CHAPTER – I

Introduction

1:1: The Concept of Mahāpurisa

The primary and literal meaning of the word Mahāpurisa is the “Great Man”, but on account of the development of the concept of the Buddha as Mahāpurisa, it underwent con-notational changes. This term has been translated by many scholars as “superman”. However, we cannot translate this term by confining it to the idea of “superman” since this gives rise to a number of misleading implications. It may suggest the philosophical and ethical view of Nietzsche: it gives the sense of being able to override the laws of nature which does not apply in this context.

The prefix “maha” denotes different meanings according to the word to which it is attached, such as big, enormous, large, great, noble, supreme, etc. when it is combined with the word “purusā”, the most appropriate meaning is “Great”. If we take the term Mahāpuruṣa (pāli: Mahāpurisa) without any association with its mythological or mystic sense, it generally means a great, noble or excellent man.

The concept of ideal man or great man is a very old notion which goes back to the ancient civilizations of the world. The characteristics of an ideal man could have been conceived according to the values of a particular culture or civilization. It is quite evident that the recognition of the ideal man is also one of subjects of speculations among Indian philosophers and religious leaders, even before the Buddha. A discourse (Mahāpurisa Sutta) in Saṃyutta Nikāya, which begins with a question from Sāriputta expecting an answer from the Buddha, probably suggests

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1 The Encyclopedia of Philosophy-ed Paul Edward, Vol 5 p511
3 S.V.P 158.
the increasing importance of such a notion at the time of the Buddha, in the contemporary society.

When the idea of Mahāpuriṣa was put forward to the Buddha, he did not reject it as not relevant to his teaching. According to a number of Suttas dealing with the question of Mahāpurisa, it appears that the Buddha seems to have accepted this notion, giving it his own interpreta-
tion, as was customary with him to give new values to prevailing concepts, conventions or technical terms, in order to explain his new teachings. Rhys Davids describes this as a method, so often followed, of “pouring new wine into old bottles”⁴.

Briefly speaking, there are three kinds of terms that we come across in Buddhist literature: (a) Terms which are common to both Brahmanical and Buddhist literature, having the same nomenclature and meaning, (b) terms having the same nomenclature, but having a different meaning in Buddhists literature, (c) terms which are of peculiarly Buddhist connotation.⁵

According to this classification, the term Mahāpurisa belongs to the second category of words. Although the term Mahāpurisa itself is not to be found in any one of the Pre-Buddhist Brahmanical or Jaina works, according to its usage in Pāli literature, we are inclined to believe that the idea of Mahāpurisa seems to have been known during the time of the Buddha among contemporary religious thinkers, and that the term Mahāpurisa is not an exclusively Buddhist coinage. Pāli texts very often mention it in a stereotyped formula which when referring to the learned Brahmana gives the Mahāpurisa lakkhaṇa (theory of the characteristics of the Great Man) as one of the branches of the Brahmana’s hereditary knowledge.⁶

⁴ Rhys Davids, Dialogues of the Buddha (P.T.S) 111, p 123.
⁵ Santani, N.H. “On some Buddhist Terms” –Bharati, Agravalal Felicitation Volume 1975 p 136
⁶ D.I.p 88, 114, 130, M. II p 135 Sn vs 101 etc
1:2: Buddhist Definition of the Mahāpurisa

The earliest idea of Mahāpurisa in the Pāli canon can be traced to the Pārāyanavagga of Suttanipāta, which comprises some of the oldest constituent parts of the Pāli Canon. The question has been put forward by a young Brahmin called Tissametteyya to the Buddha.⁷

“Who is content here in the world?” asked Reverend Tissametteyya, “In whom turmoils never rise, who understands both ends, does not stick to either exclusively and chooses the middle? Whom do you call a Great Man (Mahāpurisa) who has overcome desire in this world?

In this question Tissametteyya, the Brahmin is seen enquiring as what sort of achievements can be regarded as the qualities of Mahāpurisa, and it is remarkable here that there is no mention of any form of bodily marks of the Mahāpurisa. This may show that there were some ideas of a Mahāpurisa without any reference to bodily marks among different religious sects.

The answer the Buddha gave to metteyya indicates that the Mahāpurisa, Great or Ideal Man, according to the Buddha’s own opinion is a “worthy one” (Arahant)⁸

“The man who abstains from sensual pleasures, who is free from desire, always mindful, happy on account of reflection, one who is without turmoil, often knowing both ends, sticks to the middle as far as his understanding is concerned, him I call a Great Man (Mahāpurisa). He has overcome craving in the world,” Here it is clear that the Buddha,

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⁷ Ko, dha santusito loke-kassa no santi injītā
Kou bantam abhiññāya-majjhe manta na lippati
Kam brūsi mahāpurisoti-kodha sibhanim accagā Sn. Vs. 1040.

⁸ Kāmesu brahmacariyavā-vitatanho sadā sato
Sankhāya nibbuto bhaikkhu-tassa no santi injīta- So ubhantam abhiññayamajjhe manta na Lippati tam brūmi mahāpuriso ti so dha sibbanimaccagā
answering the question, defines the great man reckoning the spiritual qualifications that such a person possesses.

Again, this stanza appears in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, which makes reference to *Pārāyanavagga*, indicating its antiquity. A group of monks was discussing on certain views, and commenting that the answer given by the Buddha to Metteyya in *Pārāyanavagga* does not explain the idea in itself. There each one of them makes an attempt to comment and define some of the terms in that discourse, such as “two ends” (*ubhoanta*) and middle (*majjha*) according to their understanding. Here it is clear from the contents of the Sutta that it was acceptable for the monks to engage in further speculation on the concept of the great man, without any reference to the physical marks of the *Mahāpurisa*, but with an intellectual curiosity creating a conceptual basis for further speculations.

Then they went to the Buddha and gave their interpretation to him of the “two ends”, and “the middle”. The Buddha added a further conclusion to their views, explaining “Verily, sensory contact, monks, is the first end, its arising is the second, its ceasing is in the middle, and craving is the seamstress, for craving sews a man just to this ever becoming birth. Verily, monks, it is to this extent that a monk knows the knowable, comprehends the comprehensible, he makes an end of the cycle of birth and death, here and now”.10

This explanation confirms the fact that for the Buddha the person who was the *Mahāpurisa* was he, who had eradicated all the defilements. Here, there is no identification of the Great man or *Mahāpurisa* with any individual as the Buddha, *Arahant* or *Bodhisatta*. Hence it is clear that among the immediate followers of the Buddha the idea of *Mahāpurisa*...
denoted nothing but a person who had destroyed the influxes of defilements (*Khînasava*).

There is another instance when the Buddha defines *Mahāpurisa* in a different manner, but again refers to the *arahant* who has attained perfect happiness.

