



# COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THERAVADA AND MAHAYANA BUDDHISM

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**Abstract:** Buddhism isn't a single set of beliefs; rather, it's split into two major branches. But what are the main distinctions between Theravada vs. Mahayana Buddhism? Each of these two branches has a unique identity, offering practitioners two ways of attaining enlightenment. What Are the Differences? The main difference comes down to one thing: the end goal of the two branches. Theravada Buddhism is organized around the notion of breaking the cycle of Samsara (escaping reincarnation). Mahayana Buddhism aims to achieve enlightenment through the teachings of the Buddha, but they ultimately choose to stay in Samsara and reincarnate out of compassion for others. The two major branches of Buddhism have their interpretations of the Buddha's teachings. But it's important to remember that while Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism are unique, they still are based on the same beliefs. At the end of the day, Buddhists follow the teachings of the Buddha. But they have different ways of going about it. Almost every major religion in the world is made up of smaller branches. And it makes sense — when you've got millions of followers, not everyone will agree on everything. This is the story of Buddhism as well. The core teachings of Buddhism have been reinterpreted many times over the years. And two schools of Buddhism have created a distinct identity for themselves. Theravada Buddhism came first. It focuses on the teachings of the Buddha through strict meditation and the Buddha's Eightfold Path to Enlightenment.

**Key Words:** Buddhism, Theravada, Mahayana, Nikaya Buddhism, Stupa.

## 1. INTRODUCTION: THERAVADA BUDDHISM

The term "Therevāda" means the "doctrine of the elders", is a name of the oldest form of the Buddha's teachings, handed down to us in the Pali languages. According to tradition, its name is derived from the fact of having been fixed by 500 arahants, soon after the Buddha's parinibbana.

Theravāda is the only school of Buddhism that has survived among those which; Mahāyanists have called "Hānayāna". It is sometimes called southern Buddhism or Pali Buddhism. It is found today in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Chittagong etc.

History of Buddhism has different phases, so it is rather difficult to give definite answer for it. Roughly, we have another term like early Buddhism, primitive Buddhism etc. As it is said in Mahāvamsa, after the 3<sup>rd</sup> Buddhist council, Tipitaka comes into being in full form. The question is, how the Theravada school comes into being. We get, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Buddhist council, there come into being the two Buddhist schools called Mahāsaṅghika and Sthaviravada. Farther, after the 3<sup>rd</sup> council, Buddhism has splitted into 18 different sects. It is said, the Sthaviravada itself has divided into many branches. Probably, Therevada is one of them. In another synonymous term, therāvāda is called Vibhajjavada. Anyway, the term Theravada is used even in early period.

## 2. MAHAYANA BUDDHISM :

Mahayana Buddhism is not the movement initiated by Buddhist monks and nuns. But the movement initiated by laypeople. That is why sometimes they refer to Mahayana Buddhism as the Buddhist movement. Mahayana Buddhism arose in India during the first century B.C. Around that time they against the Sravastivada movement. Some people say that Mahasāṅghika is the forerunner of Mahayana movement. But some Scholars say that Mahayana's doctrine and Mahasāṅghika's doctrine are simile. Particularly in the relation of the Buddha concepts e.g according to Mahasāṅghika the Buddha is regarded as super-human and in Mahayana Buddhism super-human is very much affair by Mahayana



people. In the process of the rise of Mahayana Buddhism, Sravastivada, in fact, played very significant role. In the process of the rise of Mahayana Buddhism certain point became important. Particularly in relation to Theravada Buddhism and the basic concepts what we find Mahayana Buddhism are quite different from Theravada Buddhism.

## **2.1 THE FACTORS THAT LED TO THE RISE OF MAHAYANA BUDDHISM:**

There are three factors, which contributed to the rise of Mahayana Buddhism, put forward by many modern Scholars. They are:

1. The sectarian or Nikaya Buddhism
2. The worship of the Stupa
3. The praise of the Buddha

## **2.2 THE SECTARIAN OR NIKAYA BUDDHISM**

According to the biographical literature of the Buddha, the Mahayana Buddhism arose out of the biographical of the Buddha. Some people developed and associated the life of the Buddha and collected themselves to one collection. And base on that the concept of Buddhahood, Bodhisatta-hood, came into existence.

## **2.3 THE WORSHIP OF STUPA**

It is seen that in the Mahaparinibbana Sutta four people: Buddha, Paccekabuddha, Aranats and Cakkavatti are worth to construct or build Stupa at the four crossroads. After the demise of the Buddha his remains were divided into (8) Stupas and placed or built in central India. And later King Asoka himself built any Stupas in his kingdom and spread the Stupa worship.

