

DIFFERENT IDEAS OF BODHISATTVA CHARACTERISTICS



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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to make a fuller understanding of characteristics of bodhisattvahood that exist in both Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism. Different points of view concerning a Bodhisattva's characteristics in the *Sutta Nikāya* and the commentary of both schools present two different interpretations of characteristics between both schools. Theravāda Canonical texts hold an idea of a bodhisattva as a wise being who is concerned with awakening or obtaining the confirmation from the Buddha's mouth that he is an unenlightened bodhisattva. In contrast, Mahāyāna tradition explains the bodhisattva as a being with perfect knowledge and will be a future Buddha. He walks along the path of enlightenment by way of attaining Buddhahood through practicing the *pāramitās* (perfections), but he chooses to postpone his enlightenment and stay in this world to save all sentient beings. This represents the different ideas of a bodhisattva's characteristics between both schools. In fact, doctrine is the same since it is based on the Buddha's teaching but differences were created by the Theravāda and Mahāyāna schools. The way of a Bodhisattva attaining Buddhahood is to perfectly fulfill the *pāramitās* (perfections).

Keywords: Bodhisattva, characteristics, *pāramitās*, Theravāda, Mahāyāna

INTRODUCTION

The Bodhisattva¹ doctrine is the grounded doctrine of Mahāyāna Buddhism. A bodhisattva practices the *pāramitās*² (perfections) as the way to attain Buddhahood by cultivating goodness to others without selfishness. The Bodhisattva idea is an ethical system that is the highest moral discipline and intellect in Buddhism which give the greatest happiness to all beings.

In Theravāda Buddhism, Bodhisattvas are presented in previous lives of the Gotama Buddha before attaining enlightenment. Meanwhile, Mahāyāna went on developing the Bodhisattva concept in such a way that Bodhisattva became a kind of object of devotion. Mahāyāna Buddhism encourages everyone to enter the Bodhisattva path because the belief that everyone has Buddha-nature and can become a Buddha.

This article aims to find the different ideas of the Bodhisattva's characteristics in the Theravāda and Mahāyāna tradition. Bodhisattva is an unenlightened being in Gotama Buddha's past life in the Theravāda tradition; meanwhile, Mahāyāna Buddhism says that the Bodhisattva is a celestial being or Bodhi-being. The characteristics of a Bodhisattva in both schools are obviously different. Emphasized here is an attempt to find the reason behind the different characteristics from both schools. In this sense, both Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism seem to be addressing the same purpose but from different points of view.

THERAVĀDA BHODHISATTAVA CHARACTERISTICS

Investigating the bodhisattva's characteristics of the Theravāda tradition illuminates different types of Bodhisattva that are depicted in the Nikāyas. These can be broadly summarized into two usages: (a) one is the Bodhisattva referring to the state before the attainment of Enlightenment in the life of Gotama Buddha; (b) the other is the Bodhisattva used as a generic term referring to previous existences of any Buddha in the past.

¹ Bodhisattva (Skt.) or bodhisatta (Pāli) consist of two words: *bodhi+satta/sattva*; *bodhi* means “awakening” or “enlightenment”; *satta/sattva* means “sentient being” or “attached to”; bodhisattva means being attached to awakening.

²Ten perfections of Theravāda tradition: generosity, virtue, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, determination, loving kindness, equanimity.

Six perfections of Mahāyāna tradition: generosity, virtue, patience, energy, concentration, wisdom.

Bodhisattva in Canonical Literature

Bodhisattva in the Pāli Canon refers to Prince Siddhārtha prior to his enlightenment, in the period during which he was working towards his own liberation as well as his past lives. The Bodhisattva known as Siddhārtha left from Tusita heaven: “having deceased from the Tusita group, enter his mother’s womb.”³

Birth of Bodhisattva Gotama:

The moment, Ānanda, the bodhisattva has come to birth,... he takes seven strides, he scans all the world and utters as with the voice of a bull: “I am chief in the world, I am best in the world. This is the last birth, there is not now again-becoming.”⁴

The next of story of the Bodhisattvava Gotama discusses his renunciation up to the time of his Enlightenment:

Before awakenig, while I was still only the Bodhisattva, not fully awakened, being liable to birth because of self, sought what was like wise liable to birth, being liable to ageing because of self, ... disease ...to dying...to sorrow because of self.⁵

The Bodhisattva’s utterance that this is his last birth:

The utmost security from the bonds-nibbāna-won the stainless. Knowledge and vision arose: unshakable is freedom for us, this is the last birth, there is not now again-becoming.⁶

The stories previous Buddhas of the past are recited continually from the Buddha throughout the Sutta Pitaka. Mahāpadāna Sutta refers to seven former Buddhas; there stories iare similar to that of Gautama Buddha.

³I.B. Horner (tr.), **The collection of the Middle Length Sayings** (Majjhimanikāya), vol III, (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1993), p. 165.

⁴*Ibid.* p. 160.

⁵*Ibid.* p. 207.

⁶*Ibid.* p. 217.

They were the Buddha Vipassī, Sikhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Konāgamana and the Buddha Kassapa:

Monks, ninety-one aeons ago the Lord, the Arahant, the fully-enlightened Buddha Vipassī arose in the world. Thirty-one aeons ago the Buddha Sikhī arose; in the same thirty-first aeon before this Lord Buddha Vessabhū arose. And in this present fortunate aeon the Lords Buddhas Kakusandha, Konāgamana and Kassapa arose in the world. And, monks, in this present fortunate aeon I too have now arisen in the world as a fully-enlightened Buddha.⁷

Furthermore, In the Jātakas of the Khuddakanikāya show the stories of the previous births of Gotama Buddha and a fully elaborated doctrine of the Bodhisattva concept according to Theravāda tradition:

The Pāli work, contains 550 Jātaka or Birth-stories, which are arranged in 22 nipātas or books. Each story opens with a preface called the paccuppannavatthu or ‘story of the present’, which relates the particular circumstances in the Buddha’s life which lead him to tell the birth-story and thus reveal some event in the long stories of his previous existences as a bodhisattva or being destined to attain Buddha-ship.⁸

The Jātaka stories come under this category, though it may be later fabrication to connect them with the fulfillment of pāramī in varied forms of existences of the Bodhisattva.⁹

The best example of the Jātakas “gives the Buddha’s previous history both before his last birth, and also during his last existence until he attained the state of a Buddha”.¹⁰ These illustrate varied self-sacrificing acts performed by the Bodhisattva in his previous existences for the benefit of others.

⁷Maurice Walshe (tr.), **The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya**, (Boston: Wisdom Publication, 2012), p. 199.

⁸Robert Chalmers and W.H.D. Rouse (tr.), **The Jātaka**, (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1995), p. xxiii.

⁹M. Winternitz, **History of India Literature**, vol II, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2010), p. 158.

¹⁰Robert Chalmers and W.H.D. Rouse (tr.), *op.cit.*, p. xxv.

In brief, the Bodhisattva's characteristics, as discussed earlier, allow only two possible interpretations: the Bodhisattva as the former existences of Gotama Buddha and previous existences of all Buddhas in the past, present and future. An important point of the Bodhisattva characteristic in Theravāda Buddhism is a being who is unenlightened but intent on enlightenment.

Bodhisattva in the Commentarial Literature

This section details commentaries of the Pāli Cannon such as the *Buddhavaṃsa*, the *Cariyāpiṭaka*, and the *Milindapañhā* which discuss a Bodhisattva's characteristics.

The term Bodhisattva was only used to refer to the Buddha Gotama's life before his enlightenment and his previous lives and the six previous Buddhas.

The number of Buddhas increased in the commentaries to 24:

Every Buddha has been a Bodhisattva up to the time he wins complete Self-Awakening at the root of a Tree. Therefore, every Chronicle in *Buddhavamsa* gives some details of the life of its Buddha both before as well as after his Awakening.¹¹

Eight Buddhas (Dhammadassīn, Siddhattha, Phussa, Vipassīn, Sikkhīn, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, Kassapa) that they turned the Wheel in a *migadāya* (deer sanctuary) and only Gotama is recorded to have turned it in a *migadāya* in an *isipatana* (seers resort).¹²

Another commentary, the *Cariyāpiṭaka*, introduces for the first time in the Pāli tradition the ten *pāramitās* (perfections) that Gotama Bodhisattva was to fulfill for the attainment of Buddhahood:

Buddhavaṃsa and a number of Commentaries, including the *Jātakas* prose, are able to name the ten perfections are outstandingly important for the fulfillment of them all and further practice for fulfilling after he had heard the Buddha's declarations that he would be a Buddha at some future time.¹³

¹¹ I.B. Horner (tr.), **Buddhavaṃsa and Cariyāpiṭaka**, (London: Pali Text Society, 1975), p. xv.

¹² *ibid.*, p. xxii

¹³ I.B. Horner (tr.), The Minor Anthologies of the Pāli Canon Part III: Chronicale of Buddhas (*Buddhavaṃsa*) and Basket of Conduct (*Cariyāpiṭaka*), (London: Pali Text Society, 1975), p. xiv.

These stories are divided into three vaggas or Divisions. The first the perfection of dāna; the second the perfection of sīla; and the third the perfection of nekkhama, the one following with the perfection of resolute, determination, adhiṭṭhāna, the next six with the perfection of truth, sacca, the next two with the perfection of loving kindness, mettā, and the final one with the perfection of equanimity, upekkhā.¹⁴

The Bodhisattva's characteristics found in the Buddhavāmsa and the Cariyāpiṭaka developed the term in its usage of application. The next commentary is the Milindapañhā. Here, the word Bodhisattva is used mainly as a term denoting the former existences of Gotama Buddha. This is a book that describes a dialogue between King Milinda and Venerable Nāgasena about the Buddha's teaching.

Milindapañhā, in its own way, contributes to the concept of Bodhisattva. Some important issues discussed in Milindapañhā, "Gotama Bodhisattva, when he was residing in the Tusita heaven, had eight investigations (virokana) to determine the proper place and time of his descent therefrom."¹⁵ Gotama Bodhisattva had five teachers when he was trying to find nibbāna detail, "before the Awakening, and while he was not yet fully awakened the bodhisattva had these five teachers."¹⁶

The Bodhisattva concept from the Milindapañhā maintains the Canonical usage of the word to mean the previous existence either of Gotama Buddha or of Buddhas in general.

Milindapañhā, on the other hand, places emphasis, more than any other Canonical texts, on the generalization mainly of spiritual aspects of Bodhisattvahood, at the same time, on differences among bodhisattvas, which are of physical and external nature.¹⁷

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.vi.

¹⁵ Bhikkhu Pesala, *The Debate of King Milinda: an Abridgement of the Milinda Pañha*, (Malaysia: Inward Path, 2001), p. 193.

¹⁶ I.B. Horner (tr.), **Milinda's Questions**, (London: Pali Text Society, 1975), p. 38.

¹⁷ Toshiichi Endo, **Buddha in Theravāda Buddhism**, (Sri Lanka: Buddhist Cultural Centre, 2002), p. 227.

After all, the term Bodhisattva had been used more in Pāli commentaries of Theravāda tradition. The Bodhisattva ideal illustrated is the Gotama Bodhisattva and other Buddhas on the way to finding enlightenment in the Theravāda tradition. Moreover, the Bodhisattva in Commentarial Literature showing a being finding the way to nibbāna seems to imply anyone can become a Bodhisattva though practicing the ten perfections.

MAHĀYĀNA BHODHISATTAVA CHARACTERISTICS

In this part the Bodhisattva's characteristics in Mahāyāna Buddhism will be shown through the examples of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, and Laity Bodhisattva Vimalakīrti. Following Mahāyāna tradition Bodhisattva are a celestial being, or Bodhi-being who strive for the salvation of all sentient beings.

Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara

Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is a famous Bodhisattva image in some well-known Mahāyāna Suttas, 'karuṇā is said to be embodied in the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.'¹⁸ Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is also referred to as enlightened, 'the enlightening being Avalokiteśvara'.¹⁹ Avalokiteśvara is translated into Chinese as Kuan-yin, Kuan-shih-yin or Kuan-tzu-tzai.

The Universal Gate chapter of the Saddhammapundarika Sutta (Lotus Sutta)²⁰ says that at that time, the Bodhisattva, with inexhaustible intent, asked the Word Honored One, 'why is Avalokiteśvara bodhisattva called Perceiver of the World's sound?' The Buddha said to him that when any living being single-mindedly recites this Bodhisattva's name he will perceive the sound of their voices and they will gain deliverance from their suffering or trials. Moreover, his skill in resources is infinite through it he takes whatever form will help living beings. He manifests as a Buddha, a Bodhisattva, gods, a monk, a nun, a layperson, an asura, even a dragon and so on and speaks Dharma for individuals in

¹⁸ Charles S. Prebish and Damien Keown, **Introducing Buddhism**, (New York: Routledge Published, 2010), p. 105.

¹⁹ Thomas Cleary (tr.), **The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avataṃsaka Sutra**, (London: Shambhala Publications, 1993), p. 1275.

²⁰ Paul Williams, **Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations**, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 234.

their particular needs. Therefore, he possesses all virtues and is especially rich in loving kindness and compassion.

In the Surangama Sutta,²¹ twenty-five Bodhisattvas explain their methods of cultivation by which they accomplished enlightenment. The Buddha praised Avalokiteśvara for having obtained very well the Dharma-door of perfect penetration through contemplation and listening to the sound of the world and said that this Dharma-door was appropriate to being in the Saha world.

Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva trained his sense of hearing and gained a perfect ability that surpasses all others:

Bodhisattva Who Hears the Cries of the World the practice of hearing and contemplating. Based on the wisdom of hearing, the wisdom of contemplating, and the wisdom of practice, he was able to enter samādhi.²²

The Avatamsaka Sutta²³ says that the Bodhisattva has accomplished liberation and developed the great loving kindness and compassion of Dharma-door and ceaselessly teaches living beings to follow this path. He manifests himself everywhere and practice offering kind speech, beneficial conduct, and impartiality, or contemplates sound to save living beings. He takes the vow to liberate living beings from fearfulness, and if anyone recites his name, they will be fearless.

The Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya Sutta (the Heart Sutta)²⁴ describes the experience of the liberation of the Bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteśvara, as a result of insight gained while engaged in deep meditation that awakened the faculty of paññā (wisdom). The insight refers to apprehension of the fundamental emptiness of all phenomena. These phenomena are known as the five aggregates of human existence (*khandhas*): rūpa (material), vedanā (feeling), saññā (perception), sankhārā (coefficients of consciousness), and viññāna

²¹ Hsuan Hua (tr.), **The Shurangama Sutra - Commentary** (San Francisco: Buddhist Text Translation Society, 1996), p. 341.

²² *ibid.*, p. 234.

²³ Thich Tri Tinh (tr.), **Kinh Hoa Nghiem** (The Flower Ornament Sutra), (Sai Gon: Quynh Hoa Printing House, 1965), pp. 445-450.

²⁴ Venerable Dharma Master Lok To (tr.), **The Prajna Paramita** (The Hear Sutra), (Taiwan: The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation, 1998).

(consciousness). Seeing the emptiness of the five aggregates means seeing the absence of duality between material and mind as well as all other dualistic concepts.

The Middle Way according to this Sutta refers to direct knowledge of the nature of Dharma or existence. This nature does not have a permanent shape or image; it is not birth or death; not pure or dirty; and so on.

Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī

Mañjuśrī is a Bodhisattva who is first referred to in early Mahāyāna texts to symbolize the embodiment of *paññā* (wisdom).

The Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara said to Sudhana:

Welcome you who have set out on the incomparable, lofty, inconceivable great vehicle,... you are filled with the energy of great compassion, determined to liberate all sentient beings,... born of the ocean of knowledge of Mañjuśrī.²⁵

The last chapter of the Avataṃsaka Sutta details the pilgrimage of the youth Sudhana taken on at the behest of the Bodhisattva. Sudhana would converse with fifty-two masters in his quest for enlightenment. The penultimate master that Sudhana visits is the Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, “Mañjuśrī, who was together with a great host of transfigured enlightening beings, turned with the gaze of an elephant.”²⁶

In the Vimakakīrti Nirdeśa Sutta only Mañjuśrī, who holds the highest wisdom, can talk Dhamma with lay bodhisattva Vimalakīrti. When asked the how one entered the dhamma door of non-duality Mañjuśrī replied,:

“to know no one teaching, to express nothing, to say nothing, to explain nothing, to announce nothing, to indicate nothing, and to designate nothing- that is the entrance into non-duality.”²⁷

With great wisdom, Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī cut through all dualistic concepts in the Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sutta (Diamond Sutta, named so because wisdom is like a sharp diamond blade that cuts away distracting and delusional thoughts that bind our minds).

²⁵ Thomas Cleary, *op.cit.*, p. 1276.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 1171.

²⁷ Robert A.F. Thurman (tr.), **The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti: A Mahāyāna Scripture**, (London and University Park: Penn State, 1976), p. 77.

Thus, with great wisdom, Bodhisattva, Mañjuśrī was ‘a very important and honored bodhisattva’²⁸ to appear in Mahāyāna Suttas, “Mañjuśrī’s name appears in the titles of many other sutta translated into Chinese by a variety of people.”²⁹ In some Asia countries, such as China, Tibet, Nepal and Japan, Mañjuśrī is depicted as a male Bodhisattva wielding a flaming sword in his right hand, representing the realization of transcendental wisdom which cuts down ignorance and duality.

Bodhisattva Vimalakīrti

A famous laity Buddhist named Vimalakīrti who, despite being engaged in worldly activities through his livelihood as a banker, manages to lead an exemplary life as a Bodhisattva:

There was a rich man name Vimakakirti. Already in the past he had offered alms to immeasurable number of Buddhas,... he observed all the rules of pure conduct laid down for monks, and though he live at home, he felt no attachment to the threefold world. He had wife and children, yet he was at still times chaste in action; he had kin and household attendants, yet he always delighted in withdrawing from them.³⁰

In the Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sutta, the question of Vimalakīrti provides an important inquiry: “how does the Bodhisattva go about entering the gate of non-dualism?”³¹ Thirty-one replies follow, each somewhat more insightful and sophisticated than the preceding, but each lacking in complete understanding.

Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī replied:

All dhamma are without words, without explanations, without purport, without cognition, removed from all questions and answers. In this way one may enter the gate of no-dualism.³²

²⁸ Hrakawa Akira and Paul Groner (tr. and ed.), **A History of Indian Buddhism: From Śākyamuni to Early Mahāyāna**, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsiās Publishers, 1993), p. 291.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 292.

³⁰ Watson Burton (tr.), **The Vimakīrti Sūtra**, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsiās Publishers, 2008), pp. 32-33.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 104.

³² *ibid.*, p. 110.

Mañjuśrī then requests Vimalakīrti's answer to his own question. At the time Vimalakīrti remained silent and did not speak a word. Mañjuśrī sighed and said: 'excellent, excellent! Not a word, not a syllable- this is the true way to enter the gate of non-dualism!'³³ The conversation between Mañjuśrī and laity Buddhist Vimalakīrti was done with the highest of wisdom. This Sutta remains one of the most famous and influential works of the Mahāyāna texts, Paul Groner comments, 'the lay Bodhisattva in Mahāyāna Buddhism played an influential role'.³⁴

To sum up the Bodhisattva's characters appear in famous Mahāyāna suttas as Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, Maitreya and laities bodhisattvas; they are celestial beings or enlightenment beings, Bodhi-beings who bring happiness for sentient beings or choose to postpone release to show others attaining nibbāna.

DIFFERENT IDEAS OF BODHISATTVA CHARACTERISTICS

An investigation of Bodhisattva characteristics in Theravāda and Mahāyāna Buddhism shows the Bodhisattva in Pāli texts refers to former existences of Gotama Buddha before attaining enlightenment and other Buddhas' previous lives in the past. They are unenlightened people who attached to awakening. Meanwhile, Bodhisattvas are enlightened beings as Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī and laity Bodhisattva Vimalakīrti in Mahāyāna Suttas.

Attaining Arahantship in Theravāda Tradition

In Theravāda Buddhism, the Buddha did not teach the Bodhisattva path:

I am perfected in the world,
A teacher supreme am I.³⁵
A Tathāgata, Arahant, fully enlightened one.³⁶

³³ *ibid.*, pp. 110-111.

³⁴ Hirakawa Akira and Paul Groner (tr. and ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 310.

³⁵ M I 171; I.B. Horner (tr.), **The collection of the Middle Length Sayings** (Majjhimanikāya), vol I, (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1995), p. 215.

³⁶ A I 21; F.L. Woodward (tr.), **The Book of the Gradual Sayings** (Anguttaranikāya), vol I, (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1995), p. 14.

The Buddha was an Arahant, and encourage his disciples follow his path to also become Arahants. “The Buddha declares himself first of all to be an arahant. The defining mark of an arahant is the attainment of nibbāna in this present life.”³⁷ The Buddha in Pāli texts is described as a great Arahants who found the way of enlightenment and those who follow his path will get Arahantship. There is an absence of the Bodhisattva path or Bodhisattvahood in Theravāda Buddhism. However, the Bodhisattva concept is firmly rooted in Theravāda Buddhism as one who practices the *pāramitas* (perfections).

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the bodhisattva path is a higher state of Arahantship:

The Bodhisattva concept was broadened in Mahāyāna to include any being (*sattva*) aspiring to enlightenment (*bodhi*). A Bodhisattva is thus a Buddha-to-be, one who walks the path of enlightenment. Any being can become a Bodhisattva. The designation bodhisattva presupposes that one is seeking to bring all others, not just only oneself to enlightenment.³⁸

Anyone can become a Buddha-to-be. This means anyone is a Bodhisattva who cultivates welfare to others without selfness. It is a reason to make the Bodhisattva path the highest goal in Mahāyāna Buddhist.

The Development of Bodhisattva Doctrine

Theravāda Buddhism defines the concept of Bodhisattva as “one whose essence is Enlightenment” or “enlightened knowledge.”³⁹ Another accepted definition is “one who is devoted or attached to bodhi”.⁴⁰ *In the early Buddhism, one can not find the concept of Bodhisattva as a general concept. Nevertheless, the Pāli Canon gives the characteristics of Bodhisattva Gotama’s former lifes as an unenlightened one aiming towards enlightenment. Later works like the Buddhavamsa, Cariyapitaka, and other Pāli commentaries recited his life and other Buddhas in the past practice fulfill perfections.*

³⁷ Bhikkhu Bodhi, **Arahants, Buddha and Bodhisattva**, Bhikkhu Nyanatusita himi (ed.), **The Bodhisattva Ideal: Essays on the Emergence of Mahāyāna**, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2013), p. 5.

³⁸ Kogen Muzuno, **Essentials of Buddhism**, (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 1996), p. 26.

³⁹ G.P Malalasekera, **Encyclopedia of Buddhism**, vol III, (Sri Lanka: the Government of Ceylon, 1971), p. 224.

⁴⁰ Har Dayal, **The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature**, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1932), p. 7.

In the Mahāyāna Buddhist period, the concept of the Bodhisattva path was completed. Mahāyānists created great Bodhisattvas who chose to postpone release to work for the welfare of others like Avalokiteśvara, called Perceiver of the Word's sound, who listened to suffering from sentient beings.

Mahāyānists believe that “everyone has a Buddha mind or Buddha nature and can become a Buddha by following the Bodhisattva path.”⁴¹ The Lotus Sutta says to ‘Never Despise’ and to revere the Buddha-nature in others. Whenever the Buddhs saw someone else, he was in the habit of saying: “I do not despise you, for you will become a Buddha.”⁴² Depending on the Buddha-nature doctrine confirms anyone is a Bodhisattva and can become Buddha-to-be.

In brief, the Bodhisattva doctrine was originated in the Pāli Nikāyas and developed gradually. Therefore, it would be a mistake to assume that the concept of Bodhisattva was a sole creation of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Bodhisattva path is motivated by the wish to attain full enlightenment for the sake of others; he makes vows and keeps them by practicing the perfections.

The Relation of Bodhisattva Path and Arahantship

In Theravāda tradition, the Arahant is considered as a person who acts not based on his individual needs but for the needs of others. An “Arahant has transcended individual constrains of the personality such as greed, hatred, and delusion; he clearly displays a radically different behavior from a mundane person.”⁴³

The Buddha emphasizes that each person is ultimately responsible for his or her own destiny, that no one can purify another or rescues\ another from the miseries of samsara. This includes an altruistic dimension that distinguishes Buddhism from most other religious systems. The Buddha encourages his disciples to go forth and preach the Dhamma out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of devas and human being. While the content of the Buddha enlightenment, according to the Nikāya Suttas, does not

⁴¹ Galmangoda Sumanapala, *Buddhist Social Philosophy and Ethics*, (Sri Lanka: Samadhi Buddhist Society, 2006), p. 84.

⁴² W.E. Soothill, *The Lotus of the Wonderful Law*, (United Kingdom: Curzon Press, 1994), p. 226.

⁴³ Raluwe Padmasiri, *Desire: Comparative Study in Lenivasion Concept of Desire and Buddhist Concept of Desire*, (Singapore: National University of Singapore, 2009), p. ii.

qualitatively differ from that of other arahant, the Buddha did refer to himself as the “one person whose birth into the world is for the welfare of many folk, for the happiness of many folk: welfare and happiness of devas and mankind.”⁴⁴

Likewise Mahāyāna Buddhism says that a Bodhisattva’s every action is motivated by the wish to attaining fulfill enlightenment for the sake of others; to filfull this wish he or she takes the Bodhisattva vow and keeps them by practicing the perfections. Both these images of human perfection present a message of Buddhism. With compassion, an Arahant or a Bodhisattva has a desire to help others. First, he strives for liberation, for nibbāna, and then helps others with his skills and his experiences. We never read of a distinction between monks following the path to arahantship and monks on the bodhisattva path. According to all Buddhist traditions, attaining the supreme enlightenment of a Buddha requires forming a deliberate resolution and the fulfillment of the spiritual perfections, *pāramitās*; it is the Bodhisattva who consummates the practice of these perfections.

Table of Different Ideas of the Bodhisattva’s Characters

Viewpoints	Theravāda Buddhism	Mahāyāna Buddhism
1. Attaining Arahantship	A highest goal	Selfishness
2. Development of Bodhisattva Doctrine	Noteless emphasizing	A highest stage and development
3. Relation of Bodhisattva path and Arahantship	Brings the welfare and goods for others	Cultives compassion and loving kindness

CONCLUSION

The sole objective of a Bodhisattva is to serve all beings. The virtues that one cultivates are aimed at doing good for others without selfishness. On this basis, we can evaluate the Bodhisattva ideas as well as the ethical system related to it as the highest

⁴⁴ A I 21; F.L. Woodward (tr.), **The Book of the Gradual Sayings** (Anguttaranikāya), vol I, (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1995), p. 15.

moral discipline in Buddhism which gives the greatest happiness to all beings in the world. The different ideas of the Bodhisattva as an unenlightened one, Gotama Bodhisattva in Theravāda tradition and Bodhisattvas in Mahāyāna Buddhism both state that the Bodhisattva is a celestial being or Bodhi-being. This article has explained the reasons behind the difference of Bodhisattva's characteristics between both schools. The path of enlightenment in Theravāda Buddhism towards Arahantship, which the Buddha required his disciples practice, is quite different from the Bodhisattva path or Bodhisattvahood. The Bodhisattva doctrine was originated and gradually developed in Theravāda period and completed in Mahāyāna period. All of these paths show the way of attaining enlightenment. Likewise, Arahant or Bodhisattva cultivates loving kindness and compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of all. It is the basis of the Buddha's teaching.

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