

SKEPTICISM OF NĀGĀRJUNA: REVISITED

**THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ARTS
AT JADAVPUR UNIVERSITY, KOLKATA**

By

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2022

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MY RESPECTED TEACHER
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PREFACE

The dream of doing Doctoral Research had been nurtured in the core of my heart for many years. I had Buddhist Philosophy as special paper in my M.A Course and also done M.Phil research in the same field. I gradually developed a deep love for Buddhist philosophy in general and Nāgārjuna's philosophy in particular. So it is quite natural for me to choose to do Doctoral research on the philosophy of Nāgārjuna. Among many other books, the Bengali book entitled *Nāgārjuner Darśan Parikramā* has also increased my interest in Nāgārjunian philosophical views. I am really indebted to this book, written beautifully in lucid manner. As we all know, Buddhism as a religious and philosophical system has gained large scale popularity mainly for its social, moral and humanitarian messages. Even Nāgārjuna, an earlier Buddhist philosopher and true messenger of Buddha, has aptly pointed out the importance of the ethical aspects and tried to show the way to a good life advancing towards greater well-being.

While doing my M.Phil dissertation on Nāgārjuna's *Ratnāvalī* I have found that besides, metaphysical discussions he talked on the social-political and ethical views at length. In *Ratnāvalī* we get to see his positive assertions. In his 'Collection of hymns' we also find that he even praised and paid homage to Buddha. Whereas, in *Vīgrhavyāvartanī* and *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa*, we find the dialectical arguments of Nāgārjuna. He has rejected the *pramāṇa-prameya* dichotomy and has declared that everything is dependently originated and hence *śūnya*(void). Nāgārjuna along with Jayarāśi and Śrīharṣa is well-known as *vaiṭaṇḍikas* in Indian scenario. Jayarāśi Bhaṭṭa considered by many as a Lokāyata thinker is generally regarded as a radical skeptic. Śrīharṣa, an advaitin has used the 'Vaiṭaṇḍā' technique in his *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhāḍya* to nullify the

dualist positions. Prof. B.K. Matilal has termed the *vaitaṇḍikas* as Indian Skeptics. Nāgārjuna is considered as a Cognitive skeptic by Prof. D.K.Mohanta.

Now question arises, how it is possible for a skeptic like Nāgārjuna, who has endorsed doctrine of *śūnyatā*, to discuss about ethical issues and pay homage to Buddha. It is a fact that with acute self-contradiction within, no philosophical system or its advocate can gain popularity or importance. However, Nāgārjuna's philosophy received acceptance not only at his time, but also in recent times. Naturally, to a responsible scholar of Mādhyamika Philosophy, it is a task to establish that there is no inconsistency in the philosophy of Nāgārjuna. This obligation has tempted the researcher to revisit the skepticism of Nāgārjuna and unveil its nature with a view to make it obvious that the inconsistency apprehended is merely an apparent one. Attempt has also been made in this work to show that Nāgārjuna's skeptical approach is not something destructive rather it facilitates the way to ultimate good and well-being.

ABBREVIATIONS FOR CLASSICAL TEXTS

RgV	-	<i>Ṛg Veda</i>
CU	-	<i>Chāndogya Upaniṣad</i>
BU	-	<i>Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad</i>
KU	-	<i>Kaṭha Upaniṣad</i>
MMK	-	<i>Mūlamadhyamaka kārīkā</i>
PHK	-	<i>Pratītyasamutpādayakārīkā</i>
VV	-	<i>Vigrahavyāvartanī</i>
VP	-	<i>Vaidalyaprakaraṇa</i>
KhKh	-	<i>Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhāḍya</i>
AV	-	<i>Aṭṭhakavagga</i>
TUS	-	<i>Tattvopaplavasiṃha</i>
BJS	-	<i>Brahmajāla Sutta</i>
RV	-	<i>Ratnāvalī</i>
SL	-	<i>Suḥṛllekha</i>
CS	-	<i>Catuḥstava</i>
DDhS	-	<i>Dharmadhātustava</i>
PS	-	<i>Paramārthastava</i>
LS	-	<i>Lokāṭītaṣṭava</i>

INTRODUCTION

Skepticism occupies an important position in the field of Philosophy. Prima facie, it appears that Skepticism can have no role in Philosophical arena but it must be admitted that though negatively, skepticism has played a crucial role in development of Philosophical thinking. Question may arise here, what is skepticism? It is easy to raise the question but difficult to answer. Defining skepticism or determining its logical geography is indeed a difficult task. Particularly the term skepticism is used very loosely in our daily life. A person giving up his faith in all accepted norms and courses of action is often termed a skeptic in his society. Etymologically the term skeptic or skepticism is claimed to derive from root word *skeptikos* meaning 'enquirer' or 'investigator'. If the general sense of the word 'skeptic' is taken, then any enquirer or investigator whether philosophers or scientists will be designated as a skeptic. This suggests that the word must be used in a more restricted and stipulated sense. Skepticism is often considered as a critical philosophical attitude, which is opposed to dogmatism. A dogmatist without questioning takes for granted that it is possible to have the proper cognition of a thing through one or more ways of knowing. Skeptic on the other hand, is a person who raises questions in every step. This questioning attitude however may centre round a particular issue or it may be extended to all sorts of knowledge claim. Those who, disbelieve all accepted sources of knowledge like perception, inference, testimony etc. are considered as a philosophical skeptic. A responsible philosophical skeptic does not cast doubt only for the sake of doubt, what a cynic does rather he is in constant search for truth. This thing has been highlighted by Prof. Matilal. He points out, "A philosophic skeptic is not an iconoclast or an aggressor into the temple of truth but because of his

extreme concern for truth- a concern which may be sometimes out of proportion - he is reluctant to accept anything less.”¹ In this particular work, Skepticism is taken in the sense of a position that questions all knowledge claims and withholds or suspends all judgements concerning ultimate reality.

There is a long history of skepticism in both Western and Indian tradition. It is generally thought that philosophical skepticism originated in ancient Greece. Two Greek schools of philosophy namely Pyrrhonism and academic skepticism are credited with coming up with the ideas of skepticism. But the fact is that India has a long tradition of skepticism even before the arrival of Pyrrhonians. There are many thinkers like Adrian kuzminski, who opined that Pyrrho, who is regarded as the champion of Greek skepticism, had visited India along with Alexander, the Great and had somehow got influenced by the thoughts of Indian *Gymnosophists* (naked wise men) and it is said that Pyrrho’s skeptical philosophy was developed under this influence. It should be acknowledged in this context that use of the words skeptics or skepticism are not witnessed in Indian philosophical literatures. However there is the attitude of casting doubt on knowledge claims by refuting others position and also that of withholding judgments which may be, to a great extent similar to the attitude of the skeptics. In Indian tradition people having this attitude is known as a *Vaitaṇḍika* i.e one who is engaged in *vitaṇḍā kathā*. It would not be irrelevant to mention here that the term *vaitaṇḍika* is a derivative of *vitaṇḍā*, which refers to a typical type of dialogue. Dialogue popularly known as *kathā* is divided in various ways by Indian thinkers. In Nyāya tradition, it is classified into three types:-

¹ Matilal, Bimal Krishna, “Scepticism” in *Logical and Ethical Issues: An Essays on Indian Philosophy of Religion* (2nd ed.), India: Orient Blackswan, 2004, p.52

Vāda, Jalpa and Vitaṇḍā. Vāda is a type of argumentation where the main aim is ascertainment of truth. *Jalpa* is that kind of argumentation where the main aim is to win over the opponent. In both the cases, there is establishment of one's own position and refutation of opponent's position. But *Vitaṇḍā* (wrangling) is a peculiar kind of debate where main aim is to win over the opponent by only refuting his position without establishing one's own thesis. Śrīharṣa, who believes in two varieties of *kathā*- *Vāda* and *Vitaṇḍā*, also holds that *Vitaṇḍā* is a negative form of debate where proponent does not establish his own thesis rather only refutes the view of opponents. He is also of the opinion that among Indian Philosophers, Cārvāka, Mādhyamika and Advaita Vedāntin – can aptly be counted as *vaitaṇḍikas*, i.e one employing *vitaṇḍā kathā*.

Great Indian scholar B.K. Matilal referred to the *Vaitaṇḍikas* of Indian tradition as Indian sceptics.²

Saṅjaya, Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi and Śrīharṣa are believed to belong to four separate schools: Ajñāna, Buddhism, Materialism and Advaita Vedanta respectively but shared a common methodology known as Skepticism. Saṅjaya the exponent of Ajñāna school is considered as the initiator of this method, who influenced later skeptics namely Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi and Śrīharṣa. Ajñāna is one of the nāstika schools of ancient Indian Philosophy and is also considered as the ancient school of radical Indian skepticism. Ajñānis are referred as skeptics, eel-wrigglers etc. by the Buddhists and Jains. They are the sources of our knowledge regarding the Ajñāna school, about which very little information is available. Ajñāna philosophy is supposed to come into prominence at around 500 BCE, which was an important phase of Indian philosophy in

² Matilal, Bimal Krishna, *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986,p.28

terms of philosophical development. During this period many different philosophical sects were originated all over India. All these sects had their own philosophical theories and views. It is quite obvious for some people to be skeptical of the theories being proposed. So they came to the conclusion that it is impossible to know the truth. This is the reason for Ajñāna philosophy to come into existence. There were many theories and people were addressing questions beyond their capacity. Under such a situation some people with a practical mind-set will be skeptical of all these theories and consider them to be mere imagination, they are the Ajñānis. They have challenged every metaphysical assertion and refused to count any knowledge as true. They have preferred to concede their ignorance rather than accepting erroneous knowledge as true. They never wish to worship ignorance as such but prefer to accept their ignorance rather than blindly submit to knowledge which is in need of verification. But people find the state of *Ajñāna* so threatening that in order to avoid it they are ready to believe in a false statement. Therefore slowly as other philosophies had gained more prominence *Ajñāna* philosophy declined, paving the way for future skepticism.³

There are various forms of skepticism like Metaphysical, epistemological or cognitive, religious, moral etc. Skepticism can be moderate and extreme in its form also. There are some skeptics, who do not doubt all sorts of knowledge claims but only some of them. This type of skepticism may be described as moderate skepticism. But, there are others who do not admit any sorts of knowledge claims. This variety of skepticism has been termed as Absolute skepticism. Skepticism in its extreme form is known as Absolute skepticism. A moderate skeptic may admit at least the authenticity of one *pramāṇa* say sense-perception like

³ Yadav, Rahul, *Ajñāna Philosophy: Philosophical Skepticism in Ancient India*, Stoic Sadhu, 2019.

the Cārvāka whereas an absolute skeptic questions the certainty even of sense-perception and thus opined that nothing can be relied upon. It has been held by him that like inference and testimony, perception also fails to lead to truth. Such an extreme skeptical theory in Indian context has been found in the Mādhyamika school of Buddhism, whose exponent is Nāgārjuna. It has also been formulated, in detail in the *Tattvopaplavasimha* of Jayarāsi. In Śrīharṣa's *khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhāḍya* too we get to see this extreme approach.

Nāgārjuna (ca.150-250 CE), a famous Madhyamaka Buddhist Philosopher is considered 'Second Buddha' for his scholastic excellence. He is well-known as a *vaiṭaṇḍika*. Nāgārjuna questioned the very basic categorical presuppositions and criteria of proof, assumed by almost everyone in the Indian tradition to be axiomatic and thus was considered a skeptic. Nāgārjuna, the champion of the *śūnyatā* doctrine employed the technique of *catuskoti* and *prasaṅga* (reductio ad absurdum) to nullify the existing views of his opponents and showed that everything is ultimately *śūnya* (*niḥsvabhāva*) i.e dependently originated. In Nāgārjuna's view, one cannot firmly say anything about the reality, so he himself preferred not to pass any comment regarding the ultimate reality. He criticized and refuted the *Pramāna-prameya* dichotomy in his *Vigrahavyāvartanī* with various arguments. Prof. Matilal, Prof. Gokhale, Hayes and numerous others scholars consider Nāgārjuna as a skeptic. Prof. Dilip kumar Mohanta, for instance is willing to designate Nāgārjuna as a cognitive skeptic. Prof. Mohanta opined that "By cognitive scepticism we mean a philosophical attitude, which suspends the possibility of making conclusive statements concerning non-erring cognition or prama, as it is called in Indian Philosophy for want of sufficiently warranted

instrumental and causal grounds or *pramānas*. A cognitive skeptic does not go for theory- making”.⁴

However there are others who are not ready to accept Nāgārjuna as a skeptic. We can mention the name of Prof. Burton in this connection. Presenting an account of both Academic and Pyrrhonian skepticism, Burton proceeds to establish that Nāgārjuna is not a skeptic in either of these classical senses. He opines, “Nāgārjuna does not argue that knowledge of things as they are is impossible, nor does he argue that there is no legitimate rational adjudication between views. Instead, Nāgārjuna claims that he does have knowledge of how things are; most prominently the knowledge that all entities lack *svabhāva* and thus he cannot be considered a skeptic.”⁵ Mark Siderits as well as Eli Franco are skeptical about the applicability of the western concept of skepticism in the context of Buddhist philosophy. Siderits thinks some Buddhists may take resort to skeptical arguments but ultimately do not accept skeptical conclusions.⁶

However, the author of this thesis wishes to consider Nāgārjuna as a skeptic. Nāgārjuna as a popular *vaiṭaṇḍika* refutes others’ positions only without establishing his own thesis. He has refuted the *pramāna-prameya* dichotomy accepted in popular Indian tradition. As a champion of *śūnyatā*, he is of the view that everything is essenceless i.e *niḥsvabhāva* and hence dependently originated. All the objects being essenceless are *catuṣkotivinirmukto*. Therefore, according to Nāgārjuna, we can never say

⁴ Mohanta, Dilip Kumar, ‘Cognitive scepticism of Nāgārjuna’, Conference paper, 20th World Philosophy Congress at Boston, 1998 >
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282151705_Theory_of_Knowledge_Cognitive_scepticism_of_Nāgārjuna

⁵ Edelglass, William. *Review of Emptiness Appraised: A Critical Study of Nagarjuna's Philosophy*. *Philosophy East and West* 53, no. 4, 2003, p. 602-605. doi:10.1353/pew.2003.0036.

