CONCLUSION

Buddhist texts have assimilated the concept of the Ideal Man or the Great Man (Mahāpurisa) from two different aspects. The first relates to one’s spiritual or internal achievements and is exclusively a Buddhist one. The other identifies the Great Man by his physical perfection. Although physical marks play a part as the criterion for predicting or identifying the Great Man from his outward appearance, the actual figure portrayed by this theory of the Great Man is the one who succeeded in conquering the world. That is, the Buddha in the spiritual realm and the Cakkavatti in the physical realm, both of them upholding and adhering to dhamma (righteousness).

With regard to the origin of the Buddhist Mahāpurisa concept, the evidence we have adduced shows that neither of those aspects referred to above exhibits a direct relation to the primeval mystical man in the Puruṣasūktam. Puruṣa is depicted in the Rgveda as a cosmogonist figure, a creative source, the primeval male who envelops the whole earth and who represents totality. The Sūkta does not contain any idea of the prediction of personality or future form physiognomic characteristics. On the other hand, the term Mahāpurisa is not used in Pāli texts in the same sense as it was used in the Puruṣasūktam. It simply means “great” or “noble” man. The concept of Mahāpurisa is found in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. However, the term Mahāpurisa is not common to all religions. It is only in Buddhism we find this term used in the Pali texts. Though Mahāpurisa means a great man the Buddhist texts used the term especially for the Buddha. Precisely, the characteristics of the Mahāpurisa are described as follows: the one in whom turmoil never arises; who understands both ends and does not stick to either exclusively; who adheres to the middle path and who has overcome
desire is called the Mahāpurisa. In Hinduism a great man or the man of wisdom is conventionally one who is liberated while still alive. His characteristics are described under various terms such as Jīvan-mukta, Sthitaprajña, Yogī and we find his descriptions in various texts such as the Yogavāsiṣṭha, Bhagav-adgītā, Aṣṭāvakragītā etc. In the 2nd chapter of the Bhagavadgītā we find the characteristics of the Sthitaprajña - a man of steadfast wisdom. These are as follows: A man, satisfied in the Self alone by himself, completely casts off all the desires of the mind. He is said to be man of steady knowledge. He who is not disheartened in calamities, from whom all longing for pleasures has departed, who is free from attachment, fear and wrath, he is called a sage, a man of steady knowledge. He is without attachment anywhere; on meeting anything good or bad, he neither exults nor hates. He completely withdraws the senses from sense-objects, as the tortoise withdraws its limbs from all sides. On seeing the Supreme, that is, the Ultimate Reality, his liking for the objects comes to an end. His knowledge is steady as his senses are under control. He is self-controlled hence approaches objects with the senses devoid of love and hatred and attains peace. In peace there is an end of all his miseries; for, the reason of the tranquil-minded soon becomes steady. In him desires enter as waters enter the ocean, which, filled from all sides, remains unaltered. There is no mention of any physical marks of the great soul in Hinduism.

The Jaina texts define arhat as the supreme sanctified soul that has eliminated four types of karmas i.e. (i) deluding karma (ii) knowledge-covering karma (iii) intuition-covering karma and (iv) the obstructive karma and has attained omniscience (kevala-jñāna). There are two categories of the supreme soul – one that still dwells in the body though it is liberated and the other that has left the body and thereafter resides in the Siddha Loka (the abode of liberated souls) where it lives eternally. He is called the siddha. The first category of the supreme soul is called
arhat or arihanta. The term ‘arhat’ is made of two words ‘ar’ and ‘hat’. ‘Ar’ means an enemy. Here by enemy the internal enemies (karmas) are indicated. ‘Hat’ means to destroy. Thus by the term arhat or arihanta is meant a soul who has destroyed his Karmas. They are called ‘jinas’ (victors) because they have conquered the four deadly passions (kaśāyas) i.e. anger, pride, deceit and greed. An Arhat possesses the four infinites, namely, knowledge, perception, bliss, energy. Arhats are further classified into two categories, (i) Tīrthaṅkaras and (ii) the ordinary omniscient ones. The Tīrthaṅkaras who are also arhats or arihantas are born with miraculous cognitive powers and have extraordinary grandeur. They establish the four-fold order (saṅgha) consisting of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen. In Buddhism there are several other terms referring to the Buddha which are synonymous of the term mahāpurisa, such as mahāsatta (great being) settha purisa (noble man), acchāriya manussa (remarkable man) in the ordinary sense. It is clear at any rate that these characteristics are meant to indicate a perfection of physical form which symbolizes moral, spiritual and intellectual perfection, and they always arouse a mixture of awe and curiosity. As Pāli texts expound, as has been shown above, the marks belong neither to deities like Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa or Śiva nor are they signs of deification. Possession of these attributes does not invalidate the Buddha’s humanity in any way. Yet it indicates that in him humanity has become perfected. There is no process of deification here.

