?”

Paul Harrison has written the article titled “Searching for the Origins of the Mahāyāna: What are we looking for?” and published in the Buddhism: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies edited by Paul Williams (Routledge in London and New York: 2005). This article is a monograph on the origins of Mahāyāna Buddhism with a new and rather complete perspective. In this article, Harrison has focused on five main themes, which might give us some clues of the origins of Mahāyāna Buddhism. These five themes are also appropriate to Hirakawa’s theories about the early Mahāyāna. They are: the role of the laity; cult-practice directed towards the Buddha, Bodhisattvas, and stūpas; the wider cultural context of the new movement; the role of meditation; and the significance of magic. According to Harrison, all these themes are closely interconnected, so it is not very easy to separate them from one another for the purpose of analysis.

Although Harrison also agreed with archeological evidence that was pointed out by Professors Shizutani Masao, Hirakawa and Schopen; and he also tried to arrive at picturing of the cultural and religious context in which Buddhism developed during the first five centuries after the Buddha’s
nirvāṇa, nevertheless it is still not complete to convince one of the origins of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Thus, the review of literature provides highlights about the evidences of the origins of Mahāyāna Buddhism, but we certainly do not have a particular work that gives us a comprehensive or holistic understanding of this subject. Hence, the present study is an attempt to capture a more comprehensive picture of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

1.5. Material and Method

The primary literature of both Theravāda and Mahāyāna schools serves the material for the study.

The primary sources of Theravāda literature that serve to find out the traces of Mahāyāna in the Pāli Canon consist of the following English translations of the Pāli texts:

1. Dīgha-nikāya: the Long Collection or the Dialogues of the Buddha;
2. Majjhima-nikāya: the Medium Collection or the Collection of the Middle Length Sayings;
3. Samyutta-nikāya: the Collection of Groups or the Book of the Kindred Saying;
4. Aṅguttara-nikāya: the Collection of Expanding Groups or the Book of the Gradual Sayings;
5. Khuddaka-nikāya: the Collection of Groups of Minor Readings and Illustrator;
7. Jātaka: the Birth Stories;
8. Milindapañha: the Questions of Milinda;
Several English translations of the Sañskrit texts and their corresponding Chinese translations composed in the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* such as *Abhidharmakośa* (the Treasury of the Abhidharma), *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam* (the Commentary on the Treasury of the Abhidharma), *Abhidharma-mahāvibhāṣa-śāstra*, etc., have also been used as the primary sources, because they are necessary to show evidences of the origins of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

The primary sources of Mahāyāna literature that serve to find out the landmark of the emergence of Mahāyāna, philosophical thought, and its doctrine consist of the English translations of the Sañskrit texts and their corresponding Chinese translations composed in the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō*. They are as follows:

1. *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*: the Large Sūtra on Perfect Wisdom or the Perfection of Wisdom in 25,000 Lines;
2. *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*: the Lotus Sūtra;
3. *Avatamsaka-sūtra*: the Flower Ornament Scripture;
4. *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*: the Sūtra recounts a teaching primarily between the Buddha and Bodhisattva Mahāmati;
5. *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra*: the Sūtra of the teachings of the Layman Vimalakīrti
6. *Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*: the Discourse on the Stages of Yogic Practice;
7. *Triṃśika-vijñaptimātratā*: the Thirty Verses on Consciousness-only;
8. *Mādhyamika-śāstra*: the Treatise of the Middle Way;
These are an invaluable material source to the study of the origin, thought, doctrine and literature of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Besides, a vast number of the modern texts that are used in my investigation of Mahāyāna Buddhism may be considered the secondary sources.

With regard to such source materials, the analytical methodology seems to be appropriate to follow and have done it most of the time in the course of my study. Since the scope of the topic of research is very vast, I have also tried to adopt different methods whether it is analytical, or synthetic, or comparative, or descriptive method at times.

1.6. Outline of the Thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters including the introduction and the conclusion chapter.

The second chapter is entitled as “Indian Society at the time of the emergence of Mahāyāna Buddhism.” In this chapter, I have described political, economic and religious conditions of Indian society at the time of the emergence of Mahāyāna Buddhism that is to say from Mauryan dynasty (317 – 180 BCE) to Kuśāṇa period (Kaniṣka’s dynasty in the 1st century CE).

