

## **The Evolution of the Concept of the Dharmakaya of Lord Buddha from Theravada to Mahayana**

**Dr. Amartya Kumar Bhattacharya**

BCE (Hons.) ( Jadavpur ), MTech ( Civil ) ( IIT Kharagpur ), PhD ( Civil ) ( IIT Kharagpur ),  
Cert.MTERM ( AIT Bangkok ), CEng(I), FIE, FACCE(I), FISH, FIWRS, FIPHE, FIAH, FAE, MIGS, MIGS  
- Kolkata Chapter, MIGS - Chennai Chapter, MISTE, MAHI, MISCA, MIAHS, MISTAM, MNSFMFP,  
MIIBE, MICI, MIEES, MCITP, MISRS, MISRMTT, MAGGS, MCSI, MIAENG, MMBSI, MBMSM

Chairman and Managing Director,

MultiSpectra Consultants,

23, Biplabi Ambika Chakraborty Sarani,

Kolkata - 700029, West Bengal, INDIA.

E-mail: [dramartyakumar@gmail.com](mailto:dramartyakumar@gmail.com)

Website: <https://multispectraconsultants.com>

Lord Buddha said 'Whoever sees Dependent Origination, he sees the Dhamma; whoever sees the Dhamma, he sees Dependent Origination.' This statement of Lord Buddha, reported by Venerable Sariputta, is found in the Majjhima Nikaya (M1:191) in the Sutta Pitaka of the Pali Tipitaka .

Now, it must be clearly understood that Dependent Origination is fundamental to Lord Buddha's philosophy. Suffering arises dependent on other factors and also ceases dependent on other factors. It is Dependent Origination that makes the extermination of suffering possible. Therefore, it is Dependent Origination that makes Nirvana possible. Thus, Dependent Origination, which meshes well with impermanence which is another key teaching of Lord Buddha, is co-extensive with Dhamma.

The word Dhamma can have more than just one meaning. When written with a lower-case d, dhamma can also mean any element of the universe, that is, Samsara. Every dhamma in Samsara is Dependently Originated and conditioned. In contrast, Nirvana is unconditioned. The word dhammata means the quality or characteristic of a dhamma. The dhammata of all dhammas is that every dhamma in the universe, Samsara, is Dependently Originated and conditioned. The word dhammata is a neutral word - it does not make any assertion as to whether a dhamma is empty or not. The moment one says that the dhammata of a dhamma is emptiness, as does Mahayana, one is making a definite commitment as regards the dhammata of a dhamma.

In Theravada, the Rupakaya of Lord Buddha refers to Lord Buddha's physical body while the Dhammakaya of Lord Buddha refers to the body, or corpus, of Lord Buddha's teachings. Neither carry any metaphysical connotation.

The statement of Lord Buddha discussed above, together with another statement of his (S3:120) made in a totally different situation 'Whoever sees the Dhamma, sees me; whoever sees me, sees the Dhamma', are combined in the Mahayana Shalistambha Sutra where Venerable Sariputta asks the meaning of the combined statement to Bodhisattva Maitreya. Excerpts from the Shalistambha

Sutra are given below which make it clear that Mahayana converted the Dharmakaya of Lord Buddha into an all-pervading metaphysical entity. Similar concepts are found in other Mahayana Sutras like the Shrimala Sutra. Before discussing the Mahayana concept of Dharmakaya, which may be considered to be a form of mysticism, let us look at portions of the Shalistambha Sutra below.

#### Portions of the Shalistambha Sutra

Thus have I heard: [At one time,] the Lord was staying at Rajagriha on Vulture Peak Mountain with a large company of monks, 1,250 monks, and many Bodhisattvas-mahasattvas. At that time, the Venerable Sariputra approached the place frequented by Maitreya Bodhisattva-mahasattva. When he approached, they exchanged many kinds of good and joyful words, and sat down together on a flat stone.]