## **3. THE PRAISE OF THE BUDDHA**

It is said that laypeople who have responsibilities for looking after or for the worship of the Sutpa formed into a group. In the process of paying homage or reverence to objects of worship they created their own literature or certain Katha or verses in praise of the Buddha. These traditions handed down all these material from generation to generation. Then they became the sources what we called common sources like Mahavastu, Buddhavamsa cariyapitaka etc in different Schools.

### **3.1 THE CONCEPT OF BODHISATTVA**

According to Nikaya Buddhism, there is different between the Mahayana and Theravada. In Theravada view, Bodhisattva means the being who is aspiring to become Buddha. When we trace the development of the concept of Bodhisattva, in Nikaya, there are three definitions have been given of the term "bodhi", namely

- Boddhi (Bodhisattva)-knowledge leading to the enlightenment
- Sambodhi-
- Sammasambodhi-full enlightenment of the Buddha

In addition to this, there is another kind of Bodhisattva that the term Bodhisattva is not only refer to Gotama Bodhisattva but to all the Buddhas who had attained fully enlightenment in the past and in future. In general, ones who struggle for Buddhahood is denoted as Bodhisattva. So, the term Bodhisattva means the previous life of the Buddha. Etymologically "satta" has defined in many ways. Basically, two anonymous elucidations have given the previous existence of the Gotama Buddha and the past life of the Buddha. It is applicable to all beings who are striving for Buddhahood.

When we come to the commentarial period, they classified "Bodhi" in several sorts; usually given four utilize definition, namely

1. Rukkha
2. Catumagga nana
3. Sabbannuta nana
4. Nibbana

### **3.2 COMPILATION AND WRITING OF BUDDHA'S BIOGRAPHY, WHY?**

The followers of the Buddha felt that the biography must be compiled and written in order to look to him as the ideal to follow. The need to satisfy the mind of the followers and for them to know" who the Buddha was". And with this for the rapid spread of Buddhism and for the attraction of the people the biography of the Buddha was needed. This probably started during the Buddha's time as his religion spread far and wide during the Buddha's lifetime. So the

followers who would not have chance listen to the Buddha's preaching, wanted to have knowledge of the Buddha's personality.

### **3.3 THE BUDDHA ALSO POSSESSED "PANCA-CAKKHU"- FIVE EYES:**

1. Mamsa cakkhu- normal eye
2. Dibba cakkhu- divine eye
3. Pana cakkhu- the eye of wisdom
4. Buddha cakkhu- the Buddha's eye
5. Samanta cakkhu- all-round eye (knowledge)

### **3.4 FOUR TYPES OF CONFIDENCES (CATUVESARAJJA) M.N.**

1. No one can accuse the Buddha of non-enlightenment
2. No one can accuse the Buddha of not being completely free from all defilements
3. No one can accuse the Buddha that things declared as standing bloc or danger
4. No one can accuse the Buddha that the purpose for which the Dhamma taught is no achieved by one who follows suit.

### **3.5 SIX KNOWLEDGES NOT SHARED BY HIS DISCIPLES (ASADHARANA-NANA)**

1. Indriyapariyatte nana- knowledge of the maturity levels of spiritual faculties
2. Sattanam asayanusaye nana- knowledge of disposition of beings
3. Yamakapatihariya nana-knowledge of the twin miracle
4. Mahakaruna samapattiya nana- knowledge of attainment of great compassion
5. Sabbannuta nana- Omniscience
6. Anavarana nana- unobstructed knowledge

### **3.6 THE BUDDHA'S CONCEPT**

1. Atitam sabbam janati
2. Paccuppannam janati
3. Anagatam janati

### **3.7 FIVE KINDS OF SABBANNUTANANA**

1. Kama sabbannu- one knows everything gradually
2. Sakim sabbannu- one knows everything all of sudden
3. Satata sabbannu- one knows everything continuously
4. Satti sabbannu- one knows everything energetically
5. Nati sabbannu- one knows everything that has been known

The Buddha's knowledge is called "avajjana-patibaddha"- directing one's mind towards a particular object. When the Buddha wanted to know any specific object, he had to direct his mind towards it. The process may at least take one moment. Thence the Nata sabbannu is accepted in Buddhism.

### **3.8 THREE BODIES OF THE BUDDHA, IN MAHAYANA**

1. Nirmanakaya
2. Sambhogakaya
3. Dharmakaya (universal principle which can be seen in everywhere)

### **3.9 TWO BODIES OF THE BUDDHA, IN THERAVADA**

1. Rupakaya the actual body of the Buddha with (32) characteristics (dvitimsa lakkhananai)
2. Dhammakaya- tepitakam buddhavacanam-the whole tripitaka is Dhammakaya. And Navavidho hi lokuttaradhammo- nine divisions are supreme dhamma.