⁶ Mills, Ethan, Reflections on the Hamburg “Buddhism and Scepticism” workshop, The Indian Philosophy Blog, 2017

anything about the reality so we should pass over in silence suspending all our knowledge claims. Now to what extent he is a skeptic and what the nature of his skepticism is, that must be considered and analysed. We find the use of the word Skeptic in case of many western philosophers but they are also not skeptic in the absolute sense of the term. Pyrrho suspended judgement to reach *ataraxia*. Hume talked of professing skepticism but never practised skepticism. His skepticism may be called mitigated skepticism. The logical outcome of Descartes' method of doubt is Universal Skepticism, from which it is difficult to refrain. But in practical life he is not a skeptic. If we see in this way, then no so called skeptics can be considered to be a hardcore skeptic but still we refer them as skeptic. Any skeptic when says something or even remains silent he shows some body language which implies that he has something in mind; some goal. If he or she enters in linguistic network then ought to profess something. As such Skeptic in strict sense is a utopian concept and I suppose there will be none. No one can be a consistent or absolute skeptic. That is to say professing and practising it in all walks of life. So in a critical stance (or mood) one may be a skeptic, but one cannot be absolutely critical in all walks of life. So when Nāgārjuna is in critical stance, he is criticizing and upholding a skeptical attitude about reality but when he is not in a critical mood he passes certain positive assertions which are necessary for ordinary life and also facilitate in reaching a greater good ultimately. In this connection we must mention that Nāgārjuna in his philosophy has explained the two truth doctrine. Of course one can ask a question: Are they two different truths unrelated with each other? If no, how are they related? Conventional truth, when critically examined, is shown to be undecidable, essenceless, empty. Apart from this there is no ultimate truth called emptiness, which exists over and above the conventional truth.

Now as the discussion is regarding skepticism, we must put our focus on the paradox of Skepticism. Every skeptic is bound to face the charge that skepticism is self-defeating. A skeptic too is bound to admit certain basic beliefs and notion of *pramāṇa-prameya vyavahāra* while presenting his skeptical arguments. But his skeptical arguments themselves are aimed at refuting all *pramāṇas* and consequently the framework of commonsense beliefs. So, skeptical arguments try to refute the basic framework, which are presupposed by them. Hence they defeat themselves. To put it in short: skepticism is paradoxical. In Introduction itself, we will try to answer the skeptical challenge from the standpoint of Nāgārjuna as this work is focussed on Nāgārjuna's skepticism.

Nāgārjuna has tried to present skepticism in a comprehensive way and yet answer the so-called paradox of skepticism. Nāgārjuna in his *Vigrahavyāvartanī* refers to *Svabhāvavādins*, who charge Nāgārjuna of making a self-defeating argument. *Svabhāvavādins* argue that if Nāgārjuna says that everything is *śūnya* (*niḥsvabhāva*) then his statement should also be regarded as equally *śūnya* and hence will have no effective force. Further if Nāgārjuna denies everything then this denial must be based on some *pramāṇa*. If yes, then he has accepted at least one *pramāṇa*. If no, then his denial of everything is baseless. In response to these charges, Nāgārjuna agrees that his statement that 'everything is *śūnya*' is equally *śūnya*. He has no problem if his statement has ontologically equal status with that of his opponent. His main point here would be that '*śūnya*' does not imply non-existence. It only implies dependent (*pratītyasamutpanna*) and non-essential existence (*niḥsvabhāvatva*). In *Vigrahavyāvartanī* he opined that objects like a cart, a pot, and a cloth, etc, originate in dependence and hence lack intrinsic nature(*svabhāva śūnya*) but possess their respective functions e.g.,

carrying wood, grass and earth containing honey, water and milk and protecting from cold, wind and heat. Similarly Nāgārjuna's statement though devoid of an intrinsic nature because of being dependently originated, is engaged in the task of illuminating the actual reality. On the other hand he is pointing out that his statements have logically different status from that made by his opponents, viz., *Svabhāvavādin*s. According to Nāgārjuna, the assertions made by the *svabhāvavādin*s can be taken as an assertion of the essential nature of any object. *Śūnyavādin*'s statements are not assertions in this sense. Nāgārjuna's statements though have the same grammatical structure as those of his opponents, their logical structure is different.⁷ Nāgārjuna said in *Vīgrhavyāvartanī* '*Nāsti ca mamam pratijñā*' that is he has no thesis to prove whereas the opponents issue statements for the sake of proving something. He confesses that a *śūnyavādin* is making statements only for upholding the true picture of reality and nothing more.

This research work is a humble attempt to revisit Skepticism of Nāgārjuna through interpretation of his works and thereby unveiling its nature. There are, undoubtedly, many works in the field of skepticism in general and Nāgārjunian Skepticism in particular, however this ensuing work has its own novelty. Here the researcher has attempted not only to depict the nature of Nāgārjunian skepticism but also endeavoured to show that his skeptical approach is not inconsistent with his moral outlook, advocated in many of his writings like *Ratnāvalī* etc., and the devotional mentality which is expressed through his *Collection of hymns*. The researcher has also tried to reveal that Nāgārjuna's skepticism can be viewed as an alternative methodology in attaining Well-being and thereby

⁷ Gokhale, P. Pradeep, *Lokāyata/Cārvāka: A Philosophical Inquiry*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015, p. 38-40

makes it clear that skepticism is not an impediment in achieving well-being. In this work, attempt has been made to find answers to these questions:

- How far is it justified to call Nāgārjuna a skeptic?
- What is the nature of Nāgārjuna's Skepticism?
- Was it possible for Nāgārjuna to uphold moral standpoints and pay homage to Buddha keeping his skeptical attitude intact?
- What is the goal of Nāgārjuna's skepticism? Is Nāgārjuna's Skepticism directed to well-being?
- Is there any similarity in Nāgārjuna's attitude and thought with other philosophers and thinkers?

Major works of Nāgārjuna like *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, *Pratītyasamutpādaḥṛdayakārikā*, *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa*, *Ratnāvalī*, *Suhṛllekha*, *Dharmadhātustava*, *Paramārthastava* *Lokāṭītaṣṭava* have been studied in this context. The methodology followed in this work is mainly analytic and expository in nature.

This work is divided into five main chapters apart from the Introduction and Conclusion. The first chapter discusses about the development of skepticism as witnessed in Western tradition. Here the researcher has discussed about skepticism and some of its overlapping concepts like Cynicism, nihilism, etc. Different forms of skepticism have been considered in the first chapter. This chapter includes a survey of Greek skepticism along with discussion regarding the emergence of skepticism in modern western philosophy. The second chapter focuses on the development of Indian Skepticism in pre and post Nāgārjunian era. Here Skeptical roots in *Vedic-Upaniṣadic* age have been traced. Further

skepticism present in Early Buddhist era has also been recorded. In this chapter, the researcher has discussed the skeptical views of Jayarāśī, Śrīharṣa and that of J.Krishnamurti, a modern skeptic. In the third chapter, the general philosophy of Nāgārjuna has been highlighted. Here the theories of *pratītyasamutpāda*, *nairātmya* and *śūnyatā*, which are cores of his dialectical philosophy, have been discussed. Two-truth theory as discussed in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* has also been considered here. Moreover, this chapter focusses on two important texts written by Nāgārjuna: *Vigrahavyāvartanī* and *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa* where we find his arguments in refuting the *pramāṇa-prameya* dichotomy. According to Nāgārjuna, neither *pramāṇa* nor *prameya* have self-existence, hence they are *śūnya*. In the fourth chapter, Nāgārjuna's moral philosophy has been discussed. In this regard portions of *Ratnāvalī* and *Suhṛllekha* have been analysed. Following Nāgārjuna, attempt has been made to show that there is no incompatibility in restoring morality and adopting skeptical attitude. In the 5th chapter of this work interpretations of *Dharmadhātustava*, *Paramārthastava* and *Lokātītastava* have been presented. Attempt has been made to show that Nāgārjuna has paid his homage to Buddha keeping intact his skeptical attitude and there is no incompatibility in this case.

In a sense this work is a novel and unique one. Here various issues related to Nāgārjuna's skeptical philosophy have been brought under a single umbrella.

CHAPTER 1:

SKEPTICISM AND ITS DEVELOPMENT IN WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

1.1: What Skepticism Is

Skepticism has an important place in the philosophical arena. It traditionally refers to a position that casts doubt on some beliefs, systems or authenticity of knowledge claims. The expressions ‘skeptic’ and ‘skepticism’ are often applied very loosely in our daily life. A person who is not ready to accept the common beliefs dogmatically or unquestioningly is accused of preaching skepticism in society. A person who usually gives up his faith in religious experience and ethical codes, is neglected as a skeptic by his fellowmen. The allegation of professing skepticism is also made against the pessimist, who always cast doubt about the consequence of his future course of action. A woman who suspects her husband’s behavior in every step of life is often blamed as ‘skeptic’ by her husband. It is clear that the term ‘skeptic’ is often used very loosely to the extent that a man of wisdom can be named as ‘skeptic’ as well as an insane. The expression ‘skepticism’ also represents a wide range of positions upheld by the persons who has given up their faith in some incidents, propositions or actions.

In *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, it is defined “as a critical philosophical attitude that questions the reliability of knowledge claims made by philosophers and others. The expressions like ‘skeptic’, ‘skepticism’ is generally claimed to be derived from the original Greek

term, *skeptikos* which means ‘enquirers’”.¹ Skepticism is commonly viewed as a challenge to philosophical enquiry or as a position that nullifies all knowledge claims and withholds all judgements.

1.2: Some Overlapping Concepts

Here we will discuss some concepts, which seem similar to skepticism but in fact different from it.

Cynicism:

Skepticism and cynicism are two different yet overlapping concepts. Some people think that these two concepts are same and are not easy to demarcate one from the other. But there exists difference between them. Skepticism is more of a positive phenomenon. It denotes an enquiring attitude that may result in withholding of Judgement whereas, cynicism is more a negative concept. According to Merriam Webster, Cynic is defined as “a fault-finding captious critic”.² In the history of Greek Philosophy, we find two different schools -Skepticism and Cynicism.

Agnosticism:

The term ‘Agnostic’, coined by Thomas Henry Huxley, is derived from Greek ‘a’ meaning ‘without’ and ‘gnosis’ meaning ‘knowledge. Agnosticism may be regarded as a type of skepticism. They are closely related but these two notions differ.’ According to Merriam Webster, “Agnostic is a person who holds the view that any ultimate reality (such as God) is unknown and probably unknowable.”³ Advancement of the

¹ Edwards, Paul. Ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol- VII, London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1967, p.449.

² Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “Cynic” accessed March 21, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cynic>.

³ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “agnostic” ,accessed March 21, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/agnostic>.

philosophy of agnosticism has been made possible by two eminent modern western philosopher like Hume and Kant. Hume though was technically a skeptic, his arguments inevitably lead to agnosticism. For Hume, a statement is meaningless unless it is either a relation of ideas or matters of fact. Since statements about the knowledge of God are outside of these two categories, God is essentially unknowable. According to Hume, there is no necessity in causality. One cannot know with certainty that something is caused by anything else. According to Hume, we create causal connections in our mind by experiencing repeated conjunctions of the events. Without the ability to understand the cause of the universe, we can never know anything rightly about God.

Immanuel Kant's philosophy was greatly influenced by Hume. Kant attempted to make a synthesis of two opposing views—that of rationalism and empiricism. The content of knowledge came by experience but the form of knowledge is developed in the mind. He has provided a critical philosophy of his own by drawing the positive sides of both the views. This solution resulted in agnosticism for Kant. Kant differentiated between phenomenal and noumenal world. The former signifies the world as it appears to us and the latter indicates the reality. There is a gap between appearance and the actual reality. To him, noumenon is unknown and unknowable. Kant's conclusion was agnosticism about reality and God.

Nihilism:

Nihilism is sometimes associated with extreme pessimism and a radical skepticism. "Nihilism" comes from the Latin *nihil* meaning nothing and *ism* signifies a system or theory. Nihilism condemns existence of everything. It involves total negative approach. Among philosophers,

Friedrich Nietzsche is most often associated with nihilism. Skepticism in its pure forms, merely expresses doubts about the possibility of knowledge claims. Nihilism in any of its forms is at the opposite pole from Skepticism. Skepticism involves critical thinking. Nihilism implies a kind of skepticism but skepticism does not imply nihilism.

Relativism:

Relativism is not Skepticism though the former may sometimes lead to the latter. Skepticism superficially resembles relativism because they both doubt absolute notions of truth. Although both Skepticism and relativism share a perspectival view of truth, they are different. Relativism is one of the most popular philosophical doctrines. “It is the view that truth and falsity, right and wrong, standards of reasoning and procedures of justification are products of differing conventions and frameworks of assessment and that their authority is confined to the context giving rise to them.”⁴ Further, the relativists point out that if something is relatively so, then there can be no framework-independent point from which the matter of whether the thing in question is so can be established. Relativism is the idea that views are relative to differences in perception and consideration. According to relativism, there is no universal and objective truth rather each point of view has its own truth.

1.3: Skepticism and Its Different Forms:

There are different forms of skepticism like metaphysical, epistemological, cognitive, moral and religious. Besides these forms, according to scope there can be two types of skepticism: global and local, which have been termed as Philosophical and Scientific respectively in

⁴ Baghramian, Maria and J. Adam Carter, “Relativism” The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring2022 Edition) Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/relativism/>

Ayer's philosophy. Further according to source we get two varieties namely Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism.

Metaphysical Skepticism: It is often called external world skepticism, which denies any sorts of metaphysical knowledge. This belief is generally said to follow from the argument that material knowledge can only be attained through our perception of the world and that our senses which constitute that perception do not necessarily correspond with the actual state of affairs.

Moral Skepticism: According to *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Moral Skepticism includes different views that deny or raise doubts about roles of reason in morality. Different versions of moral skepticism deny or doubt moral knowledge, moral facts, justified moral belief, moral truth or reasons to be moral. Moral skeptics may differ in a variety of ways but due to some basic commonality they all are regarded as moral skeptics. They are concerned mainly with morality rather than other topics. Moral skeptics are regarded as skeptics in the sense that they raise doubts about common beliefs but differ in the kinds of common beliefs that they doubt. As commonly skepticism is taken as an epistemological view about the limits of knowledge or justified belief, the most central version of moral skepticism is the one that raises doubts about moral knowledge.

Religious Skepticism (or Theology Skepticism) is skepticism regarding faith-based claims. It does not necessarily denote either Atheism or Agnosticism. Religious skeptics question religious authority and are not necessarily anti-religious but skeptical of a specific or all religious beliefs or practices.