[Then] the Venerable Sariputra spoke thus to Maitreya Bodhisattva-mahasattva: "Maitreya, here, today, the Lord,] looking upon a stalk of rice, spoke this aphorism to the monks: 'Whoever, monks, sees conditioned arising sees Dharma, and whoever sees Dharma sees the Buddha.' Having said this the Lord became silent. What [Maitreya,] is the meaning of the aphorism spoken by the Lord? What is conditioned arising? What is Dharma? What is the Buddha? How is it that seeing conditioned arising one sees Dharma? [How is it that seeing Dharma one sees the Buddha

When this was said, Maitreya Bodhisattva-mahasattva spoke thus to the Venerable Sariputra: [Reverend Sariputra,] regarding what was said by the Lord, the master of Dharma, the omniscient: "He monks who sees conditioned arising, sees Dharma, and he who sees Dharma, sees the Buddha; " Therein, . what is conditioned arising? [The "phrase conditioned" means: this being, that occurs; from the arising of this, that arises]. That is to say: Ignorance conditions (mental) formations. (Mental) formations condition consciousness. Consciousness conditions name and form. Name-and-form conditions the six(sense) entrances. The six entrances condition contact. Contact conditions sensation. Sensation conditions desire. Desire conditions grasping. Grasping conditions becoming. Becoming conditions birth. Birth conditions decay and death, and grief, lamentation, suffering, depression and anxiety [arise. Thus the arising of this entire great mass of suffering occurs.]

Similarly, from the cessation of ignorance there is the cessation of (mental) formations. From the cessation of (mental) formations there is the cessation of consciousness. From the cessation of consciousness there is the cessation of name and-form. From the cessation of name-and-form there is the cessation of the six(sense) entrances. From the cessation of the six(sense) entrances there is the cessation of contact. From the cessation of contact there is the cessation of sensation. From the cessation of sensation there is the cessation of desire. From the cessation of desire there is the cessation of grasping. From the cessation of grasping there is the cessation of becoming. From the cessation of becoming there is the cessation of birth. From the cessation of birth, decay and death, grief, lamentation, suffering, depression and anxiety] cease. Thus is the cessation of this entire great mass of suffering. This is called "conditioned arising" [by the Lord]

What is Dharma? It is the Noble Eightfold Path namely right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. This Noble Eightfold Path, the attainment of (its) fruit(s) and Nirvana rolled into one is called Dharma by the Lord.

What, then is the Buddha, the Lord? He who, because he comprehends all dharmas, is called the Buddha, is endowed with the wisdom-eye and the Dharma-body. He sees the dharmas of both the learner and the learned.

How, then, does one see conditioned arising? In this connection, it is said by the Lord: "Whoever sees-this conditioned arising (which is), always and ever devoid of soul, truly undistorted, without soul, unborn, not become, not made, not compounded, unobstructed, inconceivable, glorious, fearless, ungraspable, inexhaustible and by nature never stilled,(he sees Dharma). And whoever sees Dharma (which is) also always and ever devoid of soul... and by nature never stilled, he sees the unsurpassable Dharma-body, the Buddha, by exertion based on right knowledge in clear understanding of the noble Dharma

Why is it called conditioned arising? It is causal and conditional, not non-causal and non-conditional, [Therefore it is called conditioned arising.]

In this connection, the characteristics of conditioned arising are given in briefly the Lord:] "Results (come about by) specific conditionality.' Whether or not Tathagatas arise, constant is this Dharma-nature, the constancy of Dharma, the law of Dharma, suchness. true suchness, changeless suchness, actuality, truth, (reality,)\* undistorted and immutable

Furthermore, this conditioned arising arises from two(principles). From what two (principles does it arise)? From a causal relation and a conditional relation. Moreover, it should be seen as two-fold: objective and subjective.

What, then, is the causal relation in objective conditioned arising? It is as when a sprout comes from a seed, from the sprout a leaf, from the leaf a shoot, from the shoot a stalk, from the stalk (a swelling, from the swelling)\*a bud, from the bud (a calyx, from the calyx) a flower, and from the flower a fruit. When there is no seed, a sprout does not occur, and so on until: when there is no flower,a fruit does not occur. But when there is a seed, the development of a sprout occurs, and soon until: when there is a flower, the development of a fruit occurs. It does not occur to the seed, "I cause the sprout to develop." Nor does it occur to the sprout, "I am developed by the seed", and soon until: it does not occur to the flower, "I cause the fruit to develop". Nor does it occur to the fruit, "I am developed by the flower". But still, when there is a seed, the development, the manifestation of the sprout occurs, and so on until: when there is a flower, the development, the manifestation of the fruit occurs. Thus is the causal relation in objective conditioned arising to be seen.

How is the conditional relation in objective conditioned arising to be seen? As the coming together of six factors. As the coming together of what six factors? Namely, as the coming together

of the earth, water, heat, wind, space and season factors is the conditional relation in objective conditioned arising to be seen.