While answering Sariputta’s question about *Mahāpurisa* Buddha says: “It is on account of the emancipation of the mind that I call a man “Great man”. Without that emancipation there is no Great Man. And how is one thus emancipated? With regard to his body, his sensations, his mind and ideas, he continues to be so master of them by insight that ardent self-possessed and mindful, he overcomes both the dejection and the hankering common in the world. So doing, his mind is purified, emancipated and free from mental intoxication”.\(^\text{11}\)

In this passage, Buddha explained emancipation of the mind through the “four Foundations of Mindfulness” (*satipaṭṭhāna*) as the path directed to realization which is the final goal of a man, and a person who has achieved such a state is called *Mahāpurisa*, the explanation given in many of the discourses seems to have some bearing on the person who has attained *Nibbāna*.\(^\text{12}\)

There is another verse in the *Dhammapada* which gives similar description of the characteristic of *Mahāpurisa*: “He who has overcome craving (*vītatanaho*) and is devoid of grasping (*anādāno*), who is skilled in etymology (*niruttipadakovido*) of terms, who knows the grouping of letters and their sequence (*akkharānamsannipātaṁ*) it is he who is called the bearer of the final body, one of profound wisdom (*mahāpaṇño*), a

\(^{11}\) S.V.p 158

\(^{12}\) D. II. p 134 f
great man (*Mahāpuriso*).\(^\text{13}\)

According to the commentary the term *anādāno* (without grasping) means that there is no attachment whatsoever, towards mind and matter etc. and ‘skilled in etymology’ means clever in analytical knowledge (*Patisissmhidā*): analytical of the true meaning (*attha*), of the law (*Dhamma*), of language (*nirutti*), of ready wit (*patibhāna*).\(^\text{14}\) On the whole, the person who knows what should be known whose knowledge is perfect, is of emancipated mind and is called Great Man.\(^\text{15}\)

It is clear that although the Buddha has used different words to define the Great Man, the reference is always to the worthy one (*Arahant*) who has attained the final goal, the enlightenment, All those qualities which are mentioned in these passages can be applied to both the Buddha and the *Arahant*.

It is worthwhile to examine here the terms and definitions used to identify the Buddha and an *Arahant* respectively, as in the early canonical texts.

### 1:3: The Buddha Means:

In the world, a person who is worthy to really possess the title “Buddha” must be endowed with; having the attributes of the Arahāṃ as the first and to the *Bhagavā* as the last having thirty two major characteristic marks, eighty minor characteristic marks, 108 distinguishing marks on the sole; having fulfilled ten perfections, having made great sacrifices and having performed three noble practices. Thus, possessing these virtues a person is worthy to be entitled as “Buddha”. He has following virtues or attributes\(^\text{16}\) :-

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\(^{13}\) Dh 352

\(^{14}\) Vibh XV p 293 ff

\(^{15}\) DA iv p 70

1. Having attained *Arahatta MaggaÑaṇa*.

2. Having loving-kindness and compassion for all the beings.

3. Having attained perfection (*Pāramitā*).

4. Having attained the knowledge of all beings (*Sabbaññutānāṇa*) (omniscience). Only a worthy noble man is “Buddha” the Supreme, revered by all beings, namely the human beings, *Devas* and *Brahmās*.\(^{17}\)

These Buddha are of four kinds. They are:

1. **Sabbañuta Buddha**: The Buddha who has attained *Arahatta Maggañṇaṇa*, *Sabbaññutānāṇa* after attaining the ten perfections.

2. **Pacceka Buddha**: An independently enlightened one who has realized *Nibbāna* without having heard the Buddha’s doctrine from others.

3. **Catusacca Buddha**: One who has attained the knowledge of Four Noble Truths.

4. **Suta Buddha**: One who knows many things such as *khandhā*, the five aggregates, etc, with the *sutamayañana*, who has knowledge in *Pariyatti* and *Pāṭīatti*.

   Sometimes the term Buddha is applied to three kinds;\(^{18}\)

   (1) **Sāvaka Buddha**.

   (2) **Pacceka Buddha**.

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\(^{17}\) *Buddhānussatībhāvanā*, P 8.

(3) Sammāsambuddha,

According to their diverse names. Thus, these Buddhas with diverse names are also under the term “Buddha”. ¹⁹
Thus, of these many kinds of Buddha, the Buddha described in the text is “Sabbaññuta Buddha”

Sabbaññuta Buddha is believed to have fulfilled ten perfections and at his final existence, he has attained the following six kinds of Ēṇāṇa so that he becomes the Buddha Sabbaññuta.

1. Sammāsambodhi Ēṇāṇa (the knowledge of the Ariyā truth),
2. Āsayāṇusaya Ēṇāṇa (the knowledge of the latent desires and dispositions of individual beings),
3. Yamakapāṭihāriya Ēṇāṇa (the knowledge of performing the twin miracles of water and fire),
4. Mahākarunā samāpatti Ēṇāna (the knowledge based on the Buddha’s compassion on all beings which arises while dwelling in the mahākarunā samāpatti),
5. Sabbaññutā Ēṇāṇa (the knowledge with the power of three Capacities, namely, full understanding of the known (Nāta Pariññā), full understanding of investigating (Tirāṇa Pariññā), and full understanding of overcoming (Pahāna Pariññā) knows all the dhamma that should be known),
6. Anāvaraṇa Ēṇāṇa (the knowledge of everything without obstruction).

So, the Buddha Gotama is being regarded as the one who is the noblest Subbaññuta Buddha in the world of human-beings, devas and

Brahmas and superior to Pacceka Buddha, and Arahats by the Buddhists and taken as their refuge.

Thus according to the Pāli Canon the Buddha possessed various qualities by virtue of his enlightenment which were not possessed by an Arhant. However, although the Theravāda Tradition tried to prove that the Buddha is a rare being and superior to men and gods, they mention that there is hardly any distinction between an Arahant and the Buddha. If Buddhahood consists in the attainment of Nibbāna, how does the Buddha differ from those of his followers who had also attained Nibbāna? In other words: what is a Buddha and how does he differ from an Arahant? To this question the Pāli Suttas suggest a number of possible answers.

According to the Theravāda tradition the Buddha in attaining the enlightenment became the first Arahant, His whole life was devoted to making his followers understand what he understood, to directing them to the same path of realization of Nibbāna which he himself had attained. After the conversion of the group of five monks, the first converts to the teaching, the Buddha declared that there were six Arahants in the world at that time. There, the Buddha himself was reckoned as one of them. Again in one place the Buddha mentioned that as far as attainment of Nibbāna is concerned, the Tathāgata and the Arahants are the same but the Tathāgata makes manifest the unmanifested path, he recognises the unrecognized path. However, this statement does not contradict the other statement which describes the Buddha as being distinguished from the other Arahants, not only by virtue of his primacy as the discoverer and teacher of long forgotten truth, but also by his heroic achievement in

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20 M, III, p 8
22 S. III, p 6
attaining his goal unaided, his range of knowledge and to a lesser extent his skill in supernormal powers and his compassion and competence in teaching.

According to these accounts the definitions in the above passages of both the Buddha and an Arahant are more or less equal and the Mahāpurisa according to the Buddha’s own view is a worthy one (Arahant). However, we shall see that the definition of Mahāpurisa explained by Brahmin Vassa-kāra is another step in the development of the Buddhist concept of Mahāpurisa. Here also, the qualities of a Mahāpurisa can be applied to both the Buddha and the Arahant.

The text proceeds: “Once a Brahmana called Vassakāra who was the Chief Minister of Magadha called on the Buddha and explained that a person endowed with four qualities can be regarded as a very wise and as a great Man (Mahāpurisa).

1. That he is learned (Bahussuta);
2. That he comprehends the meaning of what has been said to him (Bhāsitassaattham jānāti);
3. That he has a good memory (satimā kho pana hoti-cirakatampi cirabhāsitampi);
4. That he is expert and untiring in everything that a layman has to do (Gahaṭṭhakaranīyesu dakkhohotianalaso).

The four qualities indicate that Vassakāra put forward a secular concept of the Great Man, which had been identified by contemporary society.