Epistemological Skepticism or Cognitive Skepticism:

In accordance with the types of knowledge there are different modes of skepticism. A skeptic who cast doubt about the authenticity of knowledge claims are commonly known as an epistemological or cognitive skeptic. According to Prof. Mohanta “By cognitive scepticism we mean a philosophical attitude, which suspends the possibility of making conclusive statements concerning non-erring cognition or *pramā*, as it is called in Indian Philosophy for want of sufficiently warranted instrumental and causal grounds or *pramāṇas*. A cognitive skeptic does not go for theory- making”.⁵

Methodological skepticism: Descartes established a methodological skepticism (also known as Cartesian skepticism) in which he rejected any idea that can be doubted. ‘Doubt’ is the beginning of his philosophy. Cartesian doubt is methodological in the sense that he aims to use doubt as a way to certain knowledge by finding those things which could not be doubted. One is easily reminded of Descartes famous quote: “Cogito ergo sum” that is, I think, therefore I am. Descartes realized that the only thing which is beyond the grasp of doubting is the agent who doubts or thinks.

Antecedent and Consequent Skepticism:

In his *Enquiry*, Hume has mentioned two kinds of skepticism namely antecedent and consequent. By antecedent skepticism Hume understand “that species of doubt which is the starting point to all study and philosophical enquiry”.⁶ It recommends ‘a universal doubt not only of our

⁵ Mohanta, Dilip Kumar, ‘Cognitive skepticism of Nāgārjuna’, Conference paper, 20th World Philosophy Congress at Boston, 1998 >
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282151705_Theory_of_Knowledge_Cognitive_scepticism_of_Nāgārjuna

⁶ Hume, David., *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Calcutta: Progressive Publishers., 1999, P. 119.

former opinions and principles but of our every faculty'. Application of moderate form of this type of skepticism is extremely helpful to make our mind free from all prejudices or presuppositions. Another type of skepticism has been designated as consequent skepticism by Hume. It is derived as a consequence of scientific enquiry. It refrains from reaching any fixed determination.

Philosophical and Scientific Skepticism:

According to scope there can be two types of skepticism: global and local, which have been termed as Philosophical and Scientific respectively in Ayer's philosophy. Global skepticism is a universal or wholesale type of skepticism which cast doubt not on any particular claim of knowledge only, rather it denies the claim of knowledge altogether. Sometimes this form of skepticism is described as philosophical. A philosophical skeptic never questions the way in which we apply our standard of knowledge; in fact he challenges the standard itself.⁷ In his view all perceptions are illusory, all inferences are invalid and all testimonies are deceptive. In short all claims of knowledge regarding external objects, other minds, past, future etc. are illegitimate.

In comparison to this vicious type, there is a local and partial form of skepticism, which Ayer designates as 'scientific'⁸. A scientific skeptic nullifies the authenticity of disciplines like astrology. He suspects whether hand chanting can be accepted as a reliable means of fortune telling.

There is remarkable difference between the approaches of a philosophical skeptic and a scientific skeptic. A scientist often makes a

⁷ Ayer, A. J. (1956). *The Problem of Knowledge*, London: Macmillan, p.35.

⁸ *Ibid.*

distinction between the sources that are un-reliable and others which are reliable. But a philosophical skeptic is not much bothered to make such distinction. A scientific skeptic asserts that there are situations where human senses are deceived (for example when a person suffers from diseases like amoebic hepatitis). On the contrary a philosophical skeptic suspects whether the exercises of those senses can at all provide us with any reliable information in any circumstances. In fact his doubt is not connected with any particular experience. He questions the accuracy of all experience.

The philosophical skeptic throws doubt on our beliefs regarding physical objects, other minds, past and present by showing that in each case we take help of inferences which are illegitimate and untenable. For instance, when we infer the existence of physical objects from sense experiences or other's mind from their overt behaviour, or past phenomenon from present occurrences, we actually pass through a process, which is not legitimate.

Pyrrhonian and Academic Skepticism:

According to source we get two varieties namely Pyrrhonian and Academic skepticism. "Ancient Skepticism" mainly encompasses two Greek schools- one is Pyrrhonism which owes its origin to Pyrrho of Elis (4th-3rd c B.C.E) and other is Academic Skepticism which comprises a skeptical phase of Plato's Academy that stretches from the 3rd to the early 1st century B.C.E.

The Academics like Arcesilaus and Carneades, maintained that no assertions regarding things beyond our immediate experience can be treated as certain. The Pyrrhonians never adhere to the negative dogmatic conclusions of the Academics; they did not deny that knowledge of the

non-evident was possible. Instead they suspend judgment on that question. Pyrrhonians owe their origin to Pyrrho of Elis, who was considered as a model of the skeptical way of life. Pyrrhonian skepticism might be characterized as the cultivation of suspension of judgment.

1.4: Greek Skepticism-A Survey

Skepticism is generally supposed to be originated in ancient Greece. In this section the researcher has made a brief survey of Greek Skepticism. The figures associated with the two schools namely Pyrrhonian and Academics include Pyrrho, Timon of Philius, Arcesilaus, Carneades, Clitomachus, Philo of Larissa, Cicero, Aenesidemus, Agrippa and Sextus Empiricus.

Pyrrho:

Skepticism is historically associated with the name of Pyrrho, the Greek philosopher. But nearly nothing can be known with certainty about his life or works. The most reliable account of his philosophical thought was presented by one of his eminent pupils named Timon. Skepticism associated with Pyrrho is known as Pyrrhonian skepticism. He thinks that one should have an attitude of indifference towards the things which are unknown or unknowable that is say beyond our grasp. One should not trust them as real, not as unreal either. Though it seems a postponement of taking any attitude, positive or negative – in fact it is one kind of prohibition against making any judgment. The attitude prescribed by Pyrrho and his followers is presented by Timon in the following way: “the fact of determining nothing, but withholding assent⁹”

⁹ Stough, Charlotte L. (1969). *Greek Skepticism – A Study in Epistemology*. California: University of California Press Ltd. p. 27.

Here question may arise, what purpose did Pyrrho want to fulfill by adopting such non-committal attitude? Pyrrho was neither a pessimist nor was he indifferent towards the empirical life. Adoption of the attitude is directed towards a goal which is described by him in the following way- “there will result, first, a disinclination to make assertions and, then, ataraxia”¹⁰. So the chief goal towards which the noncommittal attitude is directed is a state of quietude where all flickering mental states are arrested. In this state of indifference, one refrains oneself from putting any assertion - positive or negative and thus the mind is filled with peace and bliss.

Timon:

Timon was the most eminent among the pupils of Pyrrho. In his writings, like *Pyrrho*, Timon tried his best to point out the contradiction and disputes embedded in the writings of the philosophers like Plato, Aristotle etc. He was critical to Anesidemus and other academics for their failure to attain the state of ataraxia.

Although he maintained the pyrrhonist tradition of leading life without beliefs, nevertheless Timon did not deny the necessities and amenities that are required for living a happy life. However he acknowledged the matter that pleasure is not lied in any object. In this connection we may code his significant assertion-“I do not lay down that honey is sweet, but I admit that it appears to be so.”¹¹

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Gorgias:

Gorgias was a Greek thinker of 5th century B.C. Plato in the dialogue *Gorgias* has described him as a rhetorician. In some writings he has been depicted as a sophist; however Gorgias was not willing to teach virtue which the sophists are usually claimed to do. The skeptical writings of Gorgias are expressed mainly in the treatise “*On Nature*”. In *On Nature* Gorgias proclaims (i) there is nothing (in reality). (ii) If there is something at all he continues, that cannot be apprehended. Moreover, (iii) Gorgias urges that if there is thing capable of being apprehended, that cannot be communicated to other.

Arcesilaus:

Arcesilaus was well-known as the chief of the New Academy that formed in Athens. Being endowed with an excellent dialectical skill Arcesilaus tried his best to get rid of the metaphysical tradition that the Academy was bearing from the time of Plato. On the other hand he was eager to disprove the absolute view of truth that has been upheld by the Stoics, in his time. According to him, the authenticity of a perception, cannot be guaranteed by the verdict of so called wise man. It is not proper to hold something as true when it is a perception of a wise man and it is equally improper to count something as false when it is a perception of a fool.

It is however not clear whether Arcesilaus inherited his skeptical attitude from the interrogative tradition of Socrates and Plato or it evoked in him as an outcome of Pyrrho’s tradition. Perhaps Arcesilaus was the first to introduce the notion of *epoché*¹² i.e.suspension of judgment.

¹² Edwards, Paul. Ed. (1967). *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. Vol- I. London: Collier Macmillan Publishers.p.145.

Carneades:

Carneades like Arcesilaus, was critical about dogmatic epistemology of the stoic. The beliefs that mind in some cases have the opportunity of receiving some perceptions that are indubitable and self-evident in nature, seemed totally unacceptable not only to the members of the academy, but also to all philosophers of that era. Carneades, in particular made it clear that representations man receives are subject to the operation of mind, and hence they cannot be counted as true or pure representation for the reason that there always remains a chance of admixture of different elements. Like Jaina thinkers of Indian philosophy, Carneades was in favour of taking the apparent representation as relatively true and denied to make any judgment about the objective nature of things.

Clitomachus:

Clitomachus also called Cleitomachus (Greek Kleitomachos) originally named Hasdrubal was born in Carthage in 187/6 B.C. He was an academic skeptic and was a disciple of Carneades. Among his many writings, only few are preserved. He wrote many books with the main aim of upholding the Philosophy of his teacher Carneadus, from whose views he never dissented.

Philo of Larisa:

Philo, born in Larisa, was a pupil of Clitomachus and like Carneades and Clitomachus he was an academic skeptic. He had many pupils among them Cicero was the most eminent. No works of Philo is available. We get to know about his views mainly from the writings of Numenius, Sextus Empiricus and Cicero. In general, Philo's philosophy was a reaction against the Academic Skepticism of the Middle and New

Academy. Unlike his teachers, Philo presented a moderate view of skepticism accepting basic beliefs without certainty. He further opined that by means of conceptive notions, objects could not be grasped rather they were comprehensible according to their nature.

Cicero:

Cicero, the popular pupil of Philo, adopted the philosophical view of the Academic skeptics. Cicero was a good orator, lawyer, politician and philosopher. He was willing to accept Academic Skepticism in some areas denying to do so when it comes to ethics and politics.

Aenesidemus:

The name of Aenesidemus is closely associated with the skeptical movement of Greece. It is generally supposed that he was a skeptic and also as a follower of Pyrrho. Aenesidemus is regarded as a hard-core critique of the academic skeptics. His main objection against the academic Skeptic is that of inconsistency. The academics endeavoured to nullify dogmatism in one hand; on the other they maintained the distinction between the probable and improbable dogmatically. Like other pyrrhonists, Aenesidemus also believed that ataraxia is the ultimate goal of human life, but he never spoke of that life in a positive tone. He was a dialectician rather than a practical moralist.

Aenesidemus tried hard to establish 'Pyrrhonism' as a genuine philosophical position. With a view to defend pyrrhonism, especially the attitude of suspending judgments, Aenesidemus put forward ten critical

arguments, which are historically known as ten ‘tropes’ or ten ‘modes’ of Aenesidemus.¹³

Agrippa:

Agrippa, whose name is historically associated with the five *tropoi* or the five ways of attaining doubt, was a Greek philosopher of 3rd century A.D. He was more familiar as Agrippa the skeptic. The five tropes that Agrippa spoke of are of general type that cast doubt on our understanding as well as our senses.¹⁴

Sextus Empericus:

Sextus Empericus was the last and the most popular among the Greek Skeptics. Though familiar as a Greek Skeptic, he was mainly a physician by profession. It is assumed that he appeared in a time during A.D. 150 to A.D. 250. Philosophically, Sextus was an outstanding adherent of Pyrrho. Sextus was the leading proponent of skeptic school founded by Aenesidemus. He endeavoured to strengthen the arguments of Aenesidemus more logically. Sextus was deeply moved by the notion of epoché or ‘suspension of judgment’¹⁵ that had been proposed by the pyrrhonists. Like many other followers of pyrrho, sextus strongly believed that there is nothing can be known with certainty, hence one should refrain from making judgments about things which are beyond our true understanding.

¹³ Stough, Charlotte L. (1969). *Greek Skepticism – A Study in Epistemology*. California: University of California Press Ltd. p. 68.

¹⁴ Edwards, Paul. Ed. (1967). *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. Vol- I. London: Collier Macmillan Publishers. p. 59.

¹⁵ Empiricus, Sextus. *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. Translated by R.G. Bury. 1990. New York: Prometheus Books. p. 7.

1.5: Emergence of Skeptical Thought in Modern Western Philosophy

Descartes: The British Philosopher Descartes is considered as the father of modern philosophy. He intended to reach to a final truth that is indubitable so started his philosophy by doubting everything and reached to a conclusion: Cogito ergo Sum (I think therefore I am). The existence of 'I' can never be doubted. Cartesian doubt is methodological in the sense that it aims to use doubt as a route to certain knowledge by finding those things which could not be doubted. Hume argued that Descartes had advocated a provisional or antecedent skepticism, that which is antecedent to all study and philosophical enquiry. This form of skepticism, philosophers inculcate, according to Hume, 'as a sovereign preservative against error and precipitate judgement.'¹⁶

Hume: The Scottish philosopher David Hume is often admired as the outstanding genius of British philosophy. He opined that no theory of reality is possible; there can be no knowledge of anything beyond experience. Kant expressed Hume's influence upon him when he said: Hume has raised me from my dogmatic slumber. Many consider Hume as a skeptic. His skepticism can be termed consequent skepticism-consequent to philosophical enquiry and investigation. In his *Treatise*, Hume has appeared to elevate skepticism to a greater height by exposing the inherent contradictions in many of his own philosophical theories. In the concluding section of his *Enquiry*, Hume again addresses the topic of skepticism and we get to see that he accepts moderate form of skepticism rejecting extreme skepticism like Pyrrhonian skepticism. He argues that we should reject such skepticism as it does not result in any durable good. Instead recommends for a moderate or academic scepticism where there

¹⁶ Hume, D, *Enquiry*, XII, p.116

will be caution and modesty in our judgements and speculations will be restricted to abstract reasoning and matters of fact. The famous quotation of Hume: “Be a philosopher but amidst all your philosophy, be still a man”. He balanced well between his skepticism and practicality

Bayle: The culmination of 17th Century skepticism appears in the writings of Pierre Bayle, especially in his monumental *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1st ed.1697). Bayle, a superb dialectician, challenged philosophical, scientific and theological theories both ancient and modern showing that they all led to paradoxes and contradictions. Richard Popkin described him as a super skeptic who carried out the skeptic tradition to the extreme. Bayle skilfully employed skeptical arguments about things such as sense information, human judgements, logical explanations and the criteria of knowledge in order to undermine confidence in human intellectual activity in all areas. He opined that humans should abandon rational activity and turn blindly to faith and revelation; they can therefore follow their conscience without any criterion for determining true faith.¹⁷

Michel de Montaigne: He was a french writer and philosopher. In full his name is Michel Eyquem de Montaigne. Montaigne’s much-discussed skepticism results from his questioning the possibility of all knowing and sees individual as a victim of weakness and failure, uncertainty, of incapacity and fragmentation. “His skepticism is reflected in the French title of his work, *Essais*, or “Attempts,” which implies not a transmission of proven knowledge or of confident opinion but a project of trial and error, of tentative exploration”.¹⁸ Montaigne’s skepticism does

¹⁷ Britannica, T.Editors of Encyclopedia. “Pierre Bayle”. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, December 24,2021. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Pierre-Bayle>.