The third chapter is entitled as “Understanding of the Grounds of Mahāyāna Buddhism.” In this chapter, I have explained the meaning of the term ‘Mahāyāna’ and analyzed the origin of the term. It has been pointed out that the followers of Mahāsaṅghika schools coined this term about two hundred years after the Buddha’s nirvāṇa. And it seems 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 as ‘Pāpa-bhikṣu’ (sinful monk) and heretics. On the other hand, it was the intention to liberate from the conservative and old-fashioned thoughts; and to exalt their ultimate and universal doctrine. The next, I have tried to discuss the relation
between Mahāsaṅghika and Mahāyāna Buddhism about their history and doctrines. Although, historically, it is very difficult to point out that Mahāyāna originated from the northern or the southern Mahāsaṅghika, but through a full comparison of the theories of Mahāsaṅghika schools with the doctrines of Mahāyāna, it is certain that the doctrines of Mahāyāna originally came from the Mahāsaṅghika schools. These evidences have proved that Mahāsaṅghika and their branches were precursors of Mahāyāna Buddhism. And in the end there is the mention of the basic doctrines of Mahāyāna Buddhism, such as, Doctrine of Trikāya, Bodhisattva ideal, Emptiness (Śūnyatā) and Buddha nature.

The fourth chapter is entitled as “Analysis of the Origins of Mahāyāna Buddhism.” In this chapter, I have analyzed the traces of Mahāyāna in the Pāli Canon and in the developments of Early Buddhism. Next follow is the survey of the motivations that caused the Mahāyāna movement. This inquiry has led me to conclude that, motivations for the Mahāyāna movement may be taken as a kind of deviation in the monastic disciplines; variations in doctrine; Skillful means (upāya-kauśalya); and social factors as polity, economy and religion. The next is an analytical study of the sources and the emergence of Mahāyāna Buddhism. In this section I have tried to collect trustful viewpoints in order to bring out reasonable and logical knowledge. It is that, the emergence of Mahāyāna Buddhism was not originally associated with just one school but was a gradual renovation of thoughts and concepts of many schools in Nikāya Buddhism. And Mahāyāna Buddhism has multiplicity of sources. We cannot say that Mahāyāna Buddhism originated from the Mahāsaṅghika schools, or from the doctrines of Nikāya Buddhism, or among certain laity, or the stūpa worship, or certain Abhidhammists, or certain rebel monks, actually, all of these had their own contributions. The contribution of each group interacted dynamically and as a result they gave the emergence of the Mahāyāna Buddhism. In other words, Mahāyāna is possibly the consequence of adaptation and gradual development of
Buddhism for a long period of time. I agree with Fujita Kōtatsu’s opinion that says that “the emergence of Mahāyāna Buddhism from the 1st century BCE to the 1st century CE, however, it most likely had been developed gradually for a long time before that.”24 R. F. Gombrich also claims that Mahāyāna is not a sect, but a current of opinion which cuts across sects as properly defined.25 Finally, in this chapter I have tried to elaborate on some new concepts in the Mahāyāna movement, such as, the Concept of Bhakti, Bodhicitta, Dharma-dhātu, and Two truths.

The fifth chapter is entitled as “The Formation of Mahāyāna Literature.” In this chapter, I have elaborated on the significance of the formation of Mahāyāna literature. In this connection I have taken account of some main sūtras of Mahāyāna literature, such as, the Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra, Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra, Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra, Avataṃsaka-sūtra, Laiṅkāvatāra-sūtra, and Sukhāvatīvyūha-sūtra; and two main śāstras of Mahāyāna literature, namely, Madhyamika-śāstra and Vijñānavāda-śāstra.

The last chapter is a chapter of conclusion that bears a summary of the important points of the thesis. It has been concluded that, Mahāyāna Buddhism is not a breakaway religion, neither is it a new religion, but it is only a developed form of Buddhism. Its roots are to be traced to the very life and teachings of the Buddha. The Mahāyāna movement is only the means (upāya) of communication for the welfare of various human beings. And the date for the emergence of the Mahāyāna is almost between the 1st century BCE and the 1st century CE, but it had been developed gradually for a long time before that, event in the Buddha’s time. Then I have discussed the adaptation of Mahāyāna Buddhism in the modern world with a view of Mahāyāna ideal, namely, the ideal of the Bodhisattva.