23 M. I. p 171
24 D. III p 100, s, v. p 437
25 M. I p 169
26 A. II p 35-37
We can assume that Vassakāra, who was a Minister of the Magadha State, saw the concept of Mahāpurisa from political and social points of view with regard to the secular aspects of life. His definition is applicable to the success of a layman in any society. As any of the four qualities of Vassakāra’s idea of the Great man does not concern the spiritual advancement of the individual, it differs from Brahmanic and Buddhist religious ideals of the perfect man.

The fact that the Buddha neither accepted nor rejected Vassakāra’s definition shows that he wanted to attach some value to this idea of great man. Buddhaghosa comments that Buddha did not accept this definition because it is based purely on the secular aspect of life. He neither rejected it because he believed that it included a beneficial value for the secular society. The Buddha characterized a Great man or Mahāpurisa thus: “I also call a man of four qualities very wise, a great man, and what are those qualities?

(1) He concerns himself with the advantages i.e. well being of folk he has established in the Aryan system (Ariyeñāye), that is in the beauty of righteousness as set forth in the Aryan path-

“Bahujanahitāya patipannohoti bahujana sukhāya bahussa jānatā, ariyeñāyepatiṭṭhāpitā”

(2) He can think about a thing or not, just as he wishes; he is master of his mind in the trends of thought-

“yam vitakkam ākaṅkhāti vitakketum, vitakkamvitakketi, yam vitakkaṁ nakankhati vitakke tumnataṁ vitakkaṁ vitakketi. yam saṅkappam”.

27 Bahujanahitāya patipannohoti bahujana sukhāya bahussa jānatā, ariyeñāyepatiṭṭhāpitā yam vitakkam ākaṅkhāti vitakketum, vitakkamvitakketi, yam vitakkaṁ nakankhati vitakke tumnataṁ vitakkaṁ vitakketi. yam saṅkappam. AA III p 74 f
(3) He can enter at his pleasure without toil or trouble into the four ecstasies beyond thought and yet pertains to this life—
“catunnanţhānānaṁ ābhicetasikānāṇaṁ diţṭhadhammasuthavihārānaṁ nikāmalābhihoti akip-chalābhī, a kariralābhī”.

(4) He has put away the intoxications arising from lust and ignorance. Thus does he gain and abide in that same emancipation of heart and mind that he knows and realises even in this present life—
“āsavānaṁ khayānāsavāṁ cetovimuttim paţñīvimuttim diţṭheva dhammesayaṁ abiţhiţţāya sacchikatvā upasampajja viharati”.

This definition proves that the early conception of Mahāpurisa in the Pāli Canon refers to an Arahant (Worthy one) with his spiritual achievements. But it is clear from this discourse how Buddha defines the concept of Mahāpurisa, giving it a wider meaning than the earlier one. He includes some of the social qualities apart from the spiritual advancement of Mahāpurisa, giving a wider connotation to the earlier concept. For Example, the idea of the welfare of the common man is lacking in earlier definitions but here is a gradual development and a complete or overall development of the individual has been suggested. The classification of the stage of the development of the individual into four in this definition shows a clear correspondence to the social intellectual and spiritual advancement of the individual who is designated as Mahāpurisa. Although the Buddha accepted in this Sutta that he himself possessed all the four qualities of a Mahāpurisa, the same can be applied to the Arahants also. This is substantiated by many other discourses of the Canon in which these four qualities have been ascribed to Arahants very often.
This social aspect of a great man seems to be elaborated in great detail in the Lakkhaṇa-sutta of the Dīghanikāya, when it enumerates various qualities of the Mahāpurisa in the Theravāda tradition, establishing a link between early and later strata of the Pāli Canon.

The second quality which may be termed as intellectual is that the great man is able to keep his mind under perfect control. The third quality denotes his psychic condition according to which he is able to train his mind systematically and attain permanent concentration of his psychic phenomena. The fourth attribute of the Mahāpurisa, describes how he attains his final goal in the very life independent of intervention by any supernatural authority. It is noteworthy that in the earlier definitions of Mahāpurisa the Buddha seems to have more or less emphasized this fourth quality.

1:4: The Popular Conception of the Mahāpurisa

The second aspect of the Buddhist concept of Mahāpurisa is based on the physical characteristics of the Great man. Apart from the ways of judging a Great Man from his mental and spiritual qualities, there is a detailed theory of the physical characteristics of the Great Man. According to the Pāli Canon characteristics of a person who is possessed of those marks of a Mahāpurisa either becomes a Buddha or a Cakkavatti, a universal monarch.

1:5: The Meaning of Major Characteristic Marks

The Myanmar Term “lak-kha-ṉhā” is derived from Pāli word “Lakkhaṇa” and it means “mark or special feature of sign in order to know the quality or virtue”.28

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28 BdM, p 333.
The Myanmar term “Taw” is the special word which represents the honoured words to the noble people.29 “Gyee” means reigning at the top as supreme one, the other meanings are: “abundance”, “large amount”, “more developed”, more and more increase in number.30 In this text, the word “Gyee” means extremely noble and great. By taking such overall meaning behind the word “lakkhana” adding the word “Taw” and “Gyee” as complete word “Lak-kha-ŋā-taw-gyee” is used in the text.31

These marks are concerned with the past actions, all the parts of the body such as eyes, eyebrows, hands, toes have their good and bad marks according to the consequences of former actions one has done in the past life. By seeing these marks the scholars of sacred text can make their prediction about who is a noble man, who is an evil man, who is a noble woman, who is an evil woman.

In the sacred text, the marks of the noble man who is worthy to become a Buddha or who is worthy to become a Universal monarch are mentioned.

At those former times, Brahmins and scholars who had learnt the sacred text and its allied texts who were seven in number, Rāma, Dhaja, Kakkha, etc told the fortune of the Bodhisatta, seeing his marks, with two sayings as under: “If Bodhisatta remains as a householder, he will become a universal monarch, if he renounces the world, he will become a self-enlightened Buddha.” But the Brahmin Konḍañña told the fortune with one saying in the following words. “He will certainly become Buddha.”

29 BdM, II, p 98.
30 BdM, I, p 54.
31 BN, p 66.
1:6: The Statement of the Buddha Himself

Regarding the characteristic marks Buddha has said the following which has been recorded in the Text *Suttapātheya Pāḷi*:

“*Bhikkhus*, there are thirty-two major characteristic marks of the great man but no other marks, if that great man remains as a householder, he will become a universal monarch who rules in a righteous manner over the four continents bounded by the four oceans, the conqueror of the all foes, the promoter of peace and stability in his territories, the possessor of seven precious treasures; if he renounces the world, he will become the Buddha who is worthy of special veneration, he truly comprehends all the *Dhamma* by his own intellect and insight, who has overcome the hindrances of the defilements.”\(^{32}\)

Though the Brahmins and ascetics knew the marks and their consequences, they did not know the cause of the consequences, so, the Buddha uttered the following statement:

“*Bhikkhus*, even the ascetics who are out of the sāsanā could know the text of *Lakkhaṇa* in which the marks of the noble man are stated, but they could not know the cause thus, “such marks appear due to consequences of doing such actions.”\(^{33}\)

Only the Buddha knows fully in details about the cause and its effects or consequences, thus, “Such and such marks appear due to the consequences of these acts which lead to the attainment of such and such *Dhamma*, etc.”\(^{34}\)

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\(^{33}\) D, III, p 119. D, III, Myan, p 137.

\(^{34}\) DA, III, P 101.
1:7: Direct Cause, Its Direct Result and Consequential Effort

It is believed that Bodhisatta was reborn in many existences. Only the desire (mahjjhasaya) for the attainment of Sabbaññuta Nāṇa remained firmly in his heart in every existences he was reborn.