¹⁸ Sankovitch, T.A. “Michel de Montaigne”.*Encyclopedia Britannica*, February 24,2022. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Michel-de-Montaigne>

not rule out the belief in the existence of truth but rather constitutes a defence against the danger of placing truth in false, unexamined notions. His skeptical approach along with his urge for truth, motivates him to reject all commonly accepted ideas and to doubt any generalizations and abstractions.

CHAPTER 2:

DEVELOPMENT OF INDIAN SKEPTICISM IN PRE AND POST NĀGĀRJUNIAN ERA

As this work is mainly focused on the Skepticism of Nāgārjuna, in this chapter, the researcher has traced the development of Indian Skepticism in Pre and Post Nāgārjunian era. In this regard, in the pre Nāgārjunian era emphasis has been given on the evidence of Skeptical element in *Vedic–Upaniṣadic* and early Buddhist literatures. One of the six eminent heretical teachers of the Buddha’s time, Sañjaya’s position has also been discussed. In early Buddhist literatures, we find reference of Sañjaya, who is believed to have influenced the skeptics of the later time. The Post-Nāgārjunian era range from the then classical to the modern time. During this long time period we have focussed on the views of Jayarāśi and Śrīharṣa, both of whom belong to Classical time frame and are generally regarded by many as Indian Skeptics. Among the Modern Indian thinkers we have not come across any hardcore skeptic except Jiddu Krishnamurti, who is an exceptional thinker of 20th Century. So in the post Nāgārjuna period, we have concentrated on the thoughts of Krishnamurti, who was against adhering any viewpoint or ideologies and can be regarded as an ultimate Skeptic.

2.1. Evidence of Skeptical Element in the *Vedic-Upaniṣadic* Literature

We find evidence of skeptical element in the *Ṛg Veda*. The Sanskrit word “*veda*” literally means “knowledge.” Skepticism, implies a denial of knowledge in some or all domains. So it may initially appear strange to search for skeptical element in the *Ṛg Veda*. The *Ṛg Veda*, regarded as the oldest Sanskrit text is a collection of hymns, riddles, poems, ritual

instructions, and philosophical speculation. Though *Rg Veda* is undoubtedly worth reading as a great work of literature and as a source of religious inspiration, here our concern is to find out the elements of Skepticism hidden in it.

According to Prof. B.K. Matilal, “Vedic questioning shows that scepticism is as old as the birth of civilization”¹. The idea of having skeptical elements in the *Rg Veda* is not something new. The work, entitled *Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, by Radhakrishnan and Moore, has a section in their chapter on the Vedas called “Skepticism and Ridicule of the Gods.”

Here we will mention *Rg veda 2.12, 10.82, 10.129* which seem to consist skeptical element.

RgV 2.12 has a passage that presents evidence of skepticism regarding the issue of what the Vedic poets have said about God Indra:

“The terrible one, of whom they ask, Where is he?

And they even say of him, He is not at all ...”².

Another instance is that of *RgV 10.82* which puts into doubt philosophical views regarding creation. Even if it is known that a creator exists that never guarantee knowledge of creator not even for learned Brahmin priests.

The expression of skepticism however, is also found in the *Nāsadiya sukta* of the *Rg veda* (10.129). After describing the origination

¹ Matilal, Bimal Krishna, *The logical Illumination of Indian Mysticism*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1977, P. 33

² Edgerton, Franklin, *The Beginnings of Indian Philosophy : Selections from the Rig veda, Atharva veda, Upanisads and Mahabharata*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965, p. 53

of creation out of a mysterious state where there was neither existence nor non-existence from verses 1–5, the hymn ends on a certain skeptical note (verses 6–7).

“Who really knows? Who shall here proclaim it – from where was it born, from where was this creation? The gods are on this side of the creation of this (world). So then who does know from where it came to be?

This creation – from where it came to be, if it was produced or if not – he who is the overseer of this (world) in the furthest heaven, he surely knows. Or if he does not know...?”³

Upaniṣads, held to be the concluding part of *Veda*, also contain skeptical roots. There are numerous *Upaniṣads* and among those, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, perhaps the oldest of the *Upaniṣads*, is found to contain several hints of skepticism.

As we know human reasoning has limitations to grasp things that are beyond the scope of mundane life. Even if we desire to know anything and everything through argumentations and reasoning it is not always possible. This case has been substantiated in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.6 where Yajñavalkya in his conversation with one of his wives Gargi, suggested not to enquire much about a thing which is beyond one’s ability of reasoning. With regard to the nature of a deity, one cannot acquire knowledge of the same by inferential method rather one should depend only upon scriptural sayings. That is, in this case testimonial knowledge (*āgama*) is the only way of knowing so

³ Jamison, Stephanie W and Joel P Brereton, trans. *The Rig veda: The Earliest Religious Poetry of India*, Oxford, 2014, p. 1609

unnecessary attempt to understand the nature of deity by other means will result in mental disturbance.

In *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* we find the dialogue of Śvetaketu by his father, Uddālaka Āruṇi. Svetaketu has been instructed by his father regarding the nature of atman through many analogies. In this connection we may refer to one analogy (CU 6.13) where Āruṇi has asked Śvetaketu to place a lump of salt in water and then come back later on. Svetaketu did as was instructed, later when he met his father, Aruni asked his son to bring him back the lump of salt placed in water but Svetaketu fails to find the salt in the. Then he tasted the water on being suggested by his father and informed that it tastes salty. The water is salty from which ever position it is tasted may it middle or button. This means the salt has got mixed with water. The salt was right there in the water but is not visible separately. Simmilarly, Uddalok tried to point out the fact that Self is all pervasive, it is within us so we cannot perceive it nor can we grasp it through our thought process. Self is a matter of realization. True reality is always beyond speech and mind. It is so subtle that it cannot be perceived. It can neither be described through words nor can mind grasp it. ⁴

In case of *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, we also find skeptical elements. In a famous conversation of the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* between Yama and Naciketa (2.9) the former tells Naciketa that he has proper insight into the nature of self but that has not been acquired through reasoning rather gained through instructions from a reliable person who has realized the self by going through scriptures. That is to say, one can neither know the self through reasoning nor can reject its presence through the same approach.

⁴ Swami Lokeswarananda, trans. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2017.

Too much reasoning is not always beneficial. Self is a matter of realization not subject to mere argumentation.

Further, it is mentioned in *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (2.23-24) that Self can neither be understood by ones scholarship, nor by intelligence or learning different views from others. These ways can at best provide an indirect conception of the Self but not its direct idea. It is a matter of sheer realization. It is a fact that *Upaniṣads* try to teach us that Self lies with in individuals. We fail to grasp it due to our utter ignorance and ego. Self is our inner most being. Ego and ignorance act as impediment in our way of realizing the same. When the veil of evil dispositions are lifted the self, reveals itself just as a flash.⁵

In short, we find within several *Upaniṣads* of a variety of mystical skepticism. There is a type of ineffable knowledge of *ātman* or *brahman*, this mystical knowledge is not sensory, nor can it be achieved through philosophizing or reasoning, linguistic conceptualization, and so forth. *Upaniṣads* contain discussion regarding entities or matters which are beyond this mundane world. Those things are veiled in mysteries and can be grasped directly only by yogi or seers like a sudden illumination. Those mystical things like *Ātman* etc. are beyond the grasp of ordinary reasoning they are way beyond ordinary human capacities. They are a matter of realization and revelation.

2.2: Emergence of Skeptical Thought in Early Buddhist Tradition

In Indian tradition we witness a great development of Skepticism. From very early time Buddhist traditions have displayed a skeptical attitude towards various types of accepted knowledge. Greek *skeptikoi* means

⁵ Swami Lokeshwarananda , *trans.*, *Kaṭha Upaniṣad*, Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2017.

investigator, enquirer. Buddha himself embraced the value of Skepticism for he always emphasized on admitting things only after right scrutiny and reasoning and not to adopt views on the basis of hearsay, legend or tradition.

Buddhist thinkers starting from the historical Buddha questioned the metaphysical assumption, the realistic world-view and the reliability of our knowledge sources, and expressed doubt regarding common social norms and religious views. In this way, philosophical skepticism played a pivotal role in the way Buddhist thought evolved. Buddha himself was silent in some metaphysical questions known as *avyakṛta praśna* (Ten questions according to Pali source and Fourteen according to Sanskrit source).

Ten unanswered questions:

“A list of ten unanswered questions is presented in both the *Aggi-Vacchagotta Sutta* and *Cūḷamālukya Sutta*.

These ten questions are:

Is it true that:

1. The world (loco) is eternal?
2. The world is not eternal?
3. The world is finite?
4. The world is infinite?
5. The soul and the body are the same thing?
6. The soul and the body are different things?
7. A Realized One exists after death?

8. A Realized One doesn't exist after death?
9. A Realized One both exists and doesn't exist after death?
10. A Realized One neither exists nor doesn't exist after death?

The Buddha refused to answer these questions directly.

Fourteen unanswered questions:

A list of fourteen unanswered questions is presented in the texts of the Sanskrit tradition. This list contains the same ten questions presented in the Pāli texts, plus four additional questions. The fourteen questions are grouped into four categories.

Questions concerning the existence of the world/universe in time:

Is it true that:

1. The world (*loco*) is eternal?
2. The world is not eternal?
3. The world is both eternal and not eternal?
4. The world is neither eternal nor not eternal?

Questions concerning the existence of the world/universe in space:

Is it true that:

5. The world is finite?
6. The world is infinite?
7. The world is both finite and infinite?
8. The world is neither finite or infinite?

Questions referring to personal identity:

Is it true that:

9. The soul and the body are the same thing?
10. The soul and the body are different things?

Questions referring to life after death:

Is it true that:

11. A Realized One exists after death?
12. A Realized One doesn't exist after death?
13. A Realized One both exists and doesn't exist after death?
14. A Realized One neither exists nor doesn't exist after death?

The Buddha remained silent when asked these fourteen questions”.⁶

Now we will look into the philosophy of *Aṭṭhakavagga*, one of the ancient texts.

General philosophy of *Aṭṭhakavagga*:

The *Aṭṭhakavagga* is the fourth chapter of the Suttanipāṭa, which belongs to the *Khuddaka Nikāya* of the Pali Canon. It contains sixteen short sutras. The *Aṭṭhakavagga* is actually a masterpiece of philosophical literature having philosophical profundity and it is presented in a very beautiful and subtle manner. It is one in every of the foremost significant texts, representative of the teachings of early Buddhism. The essential doctrines of early Buddhism are found in the *Aṭṭhakavagga* in their non-scholastic, systematised way. *Aṭṭhakavagga* recommends the way of life

⁶ https://encyclopediaofbuddhism.org/wiki/The_unanswered_questions

for the attainment of the very best perfection, which is regarded to be the best goal of persons, may be a life of detachment. It criticizes the attempts of the rational metaphysicians in the quest of philosophical truth and traces the psychological origins of their divergent philosophical conclusions. The futility of getting engaged in highly controversial metaphysical speculations are mentioned in the *Aṭṭhakavagga* for the spiritual upliftment of people at large. It puts into question the efficacy of human reason in the pursuit of objectivity and truth

In *Kāmasutta*, the 1st sutta of the *Aṭṭhakavagga*, it is suggested that the objects of pleasure giving rise to the gratification that ordinary man yearns for, are perishable and therefore form the basis of human suffering and discontent. In the *Kāmasutta* it is also pointed out that the main aim of the Buddhist way of life is not something related to the pleasures of the senses but something achievable solely by their renunciation. The life of renunciation which the *Aṭṭhakavagga* recommends is not the renunciation of a hermit who evades the social life but of an aware and wise person who lives in the world without surrendering to its numerous temptations.

“One noteworthy feature of the Buddhist philosophy of detachment, which is found in the *Aṭṭhakavagga*, is that it consists not merely in the detachment from material things but also detachment from all conceptual constructions. The *Aṭṭhakavagga* is very severe in its condemnation of *sandiṭṭhi-rāga* (attachment to one’s own view). According to the *Aṭṭhakavagga* passionate clinging to material objects is only one aspect of clinging, which results in individual and social

conflicts. People cling equally to their views and ideologies (*diṭṭhi*) and also their holy vows (*sīla*) and practises (*vata*).”⁷

As it is evident, all practises in Buddhism are aimed towards eradication of all the root causes of sorrow and distress. It is said that the principal root cause of misery is ignorance or misconception (*avidyā*), sometimes called delusion (*moha*). That in turn is supposed to originate from unprincipled thinking (*ayoniśo manaskāra*), that is, the incapability to investigate matters thoroughly. One cannot think clearly or rationally owing to unwarranted and baseless views (*dr̥ṣṭi*). Early Buddhist literature is full of descriptions regarding the dangers of wrong views (*mithyā dr̥ṣṭi*). *Paramaṭṭhaka sutta* of the *Aṭṭhakavagga* is one such instances. In this *Sutta* it is said that:

A person who clings to certain views regards them as the best and all other views as untenable and inferior. Therefore he fails to get beyond disputes with others. Then holding on to that which he sees as commendable to himself, he regards other opinions or views as worthless. The ones who have realized the reality (i.e the Buddhas and his followers) refer to the clinging to any particular view as a bond if owing to which one considers all else as invalid. That is, it is a natural tendency of Human beings to consider their own experiences as the measure of all things. People tend to trust their own reasoning but find flaws in the thinking of others. People think their own practices and commitments are correct not only for themselves but for all people. Taking themselves as the standard by which all others are to be judged, people tend to see others as inferior. But letting oneself see others as unworthy of respect is a shackle. Therefore, a *bhikṣu* should not pursue what is seen, heard or

⁷ Premasiri, P.D, *The Philosophy of the Aṭṭhakavagga*, The Wheel Publication No. 182, BPS online Edition, 2008, p. 11

thought nor depend on ritual observances. He should never show himself to be better to, equal or inferior to others. Adhering to any views whatsoever is a trap, because it tends to take oneself as the standard of comparison and puts focus on oneself. So one should simply let experiences register themselves and then check out. It is further advised in the text that one should not seek support even in knowledge by abandoning the views held previously and not to take up another. He does not take sides in any disputes and does not take refuge to any views at all. A person, does not have a fixed viewpoint, who has no inclination to the extremes of becoming or non-becoming.