There in, the earth-factor performs the function of supporting the seed. The water-factor waters the seed. The heat-factor matures the seed. The wind-factor brings out the seed. The space-factor performs the function of not obstructing the seed. Season performs the function of transforming the seed. Without these conditions, the development of the sprout from the seed does not occur. But when the objective earth-factor is not deficient, and likewise the water, heat, wind, space and season factors are not deficient, then from the coming together of all these, when the seed is ceasing the development of the sprout occurs.

It does not occur to the earth-factor, "I perform the function of supporting the seed", and so on until: it does not occur to season, "I perform the function of transforming the seed". Nor does it occur to the sprout, "I am born by way of these conditions", But still, when there are these conditions, when the seed is ceasing the development of the sprout occurs. And this sprout is not self made, not made by another, not made by both, not made by god, not transformed by time, not derived from prakriti, not founded upon a single principle, (yet not arisen without cause). From the coming together of the earth, water, heat, wind, space and season factors, when the seed is ceasing the development of the sprout occurs. Thus is the conditional relation in objective conditioned arising to be seen.

Therein objective conditioned arising is to be seen according to five principles. What five? Not as eternity, not as annihilation, not as transmigration (of any essence), as the development of a large fruit from a small cause, and as (a result) bound to be similar to that (its cause)

How is it (to be seen) as "not eternity"? Because the sprout is one (thing) and the seed another. That which is the seed is not the sprout. But still, the seed ceases, and the sprout arises. Therefore eternity is not (the case)

How is it (to be seen) as "not annihilation"? Not from the previous cessation of the seed does the sprout issue forth, nor indeed without the cessation of the seed. But still the seed ceases, and at just that time the sprout arises, like the beam of a scale rocking to and fro. Therefore annihilation is not (the case),

How is it (to be seen) as "not transmigration"? The seed and sprout are dissimilar. Therefore transmigration is not (the case).

How is it (to be seen) as the development of a large fruit from a small cause? "A small seed is sown and it causes a large fruit to develop. "Therefore it is (to be seen) as the development of a large fruit from a small cause.

How is it (to be seen) as (a result) bound to be similar to that (its cause)? "Whatever type of seed is sown, it causes that type of fruit to develop." Therefore it is (to be seen) as (a result) bound to

be similar to that (its cause). Thus is objective conditioned arising to be seen according to five principles.

Thus subjective conditioned arising also arises from two principles. From what two? From a causal relation and a conditional relation.

What, then, is the causal relation in subjective conditioned arising? It is as follows: Ignorance conditions (mental) formations. (Mental) formations condition consciousness. Consciousness conditions name-and form. Name-and-form conditions the six (sense) entrances. The six (sense) entrances condition contact. Contact conditions sensation. Sensation conditions desire. Desire conditions grasping. Grasping conditions becoming. Becoming conditions birth. Birth conditions decay and death, and grief, lamentation, suffering, depression and anxiety come to be. Thus the arising of this entire great mass of suffering occurs. Were there no ignorance, (mental) formations would not be known, and so on until: were there no birth, decay and death would not be known. But when there is ignorance, the development of (mental) formations occurs, and so on until when there is birth, the development of decay and death occurs. Herein, it does not occur to ignorance, "I cause the (mental) formations to develop". Nor does it occur to the (mental) formations, "We are developed by ignorance", and so on until: it does not occur to birth, "I develop decay and death" Nor does it occur to decay and death, "I am developed by birth". But still, when there is ignorance, the development, the manifestation of (mental) formations occurs, and so on until: when there is birth, the development, the manifestation of decay and death occurs. Thus is the causal relation in subjective conditioned arising to be seen

How is the conditional relation in subjective conditioned arising to be seen? As due to the coming together of six factors. As due to the coming together of what six factors? Namely as due to the coming together of the earth, water, heat, wind, space and consciousness factors is the conditional relation in subjective conditioned arising to be seen.

