

HĪNAYĀNA AND MAHĀYĀNA

A BROAD OUTLINE

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About a century after Buddha's Mahāparinibbāna, dissension arose among the monks regarding his actual words and their interpretation. This controversy led to the origin and growth of more than eighteen schools of thought, all claiming to have preserved Buddha's teachings. They took up the cause of Buddhism with great zeal and endeavoured hard to popularise it in the territories in and outside India. E. Conze observes, "The first five centuries of Buddhist history saw the development of a number of schools, or sects, which are traditionally counted as eighteen. The historical traditions about them are uncertain, contradictory and confused¹". André Bareau has, however, discussed chronologically the origin of these different schools². Lamotte³ has also dealt with the geographical distribution of the different schools on the basis of the inscriptions.

The first dissension was created by the monks of Vaisālī through their breach of the rules of discipline as laid down in the Vinayapitaka. The Cullavagga and the Ceylonese chronicles record that the Second Buddhist Council was held at Vaisali just a century after the passing away of Buddha to examine the validity of the ten practices (dasa vatthuni)⁴ indulged in by the Vajjian monks. The works of Vasumitra, Bhavya and Vinitadeva, extant in Tibetan and Chinese translations provide us with a quite different account. According to them the Council is said to have been convened, because of the differences of opinion among the monks in regard to the five dogmas⁵ propounded by Mahādeva a man of great learning and wisdom".

Traditions differ in regard to the cause of convening of the Second Council. But all the accounts record unanimously that a schism occurred about a century after the Mahāparinibbāna of Buddha, due to the efforts of a few monks for a relaxation of the vigour of conduct current at the time; the orthodox monks were not ready to allow that. The orthodox points of view prevailed and the monks opposed to them were expelled from the Sangha. They were not, however, disappointed. They gained strength gradually and convened shortly another Council in which ten thousand monks participated. In the history of Buddhism it is known as Mahāsaṅgīti (Great Council). The monks who joined the Council later on were called the Mahāsaṅghikas, while the orthodox monks were distinguished as the Theravādins. Thus occurred the first schism which divided the early Buddhist Saṅgha into

two primitive schools - the Theravāda and the Mahāsaṅghika. Undoubtedly this Council marked the evolution of new schools in Indian Buddhism.

It would be quite pertinent in this context to point out that this schism was followed by a series of schisms, and in course of time several sub-sects branched off from these two sects. The Theravāda was split up into ten sub-sects and the Mahāsaṅghika into seven. These appeared one after another in close succession within three or four hundred years after Buddha's *Mahāparinirvāna*. But these different sects could not maintain their individual existences for long. Most of them either disappeared or merged with other sects shortly after their origin, only four schools survived. The four schools that could outline and expand their own field of influence were the Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, Mādhyamika and Yogācāra. In course of time these four schools, however, coalesced together gradually and their philosophical views were formulated into two schools - Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna.

Buddhism today has two main sects well-known as Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna. The former prevails in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Burma (Myanmar), Thailand (Siam), Cambodia and other countries, the latter in Tibet, Nepal, China, Japan and others. The epithet Hīnayāna has been given to the Theravāda Buddhism by the Mahāyānists. The Theravādins never call themselves Hīnayānists. Asanga's *Sutrālaṅkāra* mentions the points of difference between the Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna and indicates that it attempts to show the inferiority of the Hīnayānists on mental calibre and their unfit ness to comprehend the truth.

The Pali canon (Tipitaka) forms the basis of the Hīnayāna while Mahāyāna has no such three-fold division of the canon. Of the numerous Mahāyāna works, nine books 'so called Nine Dharmas', which are held in great reverence are the most important works of the Mahāyāna school, as they trace the origin and development of Mahāyāna as also point out its fundamental teachings.

The ideal of Mahāyāna is Buddhahood while that of Hīnayāna is Arhatship. The Hīnayānists want their own Nibbāna first as they do not care for others, while the Mahāyānists do not care for their own Nibbana - they strive hard for the emancipation of all beings. Their principal objective is to make beings attain nibbāna in life. Mahāyāna has further inculcated the concept of Bodhisattva which is its another ethical ideal. Bodhisattva means a being who is on the way to Buddhahood (enlightenment) but has not yet obtained it. In order to remove the sufferings of the world a Bodhisattva desires that he should stay as long as the sky and the world exist. He further declares that let him alone experience all the worldly miseries and, let all the beings of the world enjoy happiness owing to the meritorious deeds done by him as a Bodhisattva⁶.

With the development of Bodhicitta (thought of enlightenment) the practice of the six paramitas, the fulfillment of which is compulsory for the Bodhisattva is enjoined upon. As the Bodhisattva practices the paramitas, his mind rises higher in path of spiritual progress and ultimately becomes a Buddha. The Hīnayāna also recognizes stages for the attainment of true knowledge. But the two schools differ in their conception of the highest truth. According to the Hīnayāna it is *pudgalaśūnyatā* (non-existence of soul) while according to the Mahayana it is both *pudgala* and *dharmasūnyatā*/non-existence of soul as also of all things of the world.

Another distinguishing feature of Mahāyāna is its conception of *Trikāya*. Each Buddha has three bodies: (i) *Nirmāṇakāya*, (ii) *Sambhogakāya* and (iii) *Dharmakāya*. *Nirmāṇakāya* is the human body of the Buddha. *Sambhogakāya* is the subtle body of the

Buddha. Dharmakāya is the body made pure by the practice of the Bodhipakṣiya and other dharmas that make a Buddha. It is not a body at all it is simply the 'void', śūnyatā. It can be equated with tathatā, tathāgatagarbha and dharmadhātu.

According to the Hīnayāna the world is in a state of flux but is not unreal. But the Mahāyāna maintains the flux and reality are two contradictory terms and therefore the world is the creation of the mind. In his Vijnaptimātratāsiddhi Vasubandhu has like wise pointedly shown the advocates of Hīnayāna labour under misconceptions, complete eradication of which is the main object of those of the Mahāyāna.

Mahāyāna further lays emphasis on the practice of the four Brahmavihāras, viz, maitri (friendliness), Karuṇā (compassion), muditā (sympathetic joy) and upekṣā (equanimity). Through their practice one attains purity of heart, and it is these Brahmavihāras which made Buddhism also very popular.

Lastly, Mahāyāna is metaphysical and speculative while in Hīnayāna there is no such ground for speculation. Both the sects, however, agree in the fundamentals of Buddhism, viz, the Four Noble Truths, the Noble Eightfold Path, the non-existence of the soul, the gradual stages of the spiritual advancement and the doctrine of Karma. The two are closely related to each other, hence the study of one entails the study of the other.

REFERENCES

1. Edward Conze, Buddhist Thought in India, pl 119.

2. BEFEO, 1956, pp. 16 ff.

3. Historic du Buddhism Indien, p. 578

4. 'They are' :-

- (i) Singilonakappa - the practice of carrying salt in a horn, i.e. storing articles of food.
- (ii) Drangulakappa - the practice of taking meals when the shadow is two fingers broad, i.e. taking meals after midday.
- (iii) Gamantarakappa - the practice of going to an adjacent village and taking meals for the second time.
- (iv) Avasakappa - the observance of the Uposatha ceremonies in various places in the same parish (sīma).
- (v) Anumatikappa - doing deed and obtaining its sanction after wards.
- (vi) Acinnakappa - the customary practices as precedent.
- (vii) Amathitakappa - drinking of butter-milk after meals.
- (viii) Jalogimpatum - drinking of today.
- (ix) Adasakam nisidanam - use of a rug without a fringe.
- (x) Jataruparajatam - acceptance of gold and silver.

5.

- (i) An Arhat may commit a sin under unconscious temptation.
- (ii) One may be an Arhat and not know of it.
- (iii) An Arhat may have doubts on matters of doctrine.
- (iv) One cannot attain Arhatship without the aid of a teacher.
- (v) The noble ways may begin by a shout, that is, one meditating seriously on religion may make such an exclamation as 'How sad ! How sad !' and by so doing attains progress towards perfection - the path is attained by an exclamation of astonishment.

6.

Akasasya sthityavad yavaca jagatah sthitih/
Tavanmama sthityabhuyat jagaddukkhani nighnatah//
Yaikincit jagato dukkham tat sarvam mayi pacyatam/
Bodhisattvasubhāh sarvam jagat sukhitam astu.//