Buddha always suggested not taking sides in disputes and also has recommended against the pursuit of knowledge as this too may be a source of self-importance that leads to disregarding others who are less knowledgeable than oneself. The Buddha observes more like the skeptics, that overconfidence in the soundness of one's own judgement is socially obnoxious. Wise men never speculate nor pursue any notion, they do not accept doctrines, and never cling to any particular view.⁸

The matter discussed in the *Kalahavivāda Sutta* concerns the root of disputes, argumentations, disagreements and conflicts in human society. It also deals with the woes of one's life like grief, lamentation and despair. Disputes inevitably results in other social evils such as murder, slander, harshness of speech etc. This particular *sutta* says that the bone of contentions, disputes and associated social evils is clinging to dear things. In the *Kalahavivāda Sutta*, the Buddha is found to go

⁸ Thanissaro Bhikkhu, trans., *Paramatthaka Sutta: Supreme*, 1994.
<https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.405.than.html>

deeper and deeper into the psychological springs of human action in the clarification of matters related with individual and social behaviour.

According to the *Aṭṭhakavagga*, divergence in human beliefs results in conflict. There existed many philosophical beliefs or views during the time of the Buddha. It is said in the *Pasura sutta* that, individuals firmly established in individual or particular truths engaged in open debates in the midst of large gatherings with the only motive of proving his own standpoint as correct and defeating the standpoint of the opponent. When one is refuted, he becomes disheartened. When one is praised in public, one becomes self-satisfied which in turn cause his own harm.

The role that reason plays in the statements raised by dogmatists has been discussed in the *Aṭṭhakavagga*. Buddha himself denied the capability of pure reason to comprehend ultimate reality on many occasions. The *Aṭṭhakavagga* says that owing to the abuse of reason there exists diversity of views regarding the nature of ultimate truth. Regarding truth and error, judgements were made by the thinkers contemporary to Buddha by applying reason. The Buddha had very clear views on the role of reason in the search for truth. In *Aṭṭhakavagga* we find the early Buddhist view that reason engages itself in deep and interminable conflict when it tries to cross the limits of phenomenal world to seek the ultimate truth. Philosophical conflict arises when human reason is employed beyond all empirical observation for the search for truths. The Buddha was a strong critic of metaphysical speculations. He has condemned the attempts of many thinkers of his time to give categorical answers to certain philosophical questions which go beyond the limits of experience and verification. He was an empiricist in his approach to philosophical problems and with regard to many philosophical questions, which concerns trans-mundane matter (10

questions, according to Pali canonical literatures), Buddha used to remain silent. The answers given to such questions by different thinkers during Buddha's time are described in the Pali Nikāyas as *pacceka-sacca* (individual truths).

“The multiplicity of conclusions on the nature of truth and reality in the contemporary philosophical background was undoubtedly very perplexing to any inquirer into them. There is sufficient evidence to conclude that contemporary skepticism was a result of the intellectual confusion caused by a multiplicity of views.”⁹

Saṅjaya Belaṭṭhiputta (in Pāli): Saṅjaya also known by the name Saṅjaya Vairatiputra. According to B.K.Matilal, in the Indian context Saṅjaya and a few other *sramanas* who were contemporaries of Buddha may be mentioned as skeptics. Saṅjaya is said to be the precursor of the later day skepticism as reflected in the writings and thought of Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi and Śrīharṣa. Each of these four philosophers is said to belong to four different schools: Ajnana, Buddhism, Advaita and Materialism respectively, but shared a common philosophical methodology known as Skepticism. Saṅjaya was an Indian ascetic teacher who lived around the 6th century BCE in the region of Magadha. He was proponent of the *ajñāna* school of thought and contemporaneous with Mahavira, Makkhali Gosala and the Buddha. There is hardly any literature surviving on the Ajñāna philosophy, so we are to know about them through Jain and Buddhist texts where we find mention of Ajñāna philosophy. In Ajñāna philosophy it is maintained that it is not possible for one to know the truth regarding theories or matters beyond our limited capacity so one must accept one's ignorance and live with it until one have concrete evidence

⁹ Premasiri, P.D, *The Philosophy of the Aṭṭhakavagga*, The Wheel Publication No. 182, BPS online Edition, 2008, p. 32

of one's theory. Prof H. Ui describes "Sañjaya's philosophy as a skepticism on the one hand and a primitive step towards the criticism of knowledge on the other".¹⁰

Sañjaya may be designated as a Philosophic skeptic. In the Pali texts the skeptics are nicknamed as *Amaravikkhepikas* which translates as Eel wrigglers. Sañjaya may also be referred as an eel wriggler. Eel-wiggler is described in *Brahmajāla Sutta* 2.23: "There are monks, some ascetics and Brahmins who are Eel-Wrigglers. When asked about this or that matter, they resort to evasive statements, and they wriggle like eels on four grounds"¹¹ These four cases are: Any declaration of a thesis might be a lie, or it might create harmful emotions, might raise objections, not easy to answer, or lastly that the eel-wiggler might appear to be fool (*Brahmajāla Sutta* 2.24–27). The skeptical angle here is that eel-wrigglers refuse, much like Pyrrhonian skeptics, to either assert or deny a thesis.

This attitude is clearly depicted in the figure of Sañjaya Belaṭṭhaputta in *Samaññaphala Sutta*:

Sañjaya Belaṭṭhaputta said:

"If you ask me: 'Is there another world?' if I thought so, I would say so. But I don't think so. I don't say it is so, and I don't say otherwise. I don't say it is not. If you ask: 'Isn't there another world?' ... 'Both?' ... 'Neither?' ... 'Is there fruit and result of good and bad deeds?' 'Isn't there?' ... 'Both?' ... 'Neither?' ...

¹⁰ Ui, H., *The Vaisheshika Philosophy*, London, 1917, p.33

¹¹ Walsh Maurice, trans. *Long Discourse of the Buddha*, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995, p.80

‘Does the Tathāgata exist after death?’ ‘Does he not?’ ... ‘Both? ... Neither?’ ... I don’t not say it is not.”¹²

It’s worth mentioning that Sañjaya clearly uses the method of fourfold negation or *catuskoṭi*, of almost the same type which was later used by Nāgārjuna. That is, Sañjaya denies four options: that it is, that it is not, that it both is and is not, and that it neither is nor is not. We find in Sañjaya the roots of the argument-form that eventually came to be an important and crucial method for classical Indian skeptics: *prasaṅga*.

Brahmajāla Sutta:

There are 34 sutras in the *Digha Nikāya* and the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (Pali: Sutta) is the first among them. The name means Net (jāla-net, entanglement) of Brahma. The Sutta is also called *Atthajāla*, *Dhammajala*, *Ditthijala*.

In Brahmajala Sutta, we find description of four schools of skepticism, the first three of whom advocated Skepticism based on fear of falsehood (*musavadabhaya*), fear of involvement (*upadanabhaya*), and fear of interrogation in debate (*anuyogabhaya*), respectively, which all of them considered undesirable since it led to remorse or worry, and which led to a moral danger. While these three schools seem to have valued mental equanimity, it seems that the fourth school of Sceptics, associated with the philosopher Sanjaya Belatthiputta, did not share this value.¹³

¹² Ibid, p. 97

¹³ Jayatilleke, K.N, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1963, p.128

The first school is described in the *Brahmajala Sutta (BJS)*:

“Herein a certain recluse or brahmin does not understand, as it really is, that this is good or this is evil. And it occurs to him: I do not understand what is good or evil as it really is. Not understanding what is good or evil, as it really is, if I were to assert that this is good and this is evil, that will be due to my likes, desires, aversions, or resentments. If it were due to my likes, desires, aversions or resentments, it would be wrong. And if I were wrong, it would cause me worry (*vighato*) and worry would be a moral danger to me (*antarayo*). Thus, through fear of being wrong (*musavadabhaya*) and the abhorrence of being wrong, he does not assert anything to be good or evil and on questions being put to him on this or that matter he resorts to verbal jugglery and eel-wriggling, saying: I do not say so, I do not say thus, I do not say otherwise, I do not say no, I deny the denials. (literally, I do not say "no, no")”.¹⁴

Where there is lack of adequate information, the Skeptics judiciously recommend suspension of judgement. According to Jayatilleke, this probably was not a temporary suspension of judgement, until new information could crop up for better evaluation; but rather it was meant to be a permanent state of affair by direct denying the very possibility of knowledge, and thus of questions relating to morality. Thus, their Skepticism is motivated by both intellectual as well as moral reasoning (i.e. fear of asserting falsehood due to one's prejudices). They seem to have contended that knowledge was not necessary for salvation but for *karma-patha*.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.122-123

We find the account of the second school of Skeptism in *BJS* in similar terms as that of the first one with exception that for them believing in a proposition by one's desires, aversions, and resentments would be entanglement and such entanglement would result in worry and moral danger. This school is said to adopt Skepticism mainly due to morality, since to do otherwise would lead to worry and mental disquietude

In *BJS*, the third school of Skepticism is shown to put forward such arguments in support for their view point:

“I do not know, as it really is, what is good and what is evil and not knowing, if I were to pronounce that this is good or this is evil, then I would have to join issue, argue and debate with recluses and brāhmins, learned, subtle, hair-splitters, skilled in controversy, who go about debunking with their intellect the theories of others. If I were to join issue, argue and debate with them, I would not be able to explain to them. If I were unable to explain to them, that would cause me worry (*vighata*) and be moral danger (*antarayo*). Thus because he fears and detests interrogation (*anuyoga*) he does not "pronouce this to be good nor that to be evil."¹⁵

Brahmajāla Sutta describes the fourth school of Skeptics in the following way:

“Herein a certain recluse or brahmin is dull, stupid. And by reason of his dullness and stupidity, when questioned on this or that matter, he resorts to verbal jugglery or eel-wriggling: "If you

¹⁵ Ibid, p.127

ask me whether there is a next world, then if it were to occur to me (*iti ce me assa*) that there is a next world, I would pronounce that there is a next world. Yet, I do not say so, I do not say thus, I do not say otherwise, I do not say no, I deny the denials. Similarly with regard to the propositions, "there is no next world", "there is and is not a next world", "there neither is nor is not a next world", "there are beings who survive (death)", "there are no beings who survive", "there are and are no beings who survive", "there neither are nor are there no beings who survive", "there is a result and a consequence of good and evil actions", "there is no result or consequence of good or evil actions", "the Perfect One (Tathagato) exists after death", "the Perfect One does not exist after death", "the Perfect One both exists and does not exist after death", "the Perfect One neither exists nor does not exist after death""¹⁶

We find in the account of the fourth school of Skepticism, lack of concern for good life and peace of mind, which the other three schools regarded as desirable, and thus their admission of skepticism.

2.3: Jayarāśi Bhaṭṭa and Rise of Absolute Skepticism

Jayarāśi Bhaṭṭa, considered by many scholars as a Carvāka or lokāyata thinker, is a popular *vaitaṇḍika*. Vaitaṇḍikas are considered as Indian skeptics by Prof Matilal. Krishna Kumar Dixit¹⁷ considers Jayarāśi as an extreme skeptic who does not have any faith in philosophical venturing. Jayarāśi is identified as the author of a rare and unparallel work named *Tattvapaplavasiṃha* which depicts a full-fledged form of Indian

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 131

¹⁷ Dixit, K.K. "The Ideological Affiliation of Jayarāśi, the author of *Tattvapaplavasiṃha*", *Indian Studies: Past and Present*, 1962, p. 98

skepticism. The name of the book implies ‘a lion upsetting and annihilating all *tattvas* or principles’. Jayarāṣi can be said to hold a unique place in the field of Indian Skepticism as without holding any sorts of presupposition he is seen to refute every means of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*) and establishes boldly that there can be no ‘Tattva’ or principles either. For, If *pramāṇas* are refuted the objects get refuted automatically. In this way, he comes to the conclusion that the so-called dichotomy of *pramāṇa* and *prameya* is meaningless and useless.¹⁸ To establish his position, in *Tattvopaplavasimha* he nullified at first the notion of *pramāṇa* in general like perception inference *upamāna* testimony and even *arthapatti*, *anupalabdhi*, *aithiya*, *sambhava*. He attacked the definitions of these *pramāṇas* and showed that all these are defective. As other *pramāṇas* are indebted to perception for their authenticity, he has given much emphasis on perception. He refuted the definition of perception presented by Nyāya, Mimāṃsakas and Buddhists but at the beginning, he criticized vehemently the Naiyāyikas’ definition of perception which is well-accepted and popular in philosophical arena.

Gautama in his *Nyāyasūtra* 1.1.4 defines perception as:

“*Indriyārtha sannikarṣotpannam jñānam avyapadeśyam avyabhicāri vyavasāyātmakam pratyakṣam*”.¹⁹ That is to say, Perception is that cognition resulting from sense object contact and which is independent of words, non-erroneous and is of a definite character.

¹⁸ Bhaṭṭa, Jayarāṣi, *Tattvopaplavasimha*, ed. Svāmī Dvārikādāsaśāstrī, BauddhaBharati, Varanasi, 1987, p.1.

¹⁹ Tarkabagish, Phanibhusan, *Nyāyadarshan(Vol-1)*, Kolkata: Paschimanga Rajya Pustak Parsad, 2011, p. 104

The definition contains four necessary terms- *Indriyārtha sannikarsatpanna*, *avyapadeśya*, *avyabhicāri*, *vyavasāyatmaka*. All the terms are useless according to Jayarāśi.

We find the refutation of the term ‘*avyapadeśya*’ in *Lakṣanasāra*. Pandit Sukhlalji Sanghavi and Prof. R.C Parikh the joint editors of *Tattvopaplavasimha*, have mentioned that the book which is now extant probably is a work of Jayarāśi.²⁰ So in *Tattvapalavasimha* Jayarāśi has not criticised the significance of this particular word rather concentrates his attention on the other three terms. Now here we will put our attention only to the criticism of the term ‘*avyabhicāri*’ by Jayarāśi

What does ‘*Avyabhicāri*’ mean? Etymologically the expression signifies non-erroneous cognition. But when some cognition is interpreted as erroneous? Some cognition is treated as erroneous or illusory when the character which is there in a particular object is not depicted in the cognition properly. In other words, it is ascertainment of a character in that object which is supposed to be the non-locus of that character.

Realizing the strength of the qualifier ‘*avyabhicāri*’ in the definition of perception, Jayarāśi goes on to challenge this expression with the intention that if the foundation is destroyed the superstructure which is erected on it would automatically collapse. *Avyabhicāritva* though is the defining character of *pratyakṣa*; in general it is also the mark of *pramā*. The *pramānavādins* defines *pramā* as *avyabhicāri* (non-erroneous). So if the term can be shown to be meaningless, the definition of *Pramā* will naturally be refuted.