That noble desire together with the related elements of Kammā Paccaya, Āsevana Paccaya, Upanisaya Paccaya is on account of all good deeds of perfections (Pāramitā) the Bodhisatta has done. Just as the good deeds of perfections of the Buddha for the sake of attaining the noblest Sabbaññuta Nāṇa produce some other benefits depending upon the opportune time before attaining Sabbaññuta Nāṇa, so also they can bring the benefit of the attainment of Sabbaññuta Nāṇa. In the last existence these produce the fruits of having beautiful appearance of Rūpakāya Samāpatti or having attained the noble and special Nāṇa such as knowledge of Arahatta Magga Nāṇa, Sabbaññuta Nāṇa, Sammuti Nāṇa etc.

The Buddha had fulfilled his perfections (Pāramitā) not for the attainment of beautiful appearance however in his case they resulted in producing the thirty-two major characteristic marks. This can be known by referring to the statement addressed to the King Suddhodhana and the queen Māyādevī that Prince Siddhattha will become a Buddha if he renounces the world35 as he possesses these marks. This effect, being a universal monarch or being a Buddha is connected with these marks.36

1:8: Satapuñña lakkhaṇā

The Buddha is endowed with the Satapuñña lakkhaṇa which

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36 D, III, p199, 120.
means “One who possesses the marks representing the innumerable good deeds.”

The meaning is that the glorious and beautiful appearance of the Buddha is not the consequence of fulfilling the perfections in one existence but it is the consequence of repeatedly fulfilling perfections in many infinite existences. So, the Buddha is endowed with the virtues which are esteemed more and more by the people and are admired by the devas.

It is believed that the Buddha had fulfilled more and more of his perfections by practising good deeds that surpass the total good deeds done by the ordinary people in the world. For the most distinguished good deeds he possesses more extreme consequences than others. It has been rightly said, ”The best one will gain the most supreme thing.”

The Brahmin Pokkarasādi told his pupil Ambaṭṭha: “There have been handed down, in our mystic verses, thirty-two bodily signs of a Great Man, signs which, if a man has, he will become one of two things, and no other. If he dwells at home he will become a sovereign of the world, a righteous king… but if he goes forth from the household life into the houseless state, then he will become a Buddha who removes the veil of ignorance from the eyes of the world”.

In this description Mahāpurisa is specified as a Cakkavatti or a Buddha, and the recognition of such a person is through the worldly

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38 BvA, p 49. DT, III, p 108.
practices of foretelling of a person’s character from his physical marks. This trend seems to have Pre-Buddhist origin and its history is not easily traceable, because it goes into far distant antiquity. As no two human beings are alike in appearance man seems to have an innate desire to know if physical characteristics reveal psychological traits and even probable future events as destiny. Perhaps this human desire paved the way for subsequent development of the art of divining, fortune-telling, through astrology, palmistry, physiognomy etc.

According to the Pāli Canon, early Buddhist attitudes towards practicing prognostication are quite clear; Buddha classified them into different categories of low arts (Tiracchāna-vijjā) and expressed his condemnation of their being practiced by recluses (Samana) and Brāhmaṇas who have left the household life. Although the Buddha theoretically did not accept these forms of low arts they were popular, both among the laymen as well as some sects of recluses. In Pāli texts there are several accounts of the physical appearance of many people, including that of the Buddha, in relation to contemporary mythical concepts. It is noteworthy that all the references to the knowledge of physical marks are attributed to Brāmana tradition.

However, some of these arts regardless of their origin were taken over and developed by the Buddhists.

The second aspect of the Mahāpurisa concept which enumerates the physical characteristics of a Great Man is also one of these notions which shows its relation to the science of prognostication, which we have discussed earlier. The Pāli canon introduces this concept as one branch of the hereditary knowledge of Brahmin tradition. In the Suttas of the Pāli Canon, knowledge of the theory of the Great Man (Mahāpurisa) is

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41 D. I. p 9, 67.
42 Sn Vs. 548-522.
alluded to in the list of the important subjects of study by a learned Brahmin, as a stereotyped formula.\textsuperscript{43}

“He had mastered the three Vedas with the indices, the ritual, the phonology and exegesis and the legends as fifth, learned in the idioms and the grammar, versed in \textit{lokāyata} sophistry, and in the theory of the Great man”.

Although these subjects have been referred to as some practices of Brahmins, the term “Mahāpurisalakhaṇa” in the \textit{Sutta} was replaced by the word lakṣhaṇa without it being qualified by the epithet \textit{Mahāpurisa} and is mentioned along with the other subjects, in the \textit{Apādana};

\begin{quote}
Lakkhaṇeithāseca – sanighanḍusakeṭubhe
\textit{Padakoveyyākaranosadhamme parāminggato}.\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

In this stanza, the term Lakkhaṇa is not confined to the characteristics of a Great Man but is extended to mean all Lakkhaṇa in general. The commentary explains this term as predictions based on distinct marks of men and women.\textsuperscript{45}

Hence we can assume that the distinguishing marks of the great man are a part of the study of “\textit{Lakṣhaṇasattha}”. It is always stated that the knowledge of the distinguishing marks of a \textit{Mahāpurisa} belongs to Brahmanic wisdom and the Canon states that it has been enumerated in the mantras (of the Veda) of Brahmins.

“There have been handed down in our mystic verses thirty-two bodily signs of a Great Man.\textsuperscript{46} Here the \textit{Sutta} puts the statement into the

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\begin{enumerate}
\item[43] \textit{Tīnnaṃ vedāṇaṃ pārāgū, sanighanḍhu keṭubhesu, sōkharappabhedesu itihōsa pañcamesu, padako veyvakarano lokāyata, mahāpurisalakkanesu anavayo D. I p 68.}
\item[44] Lakkhaṇeithāseca – sanighanḍusakeṭubhe \textit{Padakoveyyākaranosadhamme parāminggato} \hspace{1em} \textit{Ap vs 175.}
\item[45] \textit{Āgāni kho tatā ambāṭtha, amhākam mantesu dvattimsa Mahāpurisalakkanāni. D. I. p 89}
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
mouths of highly respected and educated Brahmin teachers, in the form that they explained to their pupils.

As the commentary explains, the literature dealing with the concept of *Mahāpurisa* contained twelve thousand books which described the characteristics of the *Mahāpurisa* and the Buddha. There were about eighteen thousand lines of stanzas which describe the Buddha, the *Paccceka-Buddha* and also the two chief disciples (*Dveaggasāvakā*), eighty leading disciples, the mother and father of the Buddha, chief attendant (*Aggupatṭhāka*) and the universal monarch (*Cakkavatti*).

It has been already stated that, although Buddhists attribute the knowledge of the theory of *Mahāpurisa* to Brahmins, there is no direct evidence regarding the existence of such a concept in any of the existing four Vedas, or in any other literature. However, to avoid the contradiction, *Buddhaghosa* says that “when the time comes for the birth of a Buddha, the *Suddhāvāsa* Brahmas visit the earth in the guise of Brahmins and teach men about their bodily signs as forming a part of the Vedic teaching, so that thereby wise men may recognize the Buddha. On his death, this knowledge generally vanishes. That is why it does not exist in the Veda.”

This statement shows that commentators were not quite certain about the origin of the theory of the physical signs a *Mahāpurisa*. Although the *Pāli* Canon accepted the tradition of the *Mahāpurisa*, it shows some reluctance to accept the lore and methods of distinguishing the Great Man. Hence, *Buddhaghosa*’s account is rather inconsistent in this respect.

