

**A Comparative Study of the Concept
of Karuṇā in Theravāda and
Mahāyāna**

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Abstract

This thesis entitled "*A Comparative Study of the Concept of Karuṇā in Theravāda and Mahāyāna*" was an attempt to compare and contrast the conceptual and practical aspects of the concept of Karuṇā in Theravāda and Mahāyāna traditions. Although it is a comparative study I have tried my best to explain in detail the concept in both the traditions separately in two parts of the thesis. The concept of *Karuṇā* has been developed theoretically and practically in Theravāda in relation to the path leading to the attainment of Arahantship or Buddhahood without much contextual difference. But in Mahāyāna it has given a prominent place in the Bodhisattva path leading to the attainment of enlightenment. Further, it has been developed in a symbolical way especially in the Buddhist ritualistic culture. Because of this reason I decided to treat the topic first separately in the two traditions so as to clarify its fully-fledged development in the two contexts.

The first part deals with the definitions and interpretations of the concept and it explains the development of Karuṇā with reference to the philosophical and ethical contexts of Theravāda tradition.

The second part while explaining the philosophical and ethical contexts of the concept in Mahāyāna tradition pays much attention to clarify its development with

reference to the concept of Avalokiteśvara which is the great symbol of compassion in Mahāyāna Buddhist culture.

The last chapter elucidates the similarities and dissimilarities of the concept in Theravāda and Mahāyāna and highlights its importance as an ethical aspect which bears a universal characteristic.