²⁰ Bhaṭṭa, Jayarāśi, *Tattvopaplavasimha*, ed. Pandit Sukhlalji Sanghavi and Rasiklal C. Parikh, Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1940

In his refutation, Jayarāśi argues that Perceptual knowledge can be considered as *avyabhicāri* in four possible ways. Firstly, by use of the term *avyabhicāri* it may be signified that the cognition in question is resulted from non-fallacious causal factors. Secondly, that cognition can be counted as *avyabhicāri* in the sense it is non-contradicted i.e it is free from contradiction. Thirdly, *avyabhicāri* cognition is that which is endowed with efficacy to give rise to successful activity. Fourthly that cognition can be *avyabhicāri* due to some other reason.²¹

In the very next step, Jayarāśi proceeds to establish that a perceptual knowledge cannot be considered *avyabhicāri* in any of these four senses. At first it cannot be claimed that perception is derived from non-vitiated causal factors. If it is so, Jayarāśi asks, how could it be established? Obviously, it cannot be done by means of perception, as the senses which are necessary conditions of perception are beyond the scope of perception owing to their subtlety. It cannot be established by inference as *liṅga* which is the core of inference is beyond apprehension and that which itself is not known cannot be used to establish other things.

That, it cannot even be claimed that the non-spuriousness of the sense is proved by its instrumentality in the origination of a valid perceptual cognition; for the validity of that valid perceptual cognition would again be dependent on non-spuriousness of the sense. It would be a circular process indeed. If establishment of A is dependent on B, the establishment of B, in turn, cannot logically be dependent on A.

²¹ ‘...kimaduṣṭkāraśāṅdohotpādyatvena, āhosvidbādhārahitatvena, prvr̥ttisāmarthena, anyathāvā?’-Bhaṭṭa, Jayarāśi, Tattvopaplavasīmha, ed. Svāmīdvārikādāśaśāstrī, BauddhaBharati, Varanasi, 1987, p.2.

Again as the sense organs are the loci of both good qualities and faults, the knowledge arising out of them may be faulty as well.

Hence, *avyabhicāritva* in the sense of non-defective causal factor cannot serve as a defining characteristic of valid cognition.

Secondly, it cannot be claimed either that perceptual knowledge in question is non –erroneous in the sense of being non contradicted, if one says that the Perceptual knowledge which has originated is non-erroneous as there is non-contradiction then question arises: There is absence of contradiction because the perception has revealed the fact or because all the factors that produce the contradictory knowledge are not present here? This can be a case of doubt.

In reply it is said that as a matter it is seen that usually due of lack of all factors contributing to the contradictory knowledge does not happen for example, in the ray of mirage at a distance when there arise the knowledge of water there is no contradiction arising at that point. But, when there is conglomeration of all factors, with the familiar place the contradicted knowledge does arise. And sometimes for the arising of the knowledge of contradiction it takes a year about and sometimes owing to absence of all necessary factors, the contradicted knowledge does not originate at all. But simply because the contradicted knowledge does not arise, it cannot be justified that the perceptual cognition is true. Further, the absence of contradictory knowledge itself indicates that there is contradiction, as the knowledge of absence of contradiction will cause the knowledge of contradiction.

Further there is another point to be taken into consideration. Is it the case that there is absence of contradictory knowledge for

everybody? Or, such absence of contradiction is just for that one who has actually perceived?

Now if perception of every individual is accompanied with the absence of contradictory knowledge, then every percipient being would be considered omniscient. If it were the case, then it will contradict the *lokavyavahāra* that each one doesn't seem to be omniscient.²²

Now, if we accept that the non-production of contradiction depends on the cogniser's non—apprehension of contradiction then it is unjustified for the easy reason that an erroneous cognition of mirage and the like is cognised even when there is non—generation of a contradictory cognition for the perceiver on account of his going to a different place or his death or on the similar grounds.

It may also be the case that due to the nature of necessary and sufficient causal conditions, erroneous cognition arises in such a way that it prohibits the production of contradictory cognition, and it is on account of this complex situation that a particular cognition is said to be uncontradicted just as a cognition is recognised as valid according to the *pramāṇavādin*s. Thus, according to Jayarāśi, "a cognition whose cause is defective and about which one has the cognition ' it is false ' that cognition alone is untrue"²³ So, absence of contradiction cannot serve as mark of valid cognition.

Now third alternative i.e *avyabhicāri* in the sense of having efficiency of successful activity, is also not tenable according to Jayarāśi. It is a fact of common experience that after cognising an object, we are

²² *Asarvajñavyavahārābhāvaprasaṅgaḥ* -Ibid., p.2.

²³ Mohanta, Dilip kumar, "A Critique of Jayarāśi's Critique of Perception", *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol- XVII No.4, Oct. 1990, p. 494

either tempted to get it or avoid that object. If one becomes successful in getting that object, then one regards one's cognition to be free from error (avyabhicāri). But if one fails, then one take that cognition as 'erroneous'. Jayarāśi pleads that if non-erroneousness' refers to practical efficiency, that is, an association of the said cognition with the result (metaphorically which means garland, sandalwood etc.), then we must see whether the practical efficiency (pravṛttisāmarthatva) is known or unknown? If one says that it causes the knowledge without being known, then how does one knows that it exist. And if it is said that it causes the knowledge after being known, how does it lead to knowledge that the perception is not erroneous? Hence, one will have to abide by the same method of enquiry as presented before. If water is attained after the knowledge of water, it must be concluded that the knowledge of water which arose before, is not erroneous. There one would like to ask, is it so because one gets the water which was revealed in the knowledge or because one gets water of that class? If it is said that, one gets knowledge which was reflected in the perception, it will be improper. Because what appeared in the knowledge, does not exist there as there is possibility that the water has become extinct through the action in the parts caused by striking of water, by the changing movements of fish, buffalo etc. Again, if it is said that the knowledge of water is considered non-erroneous as it results in getting of water belonging to the class of water, revealed in the said knowledge then in cases even if an erroneous knowledge of water give rise to people getting water in that situation too that erroneous knowledge will have to be regarded as a true cognition. In Clarification it may be said, the erroneous knowledge of water does not lead to getting the water connected with a particular space and particular time. But, a true cognition of water does lead to

getting the water connected with a particular space and time and therefore such a true cognition will be considered as non- erroneous. Then it implies that, that knowledge which does not lead to getting the thing revealed by it is an erroneous knowledge. In that case, knowledge which is caused by something which is about to perish and also the knowledge of moon, sun, planet, and stars etc. will have to be declared as erroneous since those knowledges donot result in getting the objects revealed by the respective knowledges.²⁴

Further, it is also not true that what one considers to be a true cognition, leads to getting the water connected with a particular space and particular time, because as water is likely to be destroyed the place also is also likely to be destroyed. Jayarāśi refutes the fourth alternative as well. In this way he showed the futility of the expression *avyabhicāri*.

Jayarāśi can be referred as a radical skeptic. He denounces all tattvas (principles) in his *Tattavapaplavasimha*.

2.4: Nourishment of Cognitive Skepticism in Śrīharṣa's *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādyā*

In addition to Jayarāśi and Nāgārjuna there is another thinker, Śrīharṣa who upheld the same *Vaiṭaṇḍika* tradition in Indian philosophy. He was a follower of Advaita tradition. The Advaitin has held a non-dualistic view of universe, where a sole reality called Brahman is accepted and it is self-evident requiring no proof to establish it. Śrīharṣa being an advaitin refuted the dualistic views. The sole weapon in Sriharsa's philosophical arsenal is Vitaṇḍā, a special skeptical mode of argumentation that is

²⁴ Bhaṭṭa, Jayarasi, *Tattvopaplavasimha*, trans. V.N.Jha, Kerala: Chinmaya International Foundation Shodha Sansthan, 2013

concerned exclusively with refutation.²⁵ To him Brahman the only reality is self-evident and requires no proof so the admission of *pramāṇa* and adoption of *pramāṇa-prameya* dichotomy is useless.

In his epoch-making *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādyā*, Śrīharṣa proceeds to meet the objection that there could not be any discussion or debate between two groups or persons unless both of them are agreed in the authenticity of *pramāṇa*. Those, who uphold this view are of the opinion that *pramāṇa* is must as it is unanimously admitted by all schools of philosophy (*Sarvasiddhānta*). It is not possible for one to enter into any logical discussion or dialogue without admitting *pramāṇa*. So the no-*pramāṇa* theory, that Vaitaṇḍikas represents, is untenable. Anticipating this claim of the *pramāṇavādīns*, Śrīharṣa put forward a series of arguments to disprove the allegation that the *apramāṇavādīns* have no right to take part in any discussion or debate to determine the nature of an object or to win over the opponent.

On the very outset, Śrīharṣa asks why admission of *pramāṇa* etc is needed. He presents four alternatives that any *pramāṇavadīns* can put forward: Firstly, No debate or discussion between the proponent and opponent regarding the reality of *pramāṇa* can take place if *pramāṇa* etc are not accepted²⁶ Secondly, as the acceptance of the reality of *pramāṇas* is the cause for the disputants to begin any discussion.²⁷ Thirdly, Since the reality of *pramāṇa* is widely accepted and its acceptance is a conventional one, every one participating in a debate must admit it.²⁸

²⁵ Ayon Maharaj, “Śrī Harṣa contra Hegel: Monism, Skeptical Method, and the Limits of Reason”, *Philosophy East and West*, Vol.64, No.1, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2014, p.92

²⁶ *Kim tadanabhyupagacchadbhyām vādīprativādībhyām tadabhyupagama sāhitya niyatasya vāgyavahārasya pravartayitumaśakyatvāt-* Śrīharṣa, *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādyam*, ed. Shrimohan Bhattacharya, Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institution of Culture, 2000, p. 5.

²⁷ *Utakathakābhyām pravartanīya vāgyavahārāṃpratihatvāt-* Ibid, p.5-6

²⁸ *Utalokasiddhatvāt-* Ibid, p.6

Fourthly, If *Pramāṇa* is not accepted then the result of a debate i.e establishment of truth and victory over opponents would remain unachievable.²⁹

According to Śrīharṣa, the first alternative is untenable because it is evident that *apramāṇavādīns*, like Cārvākas and Mādhyamikas, have participated in debate and discussed at length with the *pramāṇavādīns* regarding the reality of *pramāṇa*.³⁰ Otherwise if they didn't set forth their views it would have remain unknown making it difficult for the opponents to venture in refuting their positions.

The second alternative is also not valid. The successful completion of the writings like *Lokāyatika Sūtra*, *Mādhyamaka Kārikā*, *Śāriraka Bhāṣya* by their authors, who have no trust on the authenticity of *pramāṇas* proves that admission of the reality of *pramāṇa* is not the cause of use of words. So it is not the case that *pramāṇas* must be admitted for a discussion to begin.

Admitting the fact of the *apramāṇavādīns* participating in a debate with their opponents, the Naiyāyikas may further argue that unless reality of *pramāṇa* is recognized, the desired goal of refutation of the opponent's position and establishment of one's own could not be accomplished. In reply Śrīharṣa says that entering in a debate denying the reality of *pramāṇas*, cannot results in the failure of establishment of one's own position or inability to nullify the position of others, rather it can be said to be an outcome of the fallacies embedded in the propositions in question, presented by the speaker.³¹ In this regard, Naiyāyikas are

²⁹ *Athavātadanabhyupagamasyatattvanirṇayaphalātiprasaṅgakatvāt- Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³¹ 'Pramāṇādyanabhyupagamya pravartitatvaṁ tadīya sādhanavāddhanākṣamatāyāṁ na niyāmakam kintu sadvacanābhāsa lakṣaṇa yogitvamityavaśyābhyupeyam bhavatā....' - *Ibid.*, p.7.

believed to agree with Śrīharṣa. The *pramāṇavādīns* would not give up their challenge here. They would further argue that ascertainment or denial of any thesis is subject to the operation of a *pramāṇa* whatsoever. But if *pramāṇa* is taken as unreal, how could discussions take place?

In response to this, Śrīharṣa puts forward that the opponents have misunderstood the point. What he intended to say is that it is not necessary that one should start the debate with this presupposition that there is no *pramāṇa*. Even a person who is indifferent in this issue may get tempted to enter into a debate.

With regard to the third alternative, Śrīharṣa is expected to say that reality of *pramāṇa* cannot be accepted on the basis of its being well-accepted as this convention or acceptance by all does not provide proper justification of retaining any thesis.

Śrīharṣa will also decline to accept the fourth alternative i.e if *Pramāṇa* is not accepted then there would be an undue extension of the result of a debate. To Śrīharṣa what is important in this case is not acceptance of *pramāṇas* but following rules and conditions of debate.

2.5: Jiddu Krishnamurti and A New Skeptical Approach

Jiddu Krishnamurti, a 20th century sage, philosopher and thinker, has the most profound impact on human consciousness in modern times. He has illumined the lives of millions over the world – intellectuals and laymen, young and old. Krishnamurti has opined, ‘My only concern is to set men absolutely, unconditionally free’.³² He has emphasized being free when acquiring knowledge; to have freedom to see things as they are, not being

³² Weeraperuma, Susunaga, *Living and Dying: From Moment to Moment*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1996, P. 1

influenced by the world around during the process. He was against all sorts of conditioning and ‘isms’. Krishnamurti, one of the greatest thinkers of the east did not expound or formulate any philosophy or religion rather he has drawn our attention to the fact that still concerns us – the problems of living in modern society, where morality is gradually waning and individuals are searching frantically for peace. Krishnamurti belonged to no religious organization, sect or country nor did he subscribe to any school of political or ideological thought. On the contrary, he thinks that these things divide men and bring in violence³³. According to Krishnamurti “all ideologies are utterly idiotic and what is important is not a philosophy of life but to observe what is actually taking place in our daily life, inwardly and outwardly”³⁴. We can say that Krishnamurti was the ultimate skeptic. Jay G Williams in his article “Absolute Skepticism, Lao Zi and Krishnamurti” opines that Jiddu Krishnamurti may serve as a possible representative of absolute skepticism.³⁵

Encyclopaedia of Philosophy defines Skepticism “as a critical philosophical attitude that questions the reliability of knowledge claims, made by philosophers and others. The expressions like ‘skeptic’, ‘skepticism’ is generally claimed to be derived from the original Greek term, *skeptikos* which means ‘enquirers’”³⁶. Again some hold the view that, the Greek word *Skepsis*, another root of the word Skepticism, means investigation. By calling themselves skeptics, the ancient skeptics thus

³³ Krishnamurti, J., *Freedom from the known*, ed. Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti Foundation India, Chennai, 2010, p.1-2

³⁴ *Ibid*, p.15

³⁵ Williams Jay G, “Absolute Skepticism, Lao Zi and Krishnamurti”, *Proceedings of the XXII World Congress of Philosophy*, Vol-51, 2008, p.1

³⁶ Edwards, Paul. Ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol- VII, London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1967, p.449.

describe themselves as investigators. They also call themselves ‘those who suspend’ (ephektikoi), thereby signalling that their investigations lead them to suspension of judgement. They do not put forward theories. At its core, ancient skepticism is a way of life devoted to enquiry³⁷.