As modern scholarship has established, the Buddha Sakyamuni was an historical person. Enough historical and epigraphical evidence testify to his birth, his life and his passing away. The authenticity of his teaching as well has been borne out by incontrovertible proof which has stood the test of historical scrutiny. Early Theravāda texts ascribed to him, as a being, all human qualities. Even after he became the Buddha, although the texts record some miraculous incidents covering several important
events of his life, the fact of his being a human figure is never lost sight of. However, with regard to his pre-eminent spiritual attainment, he is considered an extraordinary being to whom no other is comparable human being. Consequently, it clear that the Buddha’s singular superiority arose from his spiritual pre-eminent attainment, He is still throughout a human being – he is born, lives, and passes away like all human beings. In other words, his physical being is subjected to all human beings. He is subjected to all the natural processes which any other living being undergoes. His outward appearance too conformed to the normal human type.

But as the Pāli Canon says, even as a human being he is distinctive and predominant, because he possesses a striking and charming appearance. People who came to see him on some occasions have described his immensely pleasing and commanding appearance. This shows that although human, the Buddha Sakyamuni bore excellent and unimpaired physical features which bore no blemish whatever. This distinctive perfect appearance of the Buddha is also used to depict his noble and spiritual character.

Although the distinctive physical appearance of the Sakyamuni is referred to, this did not seem to be so pronounced or prominently indicated in such a manner as to show that he was the Buddha merely because of his external appearance. No doubt this was why there were various occasions when the Sakyamuni could not be distinguished as the Buddha solely from his outward form by his own disciples.

Even though the Buddha looked like any other being, the descriptions of his especially striking features were gradually elaborated within the Pāli Canon, owing to the devoted efforts of his faithful followers. In this process the description of the thirty-two marks could
also be considered to be one of the attempts to distinguish the Buddha’s appearance from that of others.

Nevertheless, it is clear that even though the Pāli texts at times speak of these thirty-two marks in connection with the special distinguishing features of the Buddha, they could not have been so prominently visible or easily recognizable to one and all alike. Whenever references are made to the appearance of such marks being noticed on the Sakyamuni’s body, it is noteworthy that in those instance the people who recognized the physical marks did so either because of their special knowledge of the prevalent beliefs about the physiognomic characteristics or because of their implicit faith. From the Pāli texts it is quite evident that these distinctive physical features in a human being could be visible only to those who had either a particular form of expertise or to those whose faith was so great that they could see such marks peculiar to a Great Man. To those who had faith, no wonder, no proof was necessary: to them the Buddha was the one with the marks of the Great Man on his body. But in general, it transpired that the Buddha did not usually appear in any way outwardly different from a normal human figure, although he possessed the thirty-two marks of the Great Man. As we have observed, in the early parts of the Pāli Canon it is repeatedly emphasized that he was a human being in spite of all his internal and external accomplishments. However, there emerges another strand of thinking, probably at a later stage of the compilation, when extraordinary or superhuman qualities, attributed to the Buddha, received more stress than his human qualities. In this context the Buddha’s eminence becomes accepted not only because of his all-encompassing wisdom, but also because of his extraordinary physical characteristics. Even then the notion that the Buddha was an essentially human being remains predominant. Hence, within this subsequent stage of the development of the Pāli Canon and even in the commentaries, the Buddha continues to be regarded
primarily and basically as the perfect human being despite the possession of extraordinary physical qualities. As a man the Buddha possessed such physical and spiritual qualities because of his paramount virtue and supreme wisdom, and not because he was transcendental. Thus he never rose above his human state to become divine as far as the Pali tradition goes.

Firstly, This work being essentially a study of the origin and development of the Mahapurisa (Great Man) concept in Buddhism consists of four chapters. The first chapter presents the references which deal with the subject of the Mahapurisa in the Pali Canon and discusses some views regarding its origin in the light of Brahminical sources. The different types of interpretations of the Mahapurisa concept are distinguished - one identifies the Great Man by spiritual progress, the other by physical accomplishment. Early reference to the practice of prognostications, such as physiognomy and palmistry are dealt with : the probable influence upon Buddhism in spite of its condemnation of this low form of arts (tiracchana-vijjā) is shown. However, as seen in the Buddhist texts of the Mahayana tradition, there emerges a different form of the concept of the Buddha, In that tradition, there Buddha was said to be no more than a human being in reality. The Trikāya concept of Mahayāna speaks of three bodies of the Buddha, Nirmānakāya, Dharmakāya and Sambhogakāya. With the development of this new interpretation of the physical form of the body of the Buddha, all his extraordinary physical features and other qualities become the possessions of the non-human form of the Buddha in the Sambhogakāya. It is noteworthy that in this view the thirty-two characteristics of the Sambhogakāya also acquire a different meaning and orientation. Not only are these marks the possessions belonging to the celestial or divine form of the Buddha, but they are also important in a different way in relation to the Buddha’s body. While in the theravāda tradition these
marks signified only physical excellence, in Mahāyāna texts the marks
themselves are associated with the capacity to perform miracles. Apart
from these new theories of the Buddha concept, this definition of marks
in Mahāyana Buddhism was greatly influenced by the solar myth and
other epithets of the Hindu Gods.

Secondly, in that chapter the Buddha and his major characteristic
marks are described in detail with the explanation of commentaries and
sub-commentaries adding suitable statements. In explaining the thirty-two
major characteristic marks of the Buddha, the nature a person with these
marks is described. After making devoted survey on the thirty two major
characteristic marks of the Buddha, there are statements on the message
of the characteristic mark.

Thirdly, the eighty minor characteristic marks are mentioned and
notable points regarding the question on whether Buddha has the
characteristic mark of great man or not is discussed. Moreover, there were
many persons claiming that “He is also the Buddha and I am also the
Buddha,” So, for people, it is very important point to differentiate who is
the real Buddha and who is not. In the art of drawing the line between the
two persons the real Buddha and the unreal Buddha, the thirty-two major
characteristic marks of the noble man has played prominently its role.
The ancient texts pointed out that one who is the real Buddha will have to
be endowed with the thirty-two major characteristic marks. According to
this the statement about the Brahmin Brahmāyu who investigated the
Buddha whether he is the real Buddha or not, is mentioned. The statement
of the historical event of paying homage to the Buddha images, the
features and nature of major and minor characteristic marks which are
used as designs are mentioned for creating the Buddha Images. Again, it
is found that some Buddha images have a headwear in the form of banana
but with a sharp-top. The statement of such and such Buddha’s crown
with a sharp-top and the statement about the art of paying homage to some Buddha images like ancient kings decorated with some coronation regalia of crowns, shoulder wears, crystal headdresses, is in line with the concept of the text or not, are mentioned.

Finally, the epithets of the Buddha and some of his qualities are mentioned quoting prayer of Buddhism. Lord Buddha is depicted as an Arhaṁ, one who has already attained Nirvāṇa. Lord Buddha was designated as Sammāsāṁbuddho because he comprehended the existence of the world in its proper perspective and discovered the Four Noble Truths. This Term vijjācaraṇa sampanno meant that the Buddha was endowed with perfectly vision (vijjā) and exemplary good conduct (caraṇa) The “vijjā” part has two significant aspects as indicated in the threefold knowledge and eightfold wisdom. Lord Buddha was also designated as Sugato-well-gone or well-spoken. The term Lokavidū is applied to the Buddha as the one with exquisite knowledge of the world. He had experienced, known and penetrated into all aspects of world life, physical as well as spiritual. Anuttaro’ means matchless and unsurpassed. ‘Purisadamma’ refers to individuals to whom the gift of the dhamma is to be endowed. The term, when translated, means that the Buddha was a teacher of devas. The Buddha was a remarkable teacher who was flexible, inventive and genius. ‘Lord Buddha’ firstly means that the Buddha, being omniscient, possessing extraordinary powers is able to convince others of his dhamma. The Buddha was termed Bhagavā or the Blessed One because he was the happiest and most fortunate amongst mankind for having managed to conquer all evils, for expounding the highest dhamma and for being endowed with supernormal and superhuman intellectual faculties.

It is clear that Lord Buddha was a historical person, He existed really and had a Physical form. Obviously Lord Buddha is not a figment
of imagination. He was born as a human being, possessing the *Lakshnas* or the marks of Great Man, and the qualities associated with such marks. Yet firmly and clearly it was his superior knowledge, understanding, compassion and other virtues that were more significant in Him as the Buddha. No wonder then that the chief significance of the thirty-two mark came to be that they symbolised His ethical and spiritual uniqueness.

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