47 *Pacceka-buddha* “individual Buddha”. One whose enlightenment is for himself alone and others cannot not benefit from his enlightenment.
48 DA. I. p 248; MA. III p 363
49 *Suddhāvāsa*: a name given to a group of Brahma worlds, the five highest Rūpa realms. For details see Sr. Suddhavāsa DPPN, Vol. II p 1199
50 MA. II, p 761
This Brahmanc theory of Mahāpurisa appears in the Canon as one of the worldly methods of prognostication which was a practice to recognize the bodily marks, both of the Buddha and of the Universal Monarch. In other words, according to this theory, the person who was supposed to become the Buddha or Cakkavatti should have possessed these characteristics in his physical body. These physical characteristics could be revealed at the birth of the child and through them one can predict his destiny.

Although there is not much evidence about the childhood of Siddhātha Gotama, there is a detailed account in the Mahāpadāna Sutta of Dīghanikāya of biographical events of six previous Buddhas who preceded Gotama. In this Sutta the story of Vipassi Buddha is taken as the model on which the stories of the seven Buddhas including that of the Buddha Gotama are based. According to the Sutta, when Prince Vipassi was born, soothsayers were called to the palace.

“When the Brahmana soothsayers had seen the child, they said to the king, the Rājā: Rejoice, Lord…or this babe, my Lord, is endowed with thirty-two marks of a Great Man…And what, my lord, are the thirty-two marks?”

This seems to suggest that with the evolution and the institutionalization of the concept of Buddha, the theory of the Great man emphasizing his thirty-two marks appears to have been arrived at even before the compilation of the Mahāpadāna Sutta.

Jātakanidāna, the introductory biography of the Buddha prefixed to the commentary on Jātakapāli, describes the event of Prince Siddhatha’s birth and mentions the names of seven soothsayers.52

51 D. II, p 1 f
52 JA, I, p 55 f
After the enlightenment, too, there are several occasions when the thirty-two marks of the *Mahāpurisa* on the Buddha’s body came up for investigation. These incidents describe how by examining the thirty-two marks of the Great Man on Gotama’s body, some Brahmins wanted to make sure whether he surely had attained Buddhahood.

One of the incidents which is recorded in similar words, in the two canonical texts *Majjhima Nikāya* and *Suttanipāta* is explained thus: “A Brahmin called *Sela* of *Anuttarapa* was a great friend of *Keniya*, the matted haired ascetic and visited him when *Keniya* was making preparations to entertain the Buddha, Having heard about the Buddha from *Keniya*, *Sela* was filled with joy and fortitude, and went with two hundred and fifty pupils to visit the Buddha in the woodland near Āpana. There he observed on the person of the Buddha the thirty-two marks of a Great Being, all except two –viz. the male organ encased in a sheath and his broad tongue. The Buddha read his thoughts and confirmed them by his psychic power (*iddhi*) so that *Sela* should be satisfied on these two points as well; *Sela* then praised the Buddha in a series of verses and raised questions. At the end of conservation, *Sela* entered Arahantship”.

Similar stories also appear in *Majjhima Nikāya* and *Pārāyanavagga* of the *Sutta尼patā*.* These reports suggest how this physical aspect of the *Mahāpurisa* concept can be reconciled with the suitable occasions.

Although the Buddha did not define a *Mahāpurisa* by virtue of his physical excellence, nor praised it, it can be seen that he had not rejected the theory of *Mahāpurisa* which was advocated by the Brahmins on the above mentioned occasions. As a theory it is clear that the Buddha
never accepted divining, fortune-telling, prognostication etc. but in the case of Mahāpurisalakkhaṇā he is depicted as showing a different attitude. When Brahmin Sela Brahmāyu, and pupils of Bavari were not certain of two of the thirty-two marks, Buddha confirmed them by iddhi power to make them satisfied. This indicates that Buddha confirmed that he possessed the thirty-two marks of the Great Man. Evidently this shows a stage of the development of the Mahāpurisa concept in the Canon itself.

In the Lakkhāna Sutta the Buddha introduces the theory of the physical characteristics of the Mahāpurisa to the monks without specific reference to his possession of the thirty-two marks on himself; it is noticeable that in this Sutta when the Buddha explains the physical characteristics of the Mahāpurisa, he refers to the Tathāgata (Buddha) in general. Also throughout the Sutta only the third person singular form has been used in referring to the Tathāgata.

“Whereas in whenever former birth, former states of becoming… the Tathāgata… deceasing thence, and born in a life in this condition, he acquires this mark of Great Man”.  

This sutta shows the most developed stage of the Mahāpurisa concept within the Pāli texts, as it enumerates not only thirty-two marks of the Mahāpurisa but also the cause and effect of these marks, and mentions that they were due to merit acquired in former births.

It is remarkable that even in this Sutta, the Buddha attributes the knowledge of the theory of Mahāpurisa to certain sages of the past but the Buddha says that they did not know the cause-the good deeds-which were responsible for the appearance of these marks.

57 Yam pi bhikkave Tathāgato purimam bhavam ... So tota cuto itthattam āgato samāno imam mahāpurisa lakkanam paṭilabhati. D. III. P 146.
“And seers not of our communion, brethren, are acquainted with their marks but they know not for what deed done any one of the marks acquired”.

This confirms that the Pāli Canon not only adopted the theory of the Mahāpurisa from Non-Buddhistic sources but also went further and made use of it for the advancement of ethical conduct. The importance of the Lakkhaṇasutta lies in the fact that it combines the concept of the Great Man with some of the fundamental tenets of Buddhism such as the doctrine of Kamma, rebirth, the law of causation, and gives more emphasis to the social ethics of Buddhism.

As the Lakkhaṇasutta does not give enough reason for the utterance of this discourse, Buddhaghosa describes the background story which correlates the influence of some popular aspects of the Kamma theory in Buddha’s teaching with the concept of Mahāpurisa in the course of the development of Canonical literature. He says that the Buddha preached this discourse on the characteristic marks of Mahāpurisa, because there was a great curiosity to know which past good action led to his possessing these marks.

Although the Sutta introduces the past good actions with reference to the Tathāgata, physical signs and their present effects have been referred to both, the Buddha and the Cakkavatti, the two possible careers of the Mahāpurisa. Each Lakkhana reveals two different effects relating to the Buddha and Cakkavatti respectively.

This makes it clear that in the early stage of the development of the Mahāpurisa concept the thirty-two physical characteristics are the only physically distinguishing signs of a Mahāpurisa who could become either a Buddha or a Cakkavatti. But Buddhavaṃsa, a minor anthology of the

58 D. III, p 145.
59 DA. III p 918
KhuddkaNikāya, mentions that the Buddha as a Mahāpurisa possesses not only thirty-two marks but also eighty minor or secondary physical characteristics (asītianuvyañjana). The word anuvyañjana has not appeared in this sense in any of the four Nikāyas, but in the commentaries ‘eighty secondary marks’ have been mentioned as complementary to the thirty-two characteristics of a Mahāpurisa. It is noteworthy that these eighty secondary marks do not belong to a Cakkavatti, and it shows another stage of the development of the Mahāpurisa concept in the Pāli Canon.

Although the commentaries mention some of the eighty secondary signs on the Buddha’s body, the full list of anuvyañjanas primarily appears in the Lalitavistara, a text of the Sarvāstivāda School, and also in some other Mahāyāna texts, while in Pāli literature the Jinalankāra vannanā, a post commentarial work of Theravāda tradition in Sri Lanka, deals with them comprehensively. As far as the concept of Mahāpurisa is concerned, the existence of thirty-two physical marks and anuvyanjanas, on the Buddha’s body assumed equal importance, both in the Theravāda traditions and Mahāyana traditions, at this stage of development.

Thus, when we have carefully examined all the primary sources for the origin and development of the concept of Mahāpurisa, it becomes evident that nowhere in any of the discourses does the Buddha say that he possesses thirty-two extraordinary bodily marks and secondary marks. At the same time, the Buddha seems never to have attempted to speak against those who believed in this particular concept.

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60 Anuvyañjanasampannam-dvattimsavaralakkhanam Sabham samantara hitam-namu vita sabbasañkhara BV P 55.
61 DA. III p. 918.
62 BVA. P 204 (Hevavitarana Bequest) Colombo 1922.
63 KV. P 106 ff.
64 Thomas, E.J. Life of the Buddha p 106.
65 See Appendix, II.
1:9: The development of conception of the Mahāpurisa

We have examined that the Pāli Canon presents two aspects of the concept of Mahāpurisa: i.e. a great man or an ideal man who is to be distinguished by his internal qualities and the Great Man who is identified by his physical characteristics. Neither idea is exclusively of Buddhist origin, and they appear to be Buddhist interpretation of contemporary concepts. However, the second aspect had been subjected to development and become popular among all the Buddhist schools throughout the history of Buddhism, while the first aspect remained as a spiritual explanation of the idea of the worthy one or an Arahant.

The popular aspect of Mahāpurisa which we have discussed above was based on the physical characteristics of the Buddha and Cakkavatti. Although this theory propounds these two possible careers of the Mahāpurisa, a great deal of literature had been developed on the thirty-two characteristics of the Great Man with regard to the Buddha’s physical appearance rather than that of the Cakkavatti.

Although the Pali Canon represents the Buddha as a human being, extraordinary qualities have been attributed to him to demonstrate his greatness as the Buddha. The greatest quality attributed to him is wisdom-a quality from which he is always considered in terms of a person even when the idea of the Buddha developed into a cosmic principle in later schools of Buddhism. The personality of the Buddha, therefore, is to be considered in that light.

The Pāli canon has uniquely depicted the Buddha as a human being who achieved the perfect state of spiritual attainment and as one possessing physical excellence. Physical excellence has been attributed to the Buddha because of his accomplishment of supreme spiritual attainment. In the Pāli Canon the concept of Mahāpurisa was the most
important exposition of the Buddha’s physical excellence. Beside the thirty two characteristics of the Great Man, there were other special features on the physical body of the Buddha. *Brahmāyu sutta*\(^66\) which gives other various particulars about the Buddha, describes some special features and their functions. “Thus in walking he always treads with right foot; his steps are neither too long nor too short; only his lower limbs move; when he looks back, he has to turn right round to do so like an elephant. When entering a house he never bends his body; when sitting down, accepting water to wash his bowl, eating, washing his hands after eating, or returning thanks, he sits with the greatest propriety, dignity and rectitude”.

Brāhmaṇa Sonadāṇḍa, a well-respected teacher at the time of the Buddha, remarked that the Buddha’s physical excellence was one of his greatness’s to be honoured.\(^67\) “Truly sir, the *Samana Gotama* is handsome, pleasant to look upon, inspiring trust, gifted with great beauty of complexion, fair in complexion, fine in presence, stately to behold.”\(^68\) Similarly it was described that the Buddha’s complexion was fair in colour (*Snikkasavanno*)\(^69\) and clean (*Pariyodāta*) and his voice had eight qualities.\(^70\)

In spite of the description given above Pāli canonical works retained the human qualities of the Buddha by depicting him as a man abounding in wisdom and supernormal attributes.\(^71\) It has been confirmed by the *Kathāvatthu* (a later addition to the *Abhidhamapiṭaka* of the Pāli Canon, compiled at the third council)\(^72\) which shows that the *Theravāda*

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\(^{66}\) M. I. p 137.

\(^{67}\) D. I. p113.

\(^{68}\) Dal I. p 146.

\(^{69}\) Vin. I. p 38.

\(^{70}\) M. II. p 140.


\(^{72}\) *Yathā te dharmasangītim-tissathopitam tathā-*. 
tradition has been maintaining this view, even after several centuries of the Buddha’s demise.

As the *Theravāda* tradition has preserved the above view that the Buddha was a human being, it is clear that the concept of *Mahāpurisa* and the thirty-two marks of the Great Man have been attributed to him in order to show that he was a perfect human being even in his physical form. The following passage from *Milindapañha* may perhaps throw more light to the above view explaining that the Buddha possessed thirty-two marks of the Great Man along with some other physical characteristics while maintaining his human and historical nature.

“The king said: ‘Is it true, Nāgasena, that the Buddha was endowed with thirty-two bodily marks of a great man..’” Yes, Sir, Buddha was endowed with thirty-two bodily marks of a great man..” Although the Buddha possessed all the physical characteristics of the Great Man, his body was subject to natural phenomena common to any ordinary human being. “Revered Sir, did painful feelings ever arise in the *Tathāgata’s* body?” “Yes, Sir, when at Rajagaha, the Lord’s foot was grazed by a splinter, when he was ill with dysentery, when he was disturbed by rumours and purging was given to him by Jivaka, when he was troubled by rheumatism, and the Elder who was his attendant looked for hot water.”

The above discussion clearly reveals that the thirty-two marks of the Great Man which appear in his body do not invalidate Buddha’s humanity in any way. Although the *Theravāda* tradition maintains a definite idea about the Buddha’s body, some other references in the *Pāli*
Canon itself indicate probably the nature of the Buddha’s person even during his life time.\footnote{E.B. III. 4, p 424.}

As Anesaki points out: “Whatever his merits and powers, his earthly life was believed to have been as real as that of any other human being. But as soon as pious thoughts of believers began to place him side by side with a mythical Cakravarti or to make him far superior to the highest deity, Brahma, whether in his life time or after his death, his personality became more mythical and less human”.\footnote{E.R.E. Vol Sv Cakravarti.} The analogy of similar records in the case of other religious founders would lead us to expect that the followers of the great Indian teacher would not be satisfied by looking upon their master as a mere ordinary man; and this expectation is abundantly fulfilled. They endeavoured to give expression to their deep sense of inferiority and to the deep impression made upon them by the personal power of a character quite unequalled among all the men they knew or heard of, by describing the glory and the grandeur of their Buddha in poetical and figurative language always liable to be Mis-understood and hardening too soon into erroneous beliefs.”\footnote{Rhys Davids, Hibbert Lectures, 1981, p 128.}

In the Pāli Canon the fundamental difference of enumerating the thirty-two marks of the Great man is that they were an attribution to a superhuman or semi-divine body of the Buddha. They are not the possessions of a human body, and the appearance of the thirty-two marks of the Great Man is an essential characteristic of the Buddha’s superhuman nature. In the Pāli texts, these marks were seen after the birth of the Bodhisattva in his final existence, but according to the Lalitavistara his body was formed endowed with the thirty-two marks and eight secondary marks when he was about to descend from the Tusita heaven, and he entered the mother’s womb with fully developed marks.
“In the mother’s womb Bodhisattva enjoyed in a gold pavilion of jewelled mansion (Ratnavyūha). Nor is the Bodhisattva born as foetus made of consolidated bubbles and fleshy fibres. He appears with all his body and its members fully developed and marked with all auspicious signs and in a sealed position.”

In the Pāli Canon the thirty-two marks of the Great Man have been regarded as one of the physical excellences of the body of the Mahāpurisa and, apart from the fact that this had been attributed by Brahmins, these marks were not distinguished as signs of assurance of the fulfilment of Buddhahood. However they are closely connected with the idea of the superhuman Buddha in the Lalitavistara and the Mahāvastu which continuously mention that these marks have been regarded as essential characteristics to identify the Buddha and his superhuman nature.

1. The Bodhisattva entered the mother’s womb endowed with thirty-two major and eighty minor signs.
2. Diviners of dreams declared that he who bears the thirty-two marks, has come to the womb of Māyā.
3. He displayed the marks to Devas while he was in the womb.
4. Mahesvaras (Devas of the realm of Suddhāvāsa) examined the thirty-two marks.
5. Asita, the sage, examined the marks.
6. At the time when the ascetic Gotama approached the Bodhi-Tree, Kāla and Nāga described his excellence enumerating thirty-

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78 Lalitavistara Text ed. By Leffman, 1902, p 103.
79 Ibid. p 13
80 Ibid. p 20
81 Ibid. p 25
82 Ibid. p 29
83 Ibid. p 29
two marks,\textsuperscript{84} and in several other places, these indicate the Buddha’s divine nature.

One of the major developments of the \textit{Mahāpurisa} concept at this stage is the enumeration of the eighty secondary marks as subsidiary to the thirty-two characteristics.\textsuperscript{85} Apart from the \textit{Buddhavamsa}, a later compilation of the Canon (which mentions only the word \textit{Anuvyaṇjana}),\textsuperscript{86} the Pāli texts do not mention even the eighty signs of the body of the \textit{Mahāpurisa}. This later addition indicates that the concept of \textit{Mahāpurisa} has been taken on by later schools with greater emphasis than the early Theravada tradition does. At this stage we can assume that the Buddha was highly deified and the thirty-two characteristics become inadequate for the glorification of the Buddha’s physical excellence which is the outward accomplishment of his omniscience. The invention of these eighty secondary marks, therefore, can be regarded as an outcome of a later attempt to provide detailed description of each major characteristic.

The \textit{Lalitavistara} mentions an interesting quality of the \textit{Mahāpurisa}, called Nārāyaṇa-Bala, a kind of physical strength which does not appear in any of the Pāli texts. When the sage Asita came to examine Prince \textit{Siddhārtha}, he declared that the baby was endowed with the power of Nārāyaṇa apart from thirty-two major and eighty minor marks of excellence. It occurs in the traditional narrative of the birth of the sage, when \textit{Brāhmaṇa} astrologers saw him in the house of \textit{Suddhodana} in the noble city of merits and glory”\textsuperscript{87}. Again in the astrologers’ announcement to the father: “A son of great beauty has been born unto thee...He is endowed with thirty-two marks and power of Nārāyaṇa”\textsuperscript{88}. Again when the prince renounces the world to become an ascetic it is acclaimed that

\begin{addmargin}[1em]
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{84} Ibid. p 30.
\item \textsuperscript{85} LV, p 142.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Bv p 55.
\item \textsuperscript{87} “jāto laksṇa punyateja bharito nārāyanasthāmavōn” LV , p 109.
\item \textsuperscript{88} “putraste.. dvātīrmsavara laksṇanaih kavacito nārāyanasthāmavōn” ibid 110.
\end{itemize}
\end{addmargin}
his body has the strength of Nārāyaṇa himself; it is as hard as the thunderbolt.89

As it has been explained in the text; thus endowed with power of Nārāyaṇa is called Mahānārayana,90 it makes clear that the term Nārāyaṇa-Bala denotes a certain measure of physical strength, which has not been indicated in the Pāli Canon, in relation to the concept of Mahāpurisa. However, the commentaries have taken this term and explained that Nārāyanasanghātabala was the equivalent of the strength of ten Chaddanta elephants which equals in strength to that of the Buddha.91

L.A. Waddell92 points out that this is not a mere rhetorical allusion, but a deliberate and very detailed ascription to the Buddha and the supernatural mark attributes to him the status of god. It would seem to be more consistent with all the evidence to suppose that Nārāyaṇa was an independent conception and the evidence does not exist to enable us to decide the source of its origin. It was applied now to one, now to another divine being even in the very early times; yet at an early date it unquestionably became associated with “Puruṣa”.93

The Bodhisattva (Siddhārtha) anticipates, “Thus may I become, a Great Man (Mahāpurisa) endowed with thirty-two marks of my body, adorned with the eighty minor characteristics, and.”94 In addition to this, there are other references with regard to the signs of the Mahāpurisa as a fundamental fulfillment of the Bodhisattva, without any reference to Brahminic origin. Finally, both the Mahāvastu and the Lalitavistara describe that, although the Buddha was born on earth as a human being

89 Vajradrīḍha abhedanārāyano ātmabhāvaguru vīryabhalaupetu” ibid 433.
90 Mahānārāyanabalopetvan mahānārāyana ityucyate” ibid 433.
91 SA. II. 43. AA.V.10. SnA. Ii. 404.
92 Buddha’s Diadem or Usnisa- L.A. Wadell- Ostasiatische Zertschrift- 1914.
94 MV, I. p 38 f
he was not an ordinary man; because he was the Mahāpurisa, the Great Man. These two works are invaluable as the key sources to the development of the concept of the Buddha, from its earliest phase, explaining clearly how the Buddha began his career as a human, as an ascetic and ended as a god above all gods, and also how the concept of the Great Man was finally formulated into the divine ideal.

The next important development of the Buddha-concept was the elevation of Gotama Buddha from the semi-divine state to an everlasting entity. The Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra (The Lotus of the True Law) believed to have been compiled towards the end of the first or the beginning of the second century A.D.\(^{95}\), has made an attempt to remove from the minds of the people the lingering impression of the historical existence of Śākyamuni.\(^{96}\) In this Sūtra, Gotama Buddha is represented practically as an eternal God who controls the universe and all its creatures. He himself dwells continually in infinite glory. As stated in the Sūtra, the Buddha is made to say that his human life was a mere appearance of a sort of magic show; He was really eternal and had always been in the world through magic. He would continue his career as a Buddha for many ten millions of myriads of hundreds of thousands of cycles before attaining final Nirvāṇa.

In reality his being is not subject to complete Nirvāṇa; it is only by a skillful device (Upāyakauśalya) that he makes a show of it, and repeatedly he appears in the world of the living though his abode is on the summit of the Grīḍhakūṭa.

In this description relating to the Buddha’s appearance, the Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra insisted on a dual nature of Buddhahood and distinguished the earthly Śākyamuni as only a manifestation of the real

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\(^{96}\) S.B.E XXi, iv, p 154.
and eternal Buddha. It is clearly indicated that the Buddha has two bodies, that is, the Rupakāya or Nirmāṇakāya, and the Dharmakāya. The concept of Mahāpurisa has reached towards the direction of its development to meet the change of attitude towards the body of the Buddha (Buddhakāya). It is interesting to note here that although the Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra mentions thirty-two major and eighty secondary marks as endowed in the Buddha’s body, it does not make clear whether they are applied to his Rūpakāya or Dharmakāya. However, the appearance of thirty-two major and eighty minor characteristics has been described as possessions of the person who has become the Buddha. On the contrary, the Pāli texts relate these marks only to the physical figure of the Mahāpurisa who possess them at birth, but the Saddharmapuṇḍarīka gives the impression that they appear on one’s body as a result of the attainment of the Buddhahood. This is clear in the passage where Sāriputta states, if he fails to become a Buddha, he would lose all the characteristic signs of the Mahāpurisa. “When Sāriputta had been told by Śākyamuni that he would become the Buddha in future, he expressed his joy and explained how unhappy he was when Buddha declared that there is only one vehicle. The thirty-two characteristics have failed me; golden colour of skin failed me…”

The Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra has attributed thirty-two marks of the Great Man to the Body of Śākyamuni Buddha, who was only a replica of the real Buddha, “When splendidly marked with the thirty two characteristics… I show the (unmistakable) stamp of the nature of the law.”

This is quite different from that of the Theravāda tradition, where it is said that the real Buddha lived in a human form. On the contrary, N.

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Dutt points out that the idea of the created body of the Buddha also appeared in the Theravāda commentaries “as a form of religious bias of attributing superhuman powers to the Buddha.” In the *Atthasālinī Buddhaghosa* says that during the three months of his absence from the world while Buddha was engaged in preaching the *Abhidhamma* to his mother in the *Tusita* heaven, he created some *Nirmāṇa-Buddhas* as exact replicas of himself. These *Nirmāṇa-Buddhas* could not be distinguished from the real Buddha in voice, words, and even the rays of light that issued forth from His body. The created Buddhas could be detected only by the gods of the higher classes and not by ordinary gods or men of the world. Although this created Buddha-idea emerged in Theravāda commentaries, they still retain the concept of the real Buddha who was human. The created Buddha-body in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* was also seen in human form, but the actual Buddha was not human and could not be seen by ordinary human beings. Therefore, the attribution of thirty-two major and eighty minor characteristics to a created body in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra*, shows another stage of the development of the conception of the Mahāpurisa towards a more superhuman ideal.

**1:10: Trikāya (Triple body) of the Mahāpurisa**

Until the time of Nāgarjuna (2cen.A.D.) who developed the *Mādhyamika* philosophy, there was a twofold body, which was conceived as a theory of the Buddha body. It was in the Philosophy of the *Yogācāra* school (*Vijñānavāda*), represented by Asanga and Vasubandu, that the two-body theory was developed until it was consummated into the three- body theory.

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98 N. Dutt, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, p 147
99 *Māla Mādhyamika Kārika* XXII, Ratnavali, III,13, *Prajñāpāramitopadesa*, Taisho, Vol. 25, P 121c etc. refers to only Dharma body and Physical body
The doctrine of the *Trikāya* gives some idea of the nature and the formation of these three bodies. “The *Tathāgata* when he was yet at the stage of discipline practiced diverse deeds of morality for the sake of sentient beings. Through this practice he finally attained perfection, reached maturity and by virtue of its merits he acquired a wonderful spiritual power. He revealed himself in the right place, assuming various wonderful bodily forms. These bodily forms are called *Nirmāṇakāya* of the *Tathāgata*.

“But when the *Tathāgatas*, in order to make the Bodhi-sattvas thoroughly conversant with the *Dhamma*…manifest themselves to the Bodhisattvas in a form which is perfect with the thirty-two major and eighty minor features of excellence, and shining with the halo around the head and back, the *Tathāgatas* are said to have assumed the body of Bliss of *Sambhogakāya*.” “When all possible obstacles arising from sin are perfectly removed and when all possible good *dhammas* are preserved, there would remain nothing but suchness: this is the *Dharmakāya*, the first two forms of the *Tathāgata* are provisional (and temporal) existence; but the last one is a reality wherein the former two find the reason of their existence.101

According to this explanation, *Tathāgatas* have only one real body, that is, *Dharmakāya*, which is universal and eternal. *Sambhogakāya* and *Nirmāṇakāya* are only manifestations of the reality. On the other hand it is clear that according to Sūnyatā-philosophy of the *Prajñāpāramitā* school, in reality the Buddha has no form.

“All Buddhas in the ten quarters and all Dhammas of the past, present and future are forms of no form”.102 Although the Trikāya doctrine defines the Buddha nature as without form, it speaks a great deal

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of the thirty-two major and eighty minor signs of the Great Man, especially in the Prajñāpāramitā literature. There are some notable differences of the approach regarding Mahāpurisa Lakkhana in these Mahāyāna Texts.

Firstly, these characteristics of the Great Man have been attributed to the Sambhogakāya, glorified body, which is visible to the eyes of faith, and manifests itself to the community of Bodhisattvas. This glorified body is restricted to Akaniṣṭha Heaven and the Tathāgata is said to have preached the ultimate truth to the Bodhisattva in this form of body. Mahāpurisa lakkhanā as in the Pāli canon have been attributed to the Buddha who appeared on earth and lived eighty years as a human being. In Sarvāstivāda and Mahāsāṃghika texts the thirty-two marks are a possession of Nirmāṇakāya, that appeared on earth as Buddha Gotama. The principal difference of this Mahāpurisa concept in the Mahāyāna texts is that these characteristic marks of physical excellence have been possessed by the glorified body of the Buddha which has not appeared on earth and cannot be seen by human beings. Here the Mahayanists transferred the Thirty-two major and eighty minor physical marks through the doctrine of Trikāya to the characterization of the Sambhogakāya of the Buddha.

The Saṃyutta Nikāya says; “No one can see the real qualities of the Buddha by seeing his physical marks. One who practices the Dhamma sees the Buddha.”¹°³ The Buddha asked Subhuti whether Tathāgata can be seen through thirty-two marks. Subhuti said, “No, he should not be seen through them”. If we examine the above references which clarify the characteristics of the Mahāpurisa, there is general agreement in the different schools of Buddhism as to the concept and the attendant

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¹°³ Yo dhammam passati so maṃ passati – S, III p 120, M, I . p 190.
characteristics. But the controversy lies in the matter of their attribution to the body of the Buddha.

For Tathāgata, Buddha was a man who possessed a human body. Although the nature of some marks somewhat different to the ordinary human body, they are only extraordinary qualities of the physical body of the Buddha who is also called Mahāpurisa. However, these marks had been a matter for dispute even in the Theravāda tradition in later periods, yet it has retained its original concept.

In Mahāyāna Buddhism as a result of the development of the idea of Buddhakāya this concept of the Mahāpurisa is applied to different forms of bodies of the Buddha. As D.T. Suzuki points out, the development of the Trikāya concept distinguished by separating the human form of the Buddha from these physical marks and attributed them to the glorified body alone with all the other superhuman qualities.

The above discussion brings one to the conclusion that the Buddha was a human being, living on earth as the Theravada tradition clearly reveals. As a result of the intensive elaboration and ramification of the concept of the Buddha, by neglecting the mortal aspect, it underwent a great change in the course of the development of the Mahāyāna thought, probably owing to the impact of contemporary religio-philosophical thought in India. Now it is quite reasonable to believe that the attribution of the Mahāpurisa lakṣhaṇas in Theravāda tradition to the body of the Buddha was neither to deify him nor to make him a supernatural person but to emphasize morality and the uniqueness of the attainment of Buddhahood.

Finally, we have seen the different stages in the development of the Mahāpurisa concept in the Pāli Canon and its commentaries, as a result of the development of the Buddha-concept. The remarkable feature of the
Mahāpurisa theory in the Theravāda tradition is that though the Buddha possesses thirty-two signs of perfection, and eighty secondary characteristics, his physical body is like that of ordinary people which is subject to mortality. It is, however, the popular idea that these thirty-two physical marks and eighty secondary signs of the Mahāpurisa in the body of the Buddha are supernormal characteristics of the cosmic body of the Buddha.

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