The word *skepticism* in its strict sense has nothing to do with doubt, disbelief or negativity. Skepticism is the process of applying reason and critical thinking to determine the validity of some perspective. Skepticism is about redirecting our attention and be free from all sorts of superstitions and common misinformation and focus on the ideas, beneficial to humanity and the world. The scientific method is central to skepticism, which is an essential and meaningful component of the search for truth.

Krishnamurti was a true enquirer and investigator. His investigation leads him to un-conditioning of mind and total non-adherence to any theory or view point. He said, “I maintain that truth is a pathless land and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever by any religion, by any sect...”³⁸ Truth being limitless, unconditioned, and unapproachable by any path whatsoever cannot be created. He maintains that no organization can lead man to the land of supreme truth.

In the words of Krishnamurti,

“Skepticism is not Cynicism or denial it is the state of a mind that does not agree quickly, that does not accept or take things for

³⁷ Vogt, katja, “Ancient Skepticism”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Stanford University, 2018, plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/ancient/ accessed on 06.03.2020.

³⁸ Weeraperuma, Susunaga, *That Pathless Land*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1996, p. 1

granted. A mind that accepts is seeking, not enlightenment or wisdom but refuge.”³⁹

Krishnamurti reminded his listeners time and again that Humanity is our first identity. We may have individual religious or caste-based identity by birth but we all are equal as human beings. His teachings transcend all man-made boundaries of religious beliefs, nationalistic sentiment and sectarian outlook, giving a new meaning and direction to man’s search for truth. Tagore also dreamt of ‘that heaven of freedom’, “where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls...”⁴⁰

Krishnamurti’s teachings besides being relevant to the modern age, is timeless and universal. He does not advocate the practice of any religion, either ancient or modern, in fact, he denounces organized religion in forceful language. His basic message is about the unconditioning of the mind.

Krishnamurti has questioned, Can a conditioned mind ever think clearly, freely and creatively? The answer will be in the negative. Conditioning is a major hindrance to freedom. What is conditioning? One is born in a particular society and at a particular time. All the external factors like religion, nationality, culture, political ideology etc. act upon one right from birth. For example, one is not born a Hindu or a Muslim but the society in which one born gives one the identity of a Hindu or a Muslim. An individual grows with that identity; he accepts all the symbols and rituals, attached with it as sacred and he starts measuring everything, sees everything through these windows. This is conditioning.

³⁹ 7. Krishnamurti’s Talks 1949- 1950(verbatim Report), India, p.68.

⁴⁰ *Gitanjali* 35, Tagore, Rabindranath, *Gitanjali (Songs Offerings)*, Script, Kolkata, 2006, p. 91.

The thought that I am a Hindu or a Muslim is rooted in an individual and he goes by that thought. A conditioned mind is synonymous to a prejudiced mind, which cannot think freely and clearly. So we should keep away all sorts of conditioning to enjoy heavenly freedom. Tagore craved for that state of mind “where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habits”.⁴¹

Our dead habits, prejudices and traditional thinking beget hatred and ill-feeling among groups and community. As a result, Love is slowly withering away from our life. Krishnamurti is truly holding a mirror to ourselves. Can a conditioned heart ever come upon that thing called love, which is a prerequisite of global peace and harmony. The importance of love is a recurrent theme in the works of Krishnamurti. There is nothing more divine than the capacity to love selflessly.

What is love in true sense? The word Love is often defined in narrow sense. Everybody talks of love. We often say I love my country, I love my parents. Is love an idea? If it is taken as an idea, it can be cultivated, cherished, twisted in any fashion one desires. But Love in true sense cannot be twisted in any way one may like. It is an emotion coming out naturally from the core of the heart and it is ‘Love’ which may be the ultimate solution to human problems. Love is an unconditional and selfless feeling. It is free from the fetters of societal compulsions. Duty in most cases, involves social obligations. So long as you are compelled to do something because it is your duty, hardly there remains any trace of love. We have to free our minds from all sorts of conditioning then only can we come close to Truth and can realize the beauty of ‘Love’. True love always sings the triumphant song of humanity.

⁴¹ *Gitanjali* 35, Tagore, Rabindranath, *Gitanjali (Songs Offerings)*, Script, Kolkata, 2006, p. 91.

Krishnamurti has advocated for the internal development of humankind besides external development. Internal development means awakening of inner self devoid of mental evils like hatred, jealousy etc. On the contrary, it would welcome cooperation and understanding. Further, a broad heart will possess love and fraternity for the whole of mankind.

The more we deepen our inquiry into the teachings of Krishnamurti, an eminent thinker and an Awakener of Truth, the less we are satisfied with our explanations of the human condition because life can not be bound in an exceedingly conceptual nutshell as it belongs to the category of infinite change. Krishnamurti has focused on developing self-knowledge and has suggested us not to remain on the theoretical level alone rather to realize the actuality and implications of our own being. The truth, upheld by Krishnamurti, is not something abstract but the Truth emerging from our day to day life. That is why Krishnamurti should not be claimed to be a Philosopher in the established sense rather should be designated as an Awakener of Truth.

Krishnamurti was a philosopher whose passionate look for the ‘good society’ wasn’t rooted in any particular religious or philosophical tradition. He was not in favour of following any specific path for bringing about goodness in both individuals and society. He was against any types of theorizing. In his pursuit of the good society, krishnamurti emphasized the individual’s relationship to society as well as his or her responsibility for establishing the ‘good’ society. Truth lies in everything- in every stone, in every leaf, in every human heart. That truth doesn’t require any particular path on the contrary life Truth can truly be achieved through our life as it is.

It is true that whenever we adhere to any views or attempt to theorize we invite more contradiction and conflict. Krishnamurti's skeptical attitude is not opposed to the well-being of the individual and the society rather it is a means to reach a conflict-free Society where there will prevail peace and happiness. Following Krishnamurti we can dream of such a society in which people will not be divided based on caste, religion, culture or country; rather they will all be united based on love and universal brotherhood. Bond of fraternity and cooperation for each other will result in social well-being and humanity will reign supreme in this mortal world.

CHAPTER 3:

NĀGĀRJUNA AND HIS DIALECTICAL PHILOSOPHY

3.1: Framework of Nāgārjuna's Philosophical Thought

Nāgārjuna, a well-known madhyamaka Buddhist philosopher is considered 'second Buddha' for his logical brilliance and erudition. Among a band of Buddhist Philosophers he outshines others for his remarkable and distinctive contribution in the philosophical arena.

There are various significant works to his credit, which are mentioned as follows under certain categories:

- a) Texts composed mainly to refute the doctrine of other Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools of thought: In this category fall *Mūlamadhyamaka kārikā*, *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, *Ekaślokaśāstra*, *Dvādaśamukha-śāstra* and *Śūnyatā-saptati*.
- b) Texts of expository nature: *Pratītyasamutpāda-hṛdaya-kārikā*, *Yuktiṣaṣṭhikā* & *Bodhisattvapātheya-śāstra*.
- c) Commentaries and records of oral preachings (*upadeśa*): *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-śāstra*, *Daśabhūmi-vibhāsā-śāstra*, *Bhavaśaṃkrānti śāstra*, *Ārya dharmadhātugarbha- vivaraṇa* & *Vaidalya having a śūtra and prakaraṇa*.
- d) Devotional verses: *Dharmadhātustava*, *Niraupamyastava*, *Lokātīta-stava*, *Paramārthastava*, *Acintyastava* and *Stutyatītastava*.
- e) Letters: This category includes *Suhrillekha* & *Ratnāvalī*.
- f) Collection of sūtras (*Sūtrasamuccaya*). Nāgārjuna is also credited with the writing of *Dharmasaṃgraha* and *Mahāyāna viṃśikā*.¹

¹ Chatterjee, H.N, *The Philosophy of Nāgārjuna as contained in the Ratnāvalī*, Calcutta: Saraswat library, 1977.

Nāgārjuna's Philosophy is in fact difficult to understand and not at all easy to bring out a very consistent interpretation of it and there exists many controversies on that. He mainly talks about emptiness (*śūnyatā*), which is rejected by *astika* and some other *nāstika* systems as well like Jainism. They simply discarded because Nāgārjuna says 'nothing exist' which they assumed to be a doctrine of *abhāva*. Nobody cares to understand the significance of what Nāgārjuna says. Nāgārjuna issued his statement in a technical sense indicating the nonexistence of essence (*niḥsvabhāvatā*) of entities. But they failed to grasp the technical sense and criticized Nāgārjuna. For eg. Shankaracharya in his *Brahmasūtra bhāṣya* opined that it is not worthy of consideration. Jñāneswara, one of the Maharashtra saints, in his commentary on Bhagavad Gita paid salutation to Ganapati at the beginning. He has described Ganapati in terms of various Darśanas. He says, *śūnyavāda siddhānta* is *khaṇḍita danta* of Gaṇeśa i.e broken tooth of Gaṇeśa. There is a pun on the word *khaṇḍita*- it means refuted and it means broken. According to him, it is already refuted. It is a case of self-contradiction so should not be taken into consideration. But it should be worth remembering that such an erudite scholar like Nāgārjuna can never hold contradictory or absurd idea. His notion of *śūnyatā* does not indicate absence or *abhāva*. It means all the entities are dependently originated and hence essenceless. He refuted the so called *pramāṇa-prameya* dichotomy in his writings like *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (VV) and *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa* (VP) and criticized the Nyāya positions vehemently. Historically Nyāya theory was the first systematic theory of Knowledge in India which was presented along with and as suitable to the realistic metaphysics of Vaiśeṣika system. According to the Nyāya School if anyone wishes to make any claim about the nature of reality then he should present it within the framework of *pramāṇas*. This demand was unacceptable to Nāgārjuna because

according to him the framework of *pramāṇas* itself was essentialistic. Every *pramāṇa* had a fixed nature in the light of which the nature of the object was determined. Nāgārjuna being an anti-essentialist was critical about the whole system of *pramāṇas*. The position that Nāgārjuna tries to develop through the texts like VV or VP can be called anti essentialist position. Anti-essentialism can be translated as *niḥsvabhāva-vāda*, the view that things lack *svabhāva*. *Svabhāva* means the nature of a thing, which makes the thing what it is. The *Sarvāstivāda* school of Buddhism, the most realistic school, accepted various kinds of entities with well-defined natures or essences. The school admitted the existence of entities such as time, space, mind, matter and the person consisting of five aggregates. It also accepted relational pairs and trios such as cause and effect, knower and knowable, action- its agent and object and past-present and future. Though Nāgārjuna in MMK mainly focused on the views presented by the *Sarvāstivāda* school of Buddhism, his anti-essentialist criticism was not restricted to that. Through the views of *Sarvāstivāda* school he was examining the essentialist view in general. It is our common natural tendency to attribute existence or non-existence and other essential characteristics to things.

Nāgārjuna has used a peculiar method called *Prasaṅga* (roughly the method of reduction ad absurdum) for rejecting various essentialist views which according to him are dogmatic views or *dṛṣṭis*. In this context *prasaṅga* literally means calamity or unacceptable consequence. Rejecting a view by *prasaṅga* method means rejecting a view by pointing at the unacceptable consequence it will lead to. Nāgārjuna generally followed the following procedure while using *prasaṅga paddhati*.

Let us suppose that X is the essentialist view, which Nāgārjuna wants to reject. Then Nāgārjuna would analyse X in terms of four

possible alternative formulations. Then he would bring out the unacceptable consequence each one will lead to. In this way all the alternative formulations regarding 'X' stand rejected.

It is a common belief that an effect arises from causal conditions. Now with regard to a thing arising from something, Nāgārjuna thinks, there are four possible alternatives:

1. An entity arises from itself
2. An entity arises from other things
3. An entity arises from itself as well as others
4. An entity arises from neither.

Nāgārjuna shows that each alternative leads to an unacceptable consequence. By applying this Reduction ad absurdum he denies all alternatives, as he does not accept their common presupposition that things arise.

The language of existence leads to eternalism and the language of non-existence leads to nihilism. Both are expressions of fundamental craving, and hence lead to suffering. According to Nāgārjuna, Buddha avoids both the extremes. The middle way means not attributing either existence or non-existence to anything. The middle character of things is analytically related to essencelessness or emptiness. He also refers to dogmatic view point (drsti) as a kind of disease and realization of sunyata(emptiness) as freedom from the disease.²

² Based on a lecture by Prof. Pradeep Gokhale delivered in a workshop.

3.1.1: Theory of Pratityasamutpāda-A Foundation to Nāgārjuna's Philosophy

In the arena of Buddhist philosophy, the most important theory is of Pratītyasamutpāda. In general it seems a mere a causal theory but it has a crucial role in Buddhist Philosophy. In search of the main cause of suffering, Buddha implemented the theory of Pratītyasamutpāda. Nāgārjuna also paid a lot of importance to this theory in his writings like MMK, Pratītyasamutpādahṛdaya kārikā but himself doesnot embark upon the task of clarifying the meaning of the expression 'Pratītyasamutpāda'. His commentator Candrakīrti is seen to have given enough attention to the issue which indicates that at the time of Nāgārjuna the significance of the expression might be fairly well-known and readily acceptable in the then prevalent intellectual atmosphere. But with the passage of time such an understanding of the term must have become excessively hazier and through misunderstanding and various interpretation, the expression must have raised considerable controversy and difference of opinion.

The expression Pratītyasamutapāda said to comprised of two constituents –Pratītya and Samutpāda according to some. Here the first word pratītya is derived from the prefix prati, root √ i and the suffix lyap. √ i means going and *prati* means closeness (*sāṃipya*). The root word 'i' being added to prefix *prati* changes the meaning of the root word 'i'. Now the whole word *pratītya* denotes attainment by depending. *Samutpāda* is constituted of root word *pāda* being added to prefixes *Sam* and *ut*. It means origination. The whole word *pratītyasamutpāda* then will mean the origination of existent objects depending on something, here it means causes and conditions.

Another alternative interpretation is: Itya in *Pratītya* signifies destruction. *Prati* is used to mean *Vīpsā* or repetition i.e covering each case. So the term *pratītya* denotes each object which can be destroyed and *samutpāda* means origination. Therefore the entire term *pratītyasamutpāda* will signify origination of impermanent objects (*vināsinam*).