There in, what is the earth-factor in subjective conditioned arising? That which, by conglomeration, causes the solid nature of the body to develop, is called the earth-factor. That which performs the cohesion-function of the body is called the water factor. That which digests what is eaten, drunk or consumed for the body is called the heat-factor. That which performs the body's function of inhalation and exhalation is called the wind-factor. That which causes hollowness to develop inside the body is called the space-factor. That which causes name and-form to develop (mutually supported) like reeds in a sheaf is called the consciousness factor, associated with the five consciousness bodies and defiled mind consciousness. Without these conditions, the arising of the body does not occur. But if the subjective earth-factor is not deficient, and likewise the water, heat, wind, space and consciousness factors are not deficient, then, because of all these factors coming together, the arising of the body occurs

Therein, it does not occur to the earth-factor, "I cause the solid nature of the body to develop". Nor does it occur to the water-factor, "I perform the cohesion function of the body". Nor does it occur to the heat factor, "I digest what is eaten, drunk or consumed for the body", Nor does it occur to the wind-factor, "I perform the body's function of inhalation and exhalation". Nor does it occur to

the space-factor, "I cause hollowness to develop inside the body". Nor does it occur to the consciousness-factor, "I cause the body to develop". Nor does it occur to the body, "I am born by way of these conditions". But still, when there are these conditions, because of their coming together, the arising of the body occurs.

There in, the earth-factor is not self, not a being, not a soul, not a creature, not human, not a person, not female, not male, not neuter not "I", not "mine", and not any other's. Likewise the water-factor heat-factor, wind-factor, space-factor, and consciousness-factor are not self, not a being, not a soul, not a creature, not human, not a person, not female, not male, not neuter, not "I", not "mine", and not any other's

There in, what is ignorance? That which perceives these same six factors as a unit, as a lump, as permanent, as constant, as eternal, as pleasant, as self, as a being, a soul, a person, a human, a man, as making "I" or making "mine" and so on into manifold misapprehension, that is called ignorance. When there is this ignorance, greed, hatred and delusion develop in (relation to) the (sense) spheres. Greed, hatred and delusion in (relation to) the (sense) spheres are called (mental) formations. The discrete appearance of objects is consciousness. The four non-material grasping-aggregates which arise together with consciousness are name. (Name) together with the four great elements and derived matter is name and-form. The (sense) faculties connected with name-and-form are the six(sense) entrances. The conjunction of three things is contact. The experience of contact is sensation. Clinging to sensation is desire. The expansion of desire is grasping. Action, born out of grasping and giving rise to rebirth, is becoming. The manifestation of the aggregates caused by becoming is birth. The maturing of the born aggregates is decay. The perishing of the worn out aggregates is death. The internal burning of the deluded, attached, dying (person) is grief. Giving vent to grief is lamentation. The experience of unpleasantness associated with the five consciousness bodies is suffering. Mental suffering associated with the mind is depression. And whatever other subtle defilements there are of this sort are anxiety.

It is called ignorance in the sense of making a great blindness, (mental) formations in the sense of formation, consciousness in the sense of causing know, name and-form in the sense of mutual support, six (sense) entrances in the sense of entrance doors, (sensual) contact in the sense of contacting, feelings in the sense of experiencing, desire in the sense of thirsting, grasping in the sense of grasping, becoming in the sense of giving birth to repeated becoming, birth in the sense of manifestation of the aggregates, decay in the sense of maturing of the aggregates, death in the sense of perishing, grief in the sense of grieving, lamentation In the sense of verbal lamentation, suffering in the sense of bodily torment, depression in the sense of mental torment, anxiety in the sense of subtle defilement.

Otherwise, not arriving at reality, arriving at falsehood, misapprehension is ignorance. Thus when there is ignorance, the three-fold (mental) formations develop: leading to advantage leading to disadvantage, and leading to stability." (As a result) of the (mental) formations leading to advantage, advantageous consciousness occurs. (As a result) of the (mental) formations leading to disadvantage, disadvantageous consciousness occurs. (As a result) of the (mental) formations leading to stability, stable consciousness occurs. This is called consciousness conditioned by

(mental) formations. As for consciousness-conditioned name-and-form, the four non-material aggregates, sensations etc., cause bending into existence here and there, and so are called name. (This) name, which accompanies form, plus form (itself is called name-and-form. By the growth of name-and-form, through the six (sense) entrance doors, activities develop. This is called the six (sense) entrances conditioned by name-and-form. Because of the six (sense) entrances, the six contact bodies develop. This is called contact conditioned by the six (sense) entrances. Whatever type of contact occurs, that type of sensation develops. This is called sensations conditioned by contact. That which, by discriminating those sensations, causes one to relish, that which delights, clings, and clinging remains, that is called desire conditioned by sensations. (Thus) relishing, delighting and clinging, there is non-renunciation, the repeated wish: “may these dear forms, delightful forms not be separated from me . This is called grasping conditioned by desire. This wishing causes rebirth producing karma to arise by means of body, speech and mind. This is called becoming conditioned by grasping. The development of the aggregates born (as a result) of that karma is called birth conditioned by becoming. Due to increase and maturity, the perishing of the aggregates developed by birth occurs. This is called decay and death conditioned by birth.

Thus, this twelve-fold conditioned arising with interdependence of causes and interdependence of conditions, not impermanent, not permanent, not compounded, not uncompounded, not without cause, not without condition not an experiencer, not a destructible thing, not a ceasing thing, not a perishable thing, not proceeding from primordial time, not cut off, rolls along like a flowing stream.

As this conditioned arising, not cut off, rolls along like a flowing stream, four limbs of this twelve-fold conditioned arising develop through (the process causality for (performing) the action of assembling. What four? Namely: ignorance, desire, karma and consciousness

Therein, consciousness is a cause by being of the nature of a seed. Karma is a cause by being of the nature of a field. Ignorance and desire are a cause by being of the nature of defilement. Karma-defilements cause the consciousness-seed to be born. Therein, karma performs the function of being the field of the consciousness-seed. Desire waters the consciousness-seed. Ignorance scatters the consciousness-seed. Without these conditions, the development of the consciousness-seed does not occur.

Therein, it does not occur to karma, “I perform the function of being the field of the consciousness-seed.” It does not occur to desire, “I water the consciousness-seed.” It does not occur to ignorance, “I scatter the consciousness-seed.” Nor does it occur to the consciousness-seed, “I am born by (way these conditions)”

And so, the consciousness-seed grows, standing in the karma-field, .....

Furthermore, eye-consciousness arises by way of five principles. What five? Namely, conditioned by eye, form, light, space, and appropriate attention, eye-consciousness arises. Therein, the eye performs the function of being the basis of eye-consciousness. Form performs the function of being the object. Light performs the function of illumination. Space performs the function of

uncovering. Appropriate attention performs the function of reflection. Without these conditions, eye-consciousness does not arise. But if the subjective eye-entrance is not deficient and form, light, space and appropriate attention are not deficient then from the conjunction of all these, eye-consciousness arises. Therein, it does not occur to the eye, "I perform the function of being the basis of eye-consciousness". Nor does it occur to form, "I perform the function of being the object of eye-consciousness". Nor does it occur to light, "I perform the function of the illumination of eye-consciousness." Nor does it occur to space, "I perform the uncovering-function of eye-consciousness". Nor does it occur to appropriate attention, "I perform the reflection-function of eye-consciousness". Nor does it occur to eye-consciousness, "I am born by way of these conditions". But still, there being these conditions, the arising of eye-consciousness occurs because of their conjunction. Thus, a corresponding (analysis) of the remaining (sense) faculties should be done.

Therein, there is nothing whatsoever that transmigrates from this world to another world. There is (only) the appearance of the fruit of karma, because of the non-deficiency of causes and conditions. It is, monks, like the reflection of a face seen in a well-polished mirror. No face transmigrates into the mirror, but there is the appearance of a face because of the non-deficiency of causes and conditions. Thus there is nothing departed from this world, nor arisen elsewhere. There is (only) the appearance of the fruit of karma, because of the non-deficiency of causes and conditions.

It is, (monks)\* like the moon-disk which wanders 4,000 leagues above, and yet again the moon's reflection is seen in a small pool of water. It does not depart from its station (in the sky)\* above and transmigrate into the small pool of water, but there is the appearance of the moon-disk, because of the non-deficiency of causes and conditions. Thus, there is nothing departed from this world, nor arisen elsewhere. (There is (only) the appearance of the fruit of "karma, because of the non-deficiency of causes and conditions")

Just as when there is fuel as a condition, fire burns, (and) if fuel is deficient, it does not burn; ..... Thus is the conditional relation in subjective conditioned arising to be seen.

Furthermore, subjective conditioned arising is to be seen according to five principles. What five? Not as eternity, not as annihilation, not as transmigration, as the development of a large fruit from a small cause, and as (a result) bound to be similar to that (its cause).

How (is it to be seen) as "not eternity"? Because the aggregates on the edge of death are one thing, and the aggregates sharing arising are another. The aggregates on the edge of death are not (identical to) those sharing arising. But still, the aggregates on the edge of death cease, (and) the aggregates sharing arising become manifest. Therefore eternity is not (the case).

How (is it to be seen) as "not annihilation"? The aggregates sharing arising do not become manifest from the previous cessation of the aggregates on the edge of death, nor without this cessation. But still, the aggregates on the edge of death cease, and at just that time, the aggregates



sharing arising become manifest, like the beam of a scale rocking to and fro. Therefore, annihilation is not (the case).

How (is it to be seen) as “not transmigration”? Dissimilar species cause birth to develop in a common category of birth. Therefore transmigration is not (the case).

How (is it to be seen) as “the development of a large fruit from a small cause”? A small deed (karma) is done, and a large resultant fruit is experienced. Therefore, “the development of a large fruit from a small cause” is (the case).

How (is it to be seen) as “(an effect) bound to be similar to that (its cause)”, Whatever type of deed (karma) is done, that (same) type of result is experienced. There, (the effect) is bound to be similar to that (its cause). (Thus is subjective conditioned arising to be seen in five ways.)”

Whoever, Venerable Sariputra, with perfect wisdom, sees this conditioned arising, perfectly set forth by the Lord, as it actually is: always and ever without soul, devoid of soul, truly undistorted, unborn, not become, not made, not compounded, unobstructed, unobscured, glorious, fearless, ungraspable, inexhaustable and by nature never stilled, (whoever) sees it well and fully as unreal, as vanity, void, unsubstantial, as a sickness, a boil, a dart, as dangerous, impermanent, suffering, as empty and without self; such a one does not reflect upon the past (thinking): “Was I in the past, or was I not? What was I in the past? How was I in the past?” Nor again does he reflect upon the future (thinking): “Will I be in the future, or will not be? What will be in the future? How will I be in the future?” Nor again does he reflect upon the present (thinking): “What is this? How is this? Being what, what will we become? Where does this being come from? Where will it go when departed from here?”

Whatever dogmas the common world’s ascetics and priests hold, that is to say, (dogmas) related to: belief in self, [belief in a “being”] belief in soul, [belief in a “person”] rites and rituals, these (dogmas) were abandoned at that time, fully recognized (as false), cut of at the root, withered like the plume of a Tal palm, dharmas never to arise or cease (again) in the future.

[Whosoever, Venerable Sariputra, thus endowed with patience in the Dharma, understands conditioned arising perfectly, for him the Tathagata, the Noble One, the perfectly, completely enlightened one, endowed with (perfect) wisdom and conduct, the Wellfarer, knower of (all) worlds, incomparable charioteer of men needing taming, teacher of gods and men, the Buddha, the Lord, predicts unsurpassable perfect, complete enlightenment (saying): “He will become a perfect, complete Buddha.”]

(Then indeed, the Venerable Sariputra, delighted and joyful at the words of Maitreya Bodhisattva-mahasattva, rose from his seat, and the other monks also departed.)\*

[Thus spoke Maitreya Bodhisattva-mahasattva, and the Venerable Sariputra, together with the world of gods, men, titans and sprites, delighted, rejoiced at the words of Maitreya Bodhisattva-mahasattva.]

After making a comment that all Mahayana Sutra were composed by anonymous authors and views expressed in the Mahayana Sutras represent the views of their anonymous authors and that in Mahayana Sutras, words were put in the mouth of Lord Buddha, it is interesting to note the Shalistambha Sutra's strategy of combining two statements made by Lord Buddha in two different contexts (M1:191 and S3:120). Lord Buddha, did indeed utter every single word in M1:191 and S3:120, just not together. The Shalistambha Sutra's strategy of using Buddhavachana with new Mahayana concepts was one of the devices used by Mahayana Sutras to get Mahayana Sutras accepted. Indeed, many Mahayana Sutras, including the Shalistambha Sutra, tend to be hybrid texts, combining established teachings with new innovations.

Mahayana, in its early stage, conceived of Lord Buddha's Rupakaya, that is his physical body, and his Dharmakaya, which is a transcendental entity. Regarding the Dharmakaya of Lord Buddha, the important shift from Theravada lies in the fact that in Theravada, Dharmakaya is the body of Lord Buddha's teachings whereas in Mahayana, Dharmakaya is a transcendental entity which is all-pervading.

Later Mahayana, split the Rupakaya into the Sambhogakaya which is how Lord Buddha appears before high-level Bodhisattvas and the Nirmanakaya which is Lord Buddha's physical body. The Trikaya concept, that is the Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya, became standard in much of Mahayana. The Vajrayana School of Mahayana Buddhism introduced the Mahasukhakaya in addition to the Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya and Nirmanakaya.

The Shrimala Sutra is another early Mahayana Sutra which talks about the Dharmakaya. The Shrimala Sutra is quoted by the later Lankavatara Sutra and the Mahayana Sutralankara Bhashya. The Shrimala Sutra is also one of the earliest Mahayana Sutras to talk about the Tathagatagarbha. The Shrimala Sutra mentions that the Dharmakaya of Lord Buddha has the Perfection of Permanence (Nitya-paramita), the Perfection of Pleasure (Sukha-paramita), the Perfection of Self (Atma-paramita) and the Perfection of Purity (Vishuddhi-paramita).

The Tathagatagarbha is present in every man and it is simply the potential of every man to become a Buddha. Whether a man actualises his potential is another matter altogether. The Lankavatara Sutra equates the Tathagatagarbha with the Alaya-vigyana, that is, with the Store-consciousness. If we consider the Mahayana Sutralankara and its Bhashya as a corpus, Asanga and Vasubandhu equate the Alaya-vigyana with the Chitta, that is, with the mind. At this point, it is perhaps not out of the context to mention that the Mahayana texts are not entirely consistent regarding matters such as the Tathagatagarbha and the Alaya-vigyana. For example, the Shrimala Sutra and the treatise Ratnagotravibhaga, which cites the Shrimala Sutra, discuss the Tathagatagarbha without ever mentioning the Alaya-vigyana whereas, as mentioned before, the Lankavatara Sutra equates the Tathagatagarbha with the Alaya-vigyana. In the Fo Xing Lun, or Buddha Nature Treatise, Buddha-nature is considered to be present in every man. The Sanskrit translation is Buddha-dhatu, which does not appear in any ancient Indian Buddhist text, but is more or less the same as Tathagatagarbha. So, the end position is that the Chitta is the Alaya-vigyana which is the Tathagatagarbha which is the Buddha-dhatu. It is only the wise man who is

aware of the fact that his mind has the potential to become enlightened and the ignorant man does not even know what enlightenment means, let alone, know that his mind has the potential to become enlightened.

Fundamental to these concepts is the fact that any man can transform his state of mind from one of ignorance to one of wisdom if he walks on the right path which is the Noble Eightfold Path taught by Lord Buddha. Mahayana talks about the Bodhisattva way where the Bodhisattva practices six or ten perfections or Paramitas. According to the Dashabhumika Sutra, the first six Paramitas that a Bodhisattva should perform, corresponding to six Bodhisattva stages or Bhumis ( there are ten Bhumis in all ), are Dana (charity), Shila (morality), Kshanti (forbearance), Virya (courage or vigour, depending on the context), Dhyana (meditation) and Pragya (wisdom).

Vajrayana correlated the Dharmakaya, the Sambhogakaya, the Nirmanakaya and the Mahasukhakaya to four Chakras or wheels in a man's body. According to this schema, the Dharmachakra is situated at the level of the heart. The aim of this schema is to give to a man focus points for meditation.

Lord Buddha emphasised proof and he discarded anything like a Hindu Brahman and Hindu Atman which cannot be proved. But the Dharmakaya of Lord Buddha, as it is present in Mahayana, cannot be proved. Neither did Lord Buddha ever say that he has a transcendental Dharmakaya. Therefore, it is all right to say that the adoption of a transcendental Dharmakaya by Mahayana is a form of mysticism.

What should be the hermeneutics of the Dharmakaya of Lord Buddha? To a Buddhist religious practitioner, the concept of the Dharmakaya of Lord Buddha may be useful if he is devotionally-oriented or is a bit of a mystic. However, Samatha and Vipassana meditation, according to the Theravada meditation tradition may be practised, and indeed is practised, without taking any refuge in a transcendental Dharmakaya. Of course, in the Theravada tradition also, the Dharmakaya does exist, primarily in terms of books on Dharma, but not in a transcendental sense. Since Lord Buddha is the apex authority for Buddhists, hermeneutics in Theravada is very simple. In Mahayana, things are different. Views expressed in a Mahayana text have to be placed alongside Buddhavachana and whatever contradicts Buddhavachana will have to be discarded.

© Bhattacharya International Buddhist Foundation, 2020.