### **3.10 MAHAKARUNA OF THE BUDDHA, IN VISUDDHIMAGGA**

1. Paradukkhe sati sadhunam hadayakampanam karotiti karuna-when there is suffering in others, it causes good people's hearts to be moved, thus it is compassion.

2. Kinati va paradukkhā himsati vinasetiti karuṇa- alternatively it combats others' suffering, attacks and demolishes it thus it is compassion.
3. Kiriyaṭi va dukkhitesu pharaṇavasena pasariyaṭi karuṇa- alternatively it is scattered upon those who suffer, it is extended to them by pervasion, this it is compassion. Later on, in Cariyapitaka Atthakatha-289-290, this concept went on thus:
  - Karuṇaya dukkhā sampaticchati- bodhisatta accepts suffering with compassion
  - Karuṇaya vattam papunati- bodhisatta attains rounds of births with compassion

### 3.11. 18-BUDDHADHAMMA-18 UNIQUE (SPECIAL) BUDDHADHAMMA

This concept is found in the Milindapanha and in the commentarial literature. Visuddhimagga (P-325) mentions this (18) Buddhadhamma too. Milindapanha, which was translated into Chinese in 2<sup>nd</sup> A.C., was written in the first B.C, brought to Sri Lanka prior to the 3<sup>rd</sup> A.C. the addition to the first portion, which is also available in Chinese, may have been done in the Sinhalese. When it was translated in Pali the present form was already there. And the Attharasabuddhadhamma is found in the second portion.

Har Dayal, says in his book “Bodhisattva Concept in Sanskrit Literature” that Attharasabuddhadhamma is not found in Pali and Sanskrit literature prior to the 3<sup>rd</sup> A.C. But if we trace, the literary activities, the concept of Attharasabuddhadhamma must have been there before the 3<sup>rd</sup> A.C. because according to the tradition, the commentators merely translated into Pali the existing Sinhalese texts.

Dhammapala says in his commentaries the word should be “Attharasa avenika buddhadhamma”. This concept is found in detail in the DA III 994. This list is interestingly different from that given in the Vimuttimagma:

1. Natthi Tathagatassa kaya duccharitam- the Buddha is free from wrong doing
2. Natthi Tathagatassa vaci duccharitam-
3. Natthi Tathagatassa mano duccharitam-
4. Atite Buddhassa appatipatam nanam- unobstructed knowledge
5. Anagate Buddhassa appatipatam nanam-
6. Paccupane Buddhassa appatipatam nanam-
7. Sabbam kayakamma buddhassa bhagavato nananuparivatti-
8. Sabbam vacikammam buddhassa bhagavato nananuparivatti-
9. Sabbam manokammam buddhassa bhagavato nananuparivatti-
10. Natthi chandassa hani- no hindrance to his zeal
11. Natthi viriyassa hani-
12. Natthi satiya hani-
13. Natthi dava hani- no playfulness in the Buddha
14. Natthi rava hani- no noise
15. Natthi khalitam-
16. Natthi sahasa- no haste
17. Natthi avyavatomo-
18. Naathi

Dhammapala in his Dhammapadatika rejects this list saying that nowhere the No1-3 are found. This list is very confusing. The list given in the Dhammapada is very similar to that in Sanskrit literature.

### 3.12 KAYA BALA:

In the canonical texts, 32 special bodily characteristics (Dvattimsa mahapurisalakkhanani) are found. In Buddhavamsa (80) minor marks (asitānubyanjana) are mentioned. Later on (100) satapanna lakkhana (hundred meritorious marks), (108) marks on foot multisided by two feet “216”.

The Buddha's strength is sometimes compared to that of elephants. Ten kinds of elephants:

1. Kalavaka- ordinary elephant
2. Pandara-an elephant equals to 10 Kalavaka
3. Tamba
4. Pingala
5. Gandha
6. Mandala
7. Hena
8. Uposatha
9. Chaddanta



And it is said that the Buddha's power is equivalent to the power of 10 Chaddanta (Atthakatha). The Buddha's have differences in appearance form each other.

#### **4. CONCLUSION:**

Theravada Buddhists seek to become an arhat, which requires great dedication. In fact, it's usually only attempted by monks. On the other hand, the Mahayana branch of Buddhism was established with less emphasis on the original Pali canon, as their main focus is to encourage everyone toward Enlightenment. In essence, this tradition aimed to incorporate newer teachings into Buddhism to give laypeople the chance to attain Enlightenment. While Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism take different approaches to Buddhism, both follow the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. After all, these were the core teachings of the Buddha when he was alive. And they remain at the center of both branches of Buddhism today. Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism are unique in their approach to the teachings. So, is one better than the other? No, they're simply different. In fact, in many instances, the two branches coexist quite harmoniously.

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