“Candrakīrti however prefers the former interpretation. That the sense of *pratītya* is dependence and not repetition is admitted by Nāgārjuna also. For, he has used the expression *prāpya* instead of *pratītya* in the following sentence: ‘Tat tat prāpya yad utpannam notpannam tat svabhāvataḥ’.”³

Thus Nāgārjuna, through the theory of *Pratītyasamutpāda* intends to point out that all the entities of this world are originated depending on the causes and conditions.

In the MMK, Nāgārjuna has discussed 8 characteristics of *Pratītyasamutpāda* :

Anirodham anutpādam anucchedam aśāśvataṃ

Anekārtham anānārtham anāgamam anirgamam⁴

1. Anirodham- Here ‘A’ is used in the negative sense and nirodham means ceasing. Thus the Sanskrit word translates into English as non-ceasing.

³ Chattopadhyay, Madhumita, “Pratītyasamutpāda, Sunyata and Human Actions”, *Jadavpur Journal of Philosophy*, Vol-III, No.2, Kolkata: Department of Philosophy, Jadavpur University, 1991,p.59.

⁴ Mūlamadhyamaka kārikā, Dedicatory verse, Kalupahana, David, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā of Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991, p. 103

2. Anutpādam- Utpādam refers to arising and A again here refers to negation of it. So it signifies non-arising.
3. Anucchedam – As ‘A’ is used in the negative and Uchedam means annihilation, the whole term signifies non-annihilation.
4. Aśāśvatam – The term śāśvata means permanent. Now ‘A’ added to ‘śāśvata’ the Sanskrit term is rendered in English as non-permanence.
5. Anekārtham- Ekārtha means identity. Now anekārtha is the negation of ekārtha meaning non-identity.
6. Anānartham- Nānārtha means different and as usual A is used as a prefix which denotes the negation. Hence the term signifies non-difference.
7. Anāgamam- This means non-appearance. Gamam, meaning appearance, added to A bearing negative sense signifies non-appearance.
8. Anirgamam- Nirgaman means to leave or disappear and when added with ‘A’ means non-disappearance.

Now as it is evident all these characteristics are in negation. The eight negations may be taken as a refutation of all the wrong views (mithya dr̥ṣṭi). These negations are seen to be in pair like *Anirodham-Anutpadam* likewise and could be considered as another way of showing the non-substantiality not only of phenomena but also of those views. They are non-substantial in the sense that they are not absolute. *Pratītyasamutpāda* would then stand for the middle way which is the right view on the basis of which the wrong ones are criticised. To Nāgārjuna, *Pratītyasamutapada* which is the middle way is equivalent to *Niḥsvabhāvatā* or *Śūnyatā* (voidness).

Now we will discuss about the *Pratītyasamutpāda* following the text *Pratītyasamutpādahṛdayakārikā* of Nāgārjuna.

The text is small comprising of seven kārikās. Here it is said that the twelve causal links indicated by Lord Buddha as dependently originated are divided into three groups or categories- *Kleśa*, *Karma* and *Duḥkha*. The dvādash nidānas mentioned in Buddhist Philosophy are *Avidyā*, *Sanskara*, *Vijñāna*, *nāmarupa*, *sadāyatana*, *Sparśa*, *Vedanā*, *tr̥snā*, *upādāna*, *bhava*, *janma* and *jarāmarana*. Of these 12 links the 1st, 8th and 9th i.e. *avidyā*, *tr̥snā* and *upādāna* come under *kleśa*, 2nd and 10th i.e. *samskāra* and *bhava* come under *karma* and remaining seven namely *vijñāna*, *nāmarupa*, *sadāyatana*, *sparśa*, *vedanā*, *janma*, *jarāmarana* - come under *duḥkha*. Nāgārjuna opines that from *Kleśa* originates *karma* and from that *duḥkha*. In this way from one the other originates thus resulting in the continuous flow or revolving of *bhavacakra*. In this connection it is said, *bhava* refers to the stages –*kāmaloka*, *rūpaloka* and *arūpaloka*. The causal links move like a circle. As a cycle revolves symmetrically similarly *kleśa*, *karma* and *duḥkha* revolve symmetrically and this is continuing since time immemorial so it has no origination. Question may arise is there any rules governing in case of *dvādash nidāna*. Is there any agent like God operating behind 12 links? In reply it is said that the entire world and all its entities are under the theory of cause-effect thus it is needless to imagine any other agent of this world. Naturally another question can arise if there is no agent then who moves from one loka (world) to another. In answer Nāgārjuna said, there is no subtle element in the world that moves from one loka to another. From *śūnya dharma* another *śūnya dharma* originates. “*Śūnyebhyo eva śūnya*

dharma probhobanti dharmebhyaḥ”.⁵ The 12 causal links are mutually related by causal relation and they are without self and essence and hence *śūnya*. From *kleśa*, karma which are *śūnya* the remaining seven i.e *duḥkha* which also are *śūnya* originate and there is no problem here. Now in *kārikā* 5 Nāgārjuna provides certain instances in answering the question how is it possible for one essenceless entity to originate from a similar nonessenceless entity.

“Svādhyāydīpamudrādarpan ghosārkakāntabījāmloḥ

Skandhapratisandhirsamkramasca bidvadbhirabadharjou”⁶

Let us concentrate on the instances given in *PHK*. The utterance of the scriptural saying by a teacher when heard by a disciple, the word uttered by the teacher and the word grasped by the disciple are neither same nor different. The relation between these two is that of cause and effect. The word uttered by the Preceptor is the cause and the word heard by the disciple is the effect. Thus both the words which are by nature essenceless (*śūnya*) can be the cause of another. In another instance, from one flame of lamp another flame gets ignited. In case of a seal, when we give a stamp the picture in the seal gets imprinted. The imprinted one is the copy of the main picture in the seal. Similarly, when we see our face in mirror then the reflection is the copy of the original face. Then in case of sound and echo – when echo is produced from sound it is the effect produced from the cause sound. When fire is generated due to Sun stone (*suryakānta moni*) then the fire is the effect of the stone. Similarly when seed gets sprouted, the latter is the effect of the seed. Then sourness

⁵ Pratītyasamutpādaḥṛdaya kārikā, 4- N.Aiyaswami Sasti, “Nāgārjuna’s Expositions of twelve Causal Links”, Bulletin of Tibetology, vol-5, No.2, Sikkim: Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, 1968, p.14

⁶ *PHK*, 5- *Ibid*, p.14.

brings water in the mouth, this sensation happens due to the sour fruit. That is in case of all instances, the relation operative is that of cause-effect. From a cause an effect originates and that effect is neither identical nor different from the cause.

Likewise, from one *pañcaskandha*, constituted of *rūpa*, *viññāna*, *vedanā*, *saṃjñā* and *saṃskāra*, next *pañcaskandha* even *pratisandhicitta* gets originated. Thus a series of continuity is seen though there is no identity. Due to cause effect relation, it appears as if there is one *skandha* or that there is a flow of *skandhas*, but in reality there no subtle entities that moves from one *loka* to another. Due to our imagination we wrongly assume that an object migrates from one world to another world or lokas in different time but it doesnot happen in reality. This theory of non-migration is accepted not only by Nāgārjuna but also by other Buddhist thinkers as well.

In 6th and 7th *kārikās*, Nāgārjuna described how it is possible for an individual to get liberation.

Nāgārjuna said that an individual should be free from false views. Those who see origination even in regard to very subtle entities could not find the real meaning of conditioned origination. Owing to wrong views (*mithya drṣṭi*) and delusion individual assume impermanent objects as permanent, selfless entity as having self and suffering as non-suffering. Thus, the one desirous of liberation should get rid of these false assumptions and views. There is nothing to be affirmed and denied. One who sees the real correctly will be easily liberated. Holding to wrong views is like disease and when one will be cure of this disease then one will develop no clinging or attachment towards these objects. When attachments ceases, individual will not be involved in any action. In

absence of any action there will generate no result and consequently individual will not be born again. When false views are completely removed and all the causes producing rebirth cease, ultimately leading to stoppage of rebirth that stage is liberation. When wise men realize liberation in this way, he will not cling to the false theories of eternalism, nihilism etc.

Though *Pratītyasamutpādhāṛdayakārikā* is a small text still it contains an important fact of Buddhist philosophy that the entire world is established on the law of cause and effect.

3.1.2: Theory of No-Self (Nairātmya)

The notion of self (*ātman*) occupies an important place in Indian Philosophy. It has been seen that the theory of self (*ātmavada*) acquired new shape since the age of Upaniṣads. In Upaniṣads we find various descriptions of atman. Gita describes it as immortal, un-decaying, unchanging and eternal. Many systems of Indian philosophy believe in that eternal self. But Lord Buddha in his philosophy has rejected all the prevalent views regarding self and tried to establish that there is no eternal, unchanging entity called self. Thus, the doctrine of No-self (anātman) is fundamental to Buddhist philosophy. All the schools of Buddhism support the doctrine of no-self and Mādhyamika philosophy is no exception to it. Mādhyamika philosopher Nāgārjuna too in his writings like *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, *Ratnāvalī* has focused on the concept of self. In RV, we find the distinction between two types of dharma, namely *Abhyudaya* (worldly pleasure) and *Naiḥśreyasa* (liberation). Specially in discussing the nature of liberation, Nāgārjuna has introduced the notion of self. He thinks, clinging to the notion of permanent self (*ātman*), bound individuals to this world. Nāgārjuna has pointed out the fact that

according to Buddha, all beings have arisen from the conception of I, enveloped with the conception of mine. In *Ratnāvalī* it is said that, “The I exists, the mine exists”: these are wrong conceptions. There is nothing called ‘I’ or ‘mine’. Those who are in search of the ultimate reality realize that ‘I exist’ or ‘mine exists’ are all false. From the knowledge of the ultimate, these two notions never follow. In this regard mention should be made of the two types of truths as differentiated by Nāgārjuna-*Paramārtha satya* (ultimate truth) and *Samvṛti satya* (conventional truth). From the standpoint of conventional truth the existence of self can be thought of. It is the natural tendency of men that they will believe in self. It is never easy for lay people to accept that there is nothing as such called self. In our daily life we use the terms I or mine. Our uses of language indicate the acceptance of some eternal entity called self and these linguistic applications mislead us. There are no entities corresponding to the terms like ‘*Aham*’ or ‘*tvam*’. ‘*Aham*’ and ‘*tvam*’ are the creations of human mind for practical utility. All these are actually untrue. In *Ratnāvalī*, Nāgārjuna says – “*Ahankarodbhavāḥ skandhāḥ so’hankaro’nrto’arthataḥ/ Bījaṃ yasya anṛtaṃ tasya prarohaḥ satyataḥ kutaḥ//*.”⁷

The concept of the *skandhas* has been stated to arise from the conception of ‘I’ (*Ahaṃ*) which is false (*anṛta*) in fact. And anything generated from this wrong notion is bound to be false. Now following *Ratnāvalī* it can be said that, as the *skandhas* are revealed as false, the conception of I is no more. And due to the absence of the conception of I, the aggregates arise no more. Here, we can cite analogy of mirror. As there is a mirror, the reflection of our face is seen. That reflection though

⁷ *Ratnāvalī*, 1.29, Chatterjee Sastri, H.N, The Philosophy of Nāgārjuna as contained in the *Ratnāvalī*, Calcutta: Saraswat Library, 1977,p.85.

similar to our real face has no real existence. So long the mirror exists that reflection can be seen, without the mirror that reflection is not found. Similarly on account of the aggregates we create the notion of I. In reality there is nothing called I. It is a known fact that earth, water, fire, air, space and consciousness exist in a person. Nāgārjuna has shown that a person is not any of these constituents individually nor a collection of all of them taken together. Thus being a composite of all these constituents a person is not real. Further through a fivefold analysis he refutes the notion of an inherently existent 'person'. The self exists in relation to the aggregates but the aggregates are not the self, neither are they included in the self, nor does the self contain the aggregates. The self further does not get mingled with the aggregates like fire and fuel because in that case they cannot be distinguished. Thus there is no self as such. Nāgārjuna, in his work entitled *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK) has also upheld similar view that nothing called self can be admitted. In respect of the denial of the existence of self, the Buddhists mainly say that- if the constitution of a being is analyzed nothing called self will be found over and above the five *skandhas*. *Rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saṃjñā*, *saṃskāra* and *viññāna* are the five aggregates admitted in the Buddhist philosophy. If self is admitted apart from these five *skandhas* then question arises, what type of relationship is there between the five aggregates and the self? There are two possible way of answering this question: The relation between the self and the *skandhas* can either be one of identity (*ekatva*) or of difference (*anyatva*). In the case of *anyatva* again, the question of the relation of the locus and the located (*ādhāra-ādheya*) arises that is whether *Ātman* is in the *skandhas* or the *skandhas* are in the *ātman*? Nāgārjuna by applying his method of *prasaṅga* showed that none of the alternatives are tenable as these will lead to absurdity. In

Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, Nāgārjuna has examined the notion of self and showed that there is no existence of any eternal self.

It is said in MMK, - “*Ātmā skandhā yadi bhaved udaya-vyaya-bhāg bhavet/ Skandhebhyo’nyo yadi bhaved bhaved askandhalakṣanaḥ*.”⁸ That is, if it is admitted that *ātman* is identical with *skandha* then it will also have the same characteristics that is of origination and ceasing as that of the *skandhas*. We know an object having origination and ceasing is considered as non-eternal; so if the self is subject to uprising and ceasing then it can no longer remain eternal, it will also become non-eternal. But those who believe in the existence of self, consider self to be eternal. Moreover if the *ātman* which had no existence before comes into being, then it will become an object constituted (*kṛtaka*) but the *ātmavādins* regard *ātman* as eternal and unconstituted. Hence the identity between atman and *skandhas* cannot be admitted. Moreover if it is claimed that *ātman* is different from the *skandhas* then it will not have the characteristics of the dependently originating *skandhas*. The five aggregates possess characteristics of origin, continuity and destruction (*utpatti-sthiti-bhaṅga*). In the absence of all these three characteristics in atman, we cannot call atman as *pratītyasamutpanna* i.e dependently originated. According to the Buddhist, all real objects are dependently originated. *Ātman*, not being dependently originated cannot be considered as real, it should be called non-existent (*alīka*) like the sky flower. Again, the five *skandhas* have their own characteristics like *rūpa* possesses the characteristics of taking forms. The task of *Vedanā* and *Samjñā* is to ascertain the cause of direct perception (*anubhavanimittodgrahaṇa*) and of *vijñāna* is to have detailed

⁸ Mulamadhyamakakarika XVIII.1, Nagarjuna, