PREFACE

The Mahāyānic emergence and growth is considered as an important historical event in ancient India. Many scholars assert that Mahāyāna Buddhism emerged and grew during the time of Kaniska (1st B.C. – 1st A.D.). Whereas, another set of scholars maintains that Mahāyāna Buddhism took shape and expanded in India during the time of Mauryas – Sungas (3rd B.C. – 1st B.C). Two Kharosthi inscriptions, which have been discovered recently at Swat and Taxila, show that Mahāyāna Buddhism had a firm footing in North-western India before the time of Asoka. This view is further strengthened by the fact that during the reign of Han Ming Ti (1st A.D.) in China, Kasyapa Matanga and Chu Fa Lan brought the Sūtra in Forty Two Sections (the basic sūtra of Mahāyāna) to China and translated it at the White Horse temple at Loyang. It is also noted that the central Asiatic oases such as Yarkand, Khotan, Kashgar, Tashkend, Turfan, Miran, Kuccha, Qarashahr, Tung Huang, etc became the centres of Mahāyāna Buddhism during the time of Kaniska (1st B.C. – 1st A.D.). Moreover, the Prajñāparamitā sūtras are said to be composed in the second century B.C and the Avataṃsaka sūtra appeared during the first century A.D.

On the basis of above facts one could infer that Mahāyāna Buddhism had emerged during the third century B.C and flourished during the periods of Sungas, Sakas, Kusānas, Sētavēhanas and reached its climax during the time of Guptas.

It is generally accepted that Mahāyānism developed from Mahāsanghika school that branched off from Early Buddhism after the second Buddhist council about 110 years after the death of Buddha. Though Mahāyāna Buddhism came into existence before the time of Asoka (3rd B.C.), but in the beginning it had no subsects. Towards the second century A.D, Rahurabhadra (Nāgārjuna’s master) founded Madhyamika school in Anga country and towards the end of the third century A.D., Maitreyanātha (Asanga’s master) founded the Yogācāra school.

Mahāyāna Buddhism is considered as the most progressive school in thought as well as in practice in Buddhism. The appearance of Mahāyānism is seemingly a cultural and ideological revolution in ancient India. Mahāyāna Buddhism rose to redress the weaknesses of Hīnayāna doctrines and to induct the progressive ideas in Buddhism. In the philosophical
sphere, Hīnayāna only talks of the conventional truth (samvīti satya), while Mahāyāna introduces the concept of absolute truth (paramārtha satya) in Buddhist Philosophy. Though in Upanisadic thought the concept of absolute truth already exists but the Mahāyānist concept is different from Upanisadic concept.

The thinkers of the Upanisads assert that the Absolute is eternal and unchangeable and it is God who created the universe by his māyā (power). While, Mahāyānists assert that if the Absolute is eternal and unchangeable, all external objects would not spring from the Absolute, exist, and return back to the Absolute after their dissolutions. Mahāyānists re-assert that the Absolute exists according to cause and conditions though it is not created by material elements. Mahāyānists also reject the role of God in the creation of the universe and they emphasize that God is only a personalization of the creative power of the universe by which all things in the universe have been created.

In the field of psychology, Hīnayānic sects only mention six consciousness of sense organs (visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, bodily and mental consciousness), and two important components of psychology – manas and Ėlayavijñāṇa do not find any place in Hīnayānic doctrines. For the first time Mahāyānism introduces the concepts of manas and Ėlayavijñāṇa along with their functions in order to complete the system of Buddhist psychology.

Though the thinkers of Upanisads had highlighted the important role of hiranyagarbha (Ėlayavijñāṇa) in the creation of the universe but did not state its role in the individual cognition. According to Mahāyāna Buddhism, hiranyagarbha (Ėlayavijñāṇa) plays an important role in the individual cognition and it is the foundation of consciousness. All habits of karma and defilements are contained in hiranyagarbha (subtle body) and after death, it is hiranyagarbha will be led to the rebirth by karmas contained in it. Likewise in the fields of literature, religion, ethics, etc. Mahāyāna Buddhism not only address the inadequacies in Hīnayānic doctrines as well as in the Upanisadic thought, but also introduces some new and progressive ideas in Buddhist thought.

The existing social, political, religious and economic scenario influenced directly the emergence and growth of Mahāyāna Buddhism and vice-versa. In the time of Sakas –
Sêtavêhanas, all castes lived in harmony without the severe discriminations of caste; contrary to the situation in this respect during the Gupta periods. Under by Mahêyênist influence many Sêdras were granted the cultivable lands, were helped with seeds and cattle etc. by the state. Many of them worked in the productive and commercial bases of state. As a consequence some Sêdras became very wealthy too.

Though most of the rulers followed Brahmanism, they also patronized Buddhism enthusiastically. Monasteries, temples, caves of Buddhism were built by them such as the University of Nêlandê was built by king Kumêragupta. They also granted cultivable lands to Buddhist monasteries with tax exemption and helped them with agricultural inputs, cattles and seeds etc. Under the patronage of Kaniska, the fourth Buddhist council was held at Kasmir and twenty Buddhist sects also took shape during his period. Most of Mahêyênic sêtras were written in Andhra country under the patronage of kings of Sêtavêhana dynasty.

Before advent of Mahêyêna Buddhism, India had many religions such as Shaivism, Vaisnavism, Saktism, Jainism, and the sects of Hînayêna Buddhism. Through the animal sacrifices, cattles that were needed for agriculture works were being sacrificed, Buddhism, Jainism and other heterodox sects stood against the Vedic sacrifices. It undermined the prestige and authority of Brahmins. Therefore Brahmanism underwent some important changes. As a consequence, Hinduism was founded in order to save the situation. Hinduism was only the outward change but the faith and observance were not different from Brahmanism. Hinduism was only an incorporation of Shaivism, Vaisnavism, Saktism, Buddhism and various local beliefs and ceremonies of worship. Hindus worshipped all gods, and even the Buddha was worshipped by them. The blood sacrifices of Brahmanism were replaced by vegetarianism in Hinduism. Moreover, Brahmanism did not have image worship, and performed their sacrifices at fireside whereas Hindus have worshipped images of god and performed their veg-sacrifices in shrines and temples. The image worship is said to be influenced by Mahêyêna Buddhism because before the advent of Mahêyêanism, India did not have any image of god or of Buddha.

The doctrines of Hînayêna Buddhism did not cater the needs of the Buddhist in a changed scenario ² a period of the social, political, cultural and economic developments, and specially when the economy of commodity occupied an important position in the social life. Speaking of Hînayênic atheism, S.Raddhakrishnan asserts that the philosophical atheism of
Hīnayāṇa is the skeleton in the box, the diseased worm in the beautiful flower; Hīnayāṇic Nirvāṇa is not possible for ordinary man, who falls in love with annihilation. That is the reason that Hīnayāṇa Buddhism could not become a popular religion.

During the period under study, agriculture, industries, handicrafts, and commerces had developed significantly. At that time, agriculture was equipped with the iron ploughshares and a large variety of iron implements. Consequently, enlargement of cultivable land was also encouraged and systems of irrigation were built. Agriculture was now a developed industry. Manufacturing activities too were quite developed during the period. Among these industries, metallurgical industry played an important role in the national economy from which the other economic activities were developed. The spinning and weaving of cotton and silk were important activities during the period of Kusānas – Śātavahānas. The trade and commerce were developed during the period. The surplus productions of agriculture and industry resulted in the growth of trade and commerce. Many trade routes (land and sea routes) were established to connect with the important ports in the country as well as the ports of the countries outside India. Through the commercial relations with many countries in the world, India exported her agricultural and industrial products and imported from Roma and other countries raw materials for industries, specially golden and silver coins and other products such as wine, amphorae, samian ware, roulette ware, red glazed argentine ware. Through these trade routes (silk and sea routes) Mahāyāna Buddhism was propagated to Western Asia, Central Asia, and South-eastern Asia.

The period, from the first century B.C. to the sixth century A.D. is considered the heyday of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India, but after the sixth century A.D. Indian Buddhism including Mahāyāna gradually came to decline and almost totally disappeared from India in the sixteenth century A.D. That is the reason the period from the first century B.C. to sixth century A.D. has been chosen for study. The objectives of the study are to reassess the date of Mahāyānic emergence; to bring the light to the progressive contents in Mahāyānic thought and practice; and to examine its contributions to Indian and world civilizations. It is said that the Mahāyānic appearance marks a new step forward of Indian culture and art.

In the field of literature, Mahāyāna Buddhism enriches the Indian Sanskrit literature with innumerable literary works; specially with hundreds of valuable works of
prajñāparamitā literature. There are, at least, six hundred Mahāyāna sūtras which have already been found in the original Sanskrit source as well as in Chinese and Tibetan translations. Apart from these works, Mahāyānists have equipped Indian literature with five kinds of literature, viz the Negative dialectical literature, the Realistic critical literature, the Symbolic literature, the Literature of Self-Relation, and the Depictive literature. Mahāyānic literature’s influence is visible on eighteen Purāṇas, Gaudapāda’s works, Saṅkara’s works, Rāmanuja’s works, etc.

In the field of philosophy, Mahāyānists taught two kinds of truth – conventional and absolute truths. L.M. Joshi asserts that these two truths were firstly taught by Mahāyānic scholars like Nāgārjuna, Nāgārjuna, Asanga, Vasubandhu etc and then the Classical Vedānta schools took this concept of twofold truth as the very foundation of that philosophy. The Mahāyānic concept of the absolute truth even influenced the thought of Gaudapāda and other scholars of Non-dualistic Vedānta.

In the field of psychology, Mahāyānists analyzed eight consciousness and their functions in the individual cognition. Simultaneously manas and Ėlayāvijñāna were added into the Hīnayānic psychology in order to complete the Buddhist psychology. Manas is an agency of will and affection without which one is not different from wood or stone. And Ėlayāvijñāna is the subtle body that contains all habits of defilement and karma. Without Ėlayāvijñāna, man will not have rebirth.

In the field of ethics, the Mahāyānic vegetarianism has a great influence on Hinduism. The vegetarian was encouraged by some scholars of Hinduism such as the author of Manusmṛti (200 A.D.), author of Mahābhārata (200 B.C. – 400 A.D.) It is also said that Hinduism has borrowed the tenet of ahimsā from Mahāyāna. The doctrine of ahimsā is the principal doctrine of Purāṇas. In the field of art, all images of Buddha, Bodhisattva and gods of Buddhism and that of Hinduism appeared only after the advent of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The ancient Indian schools of art such as the Gandhara school in North western India, Mathurā in Northern India, Amaravati and Vaiṣṇava in the Southern India were greatly influenced by the Mahāyānic thought.
Generally, Mahāyānic art not only influenced Hindu art but it also influenced Buddhist art in the countries outside India.

Though after sixteenth century A.D, Mahāyāna Buddhism disappeared from India, but contrary to it Mahāyāna grew very strong in many other countries in the world. Mahāyānic doctrine has now been accepted and practised by a good number of people in China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Bhutan, Tibet, Australia, America, Europe and South Africa.

Though a few good books on Mahāyāna Buddhism have appeared but all of them are of general nature and do not deal in detail the exclusive questions like emergence and growth of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and influence of the Mahāyāna Buddhism to Indian thought and culture.

**Mahāyāna Buddhism** by N. Dutt (1987) discusses some points of political, cultural and religious background of Mahāyāna. And some points of philosophy such as Dharmakīya, Nirvāṇa, Truths, the absolute, etc are also discussed.

**2500 Years of Buddhism** by P.V. Bapat (1997) presents the Indian Buddhist schools, four Buddhist councils and the propagation of Buddhism to Asiatic countries. The work provides data for study of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism and its propagation to many countries in the world.

**Indian Philosophy** by S. Radhakrishnan (2 Volumes, 1999) and **Indian Philosophy** by Sinha J. (1979), these books are very helpful for understanding. The works provide data for the relationship between Mahāyānic and Brahmanical philosophies and the reasons for the decline of Buddhism in India.

**The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline** by D.D. Kosambi (2008) relates Indus and Ganges civilizations, the social structure of Aryan people, the Urban Revival, the Brahmanism and its animal sacrifices, Buddhism and society, agriculture and industries in the time of Asoka, political and economic changes, etc. The work provides data for the study of political and economic background of Mahāyānicism.

**Studies in the Buddhistic culture of India** by L.M. Joshi (1997) discusses the emergence of Mahāyāna and the development of Buddhism under the Guptas, the schools of
art, and the influence of MahĀyĀna Buddhism on thought, ethics, literature, art, and practice of Hinduism. The work supplies data for study of the influences of MahĀyĀna on the culture, thought, and practice of Hinduism.

**A Text Book of the History of TheravĀda Buddhism** by K.T.S. Sarao (1995) relates the social and economic conditions of ancient India, The emergence of MahĀyĀna in Andhra, Royal patronage to Buddhism, the decline of Buddhism in India, etc. The work provides data for study of royal patronage to Buddhism and the decline of Buddhism in India.

**The Penguin History of Early India** by Romila Thapar (2002) relates to political and economic conditions under the reigns of Sungas, Sakas, KusĀnas, SĀtavĀhanas and Guptas, the schools of art, and the propagation of MahĀyĀna Buddhism outside India. The work supplies data for study of political and economic background of MahĀyĀna Buddhism.

**Buddhism in China** by Kenneth, K.S. Ch’en (1946) relates to the propagation of MahĀyĀna to China, MahĀyĀna Buddhist schools in China, and Buddhist art in China. The work supplies data for re-assertion of the date of Indian MahĀyĀna Buddhism.

**Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Early India** by R.S. Sharma (1995) talks of the land grants to Buddhist and Brahmanical monks, guilds of artisans, gold and silver coins, etc. The work provides data for study of political and economic backgrounds of MahĀyĀna.

Following works are some of the important primary Buddhist sources which were used for the study of the problem situation under review.

The MahĀyĀnic works like the **Saddharmapuṭṭarīka sūtra**, **Lankāvatāra sūtra**, **Śērangama sūtra**, **Vajracchedika sūtra**, **Vimalakirtinidesa sūtra**, etc provide significant data for study of MahĀyĀna philosophy. **Milindapaṇḍho** gives a list of 75 occupations and guilds of artisans and craftsmen. The work provides data for study of the economic background of MahĀyĀnism.

**The Principal Upanisads** presents the concepts of Brahman, Ėtman, soul, God, karma, rebirth, the concepts of the world, liberation and means to the liberation. The work provides the data for study of relation between Brahmanical and MahĀyĀnic philosophies.
The Flower Ornament Scripture presents the concept of universe, the systems of world in the universe, the interdependence of all things in the universe, the Bodhisattva-way and fifty two stages of Bodhisattva. The work provides data for the study of Mahāyānic philosophy.

The Treatise in Thirty verses on Mere-consciousness presents eight consciousnesses and their functions, the practice of the doctrine of Mere-consciousness and the stages of sainthood. The work provides data for study of Mahāyānic psychology.

Five Pāli Nikāya, i.e. The Gradual Sayings (Angutta Nikāya), The Long discourse (Dīgha Nikāya), The Kindered Sayings (Samyutta Nikāya), The Middle Length Sayings (Majjhima Nikāya) and The Minor Readings (Khuddaka Nikāya) provide data for study of Hīnayānic philosophy, psychology, and the limitation of Hīnayānic thought and practice.

The Sūtra of Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha’s Fundamental vows presents the Hells, Heavenly worlds, Rebirth, Karma and the Bodhisattva Ksitigarbha’s salvation of all beings from the suffering world.

The work provides data for the study of the concept of universe and the altruistic actions of Mahāyāna Bodhisattva.

The present thesis is divided into six chapters.

Chapter I ‘Introduction’ deals with the emergence and growth of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism, its thought and practice. The focus of discussion is on the date of emergence of Mahāyāna in India; the sects of Mahāyāna, the authors and works of Mahāyāna, philosophical thought and practice of Mahāyāna.

Chapter II ‘Social and political background of Mahāyāna Buddhism’ deals with the social and political conditions of the period that led to the emergence and growth of Mahāyāna in India. The discussion focuses on five dynasties of ancient India, viz Mauryas, Sakas, Kusānas, Sētavēhanas and Guptas and their patronages to Mahāyāna Buddhism.
Chapter III ‘Economic background of Mahāyāna Buddhism’ deals with agriculture, industries, handicrafts, commerce, the trade’s routes and introduction of Mahāyāna Buddhism to Asiatic countries.

The discussion focuses on the cultivation of wet paddy and cereals, animal breeding, the grant of land, the developments of metallurgical and weaving industries, pottery, the relations of trade and commerce between India, Roma and other countries, the export and import of commodity, the silk and sea routes, and propagation of Mahāyāna Buddhism to Asiatic countries.

Chapter IV ‘Religious Background of Mahāyāna Buddhism’ deals with the development of Brahmanism, main sects of Brahmanism, Hinduism, Hīnayāna Buddhism and their limitations. Harmonization of Mahāyānism and Brahmanism, and the patronage of Indian rulers to Mahāyānism and Brahmanism have also been dealt with.

The discussion also focuses on the philosophical thought, image worship and rituals in Brahmanism and Buddhism.

Chapter V ‘Contribution of Mahāyāna Buddhism to Indian thought and Culture’ deals with the systematization of thoughts of Brahmanism and Buddhism, the development of the theory of Sānyatē and Buddhayēna, and contribution of Mahāyāna Buddhism to Indian culture and society. The discussion focuses on the Mahāyānic contributions to Indian literature, philosophy, psychology, ethics, art and painting, and influences of Indian Mahāyānic art on the Buddhist art in Asiatic countries.

Chapter VI ‘Conclusion’ sums up discussions held in the previous chapters and the concluding observation based on critical evaluation of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism.

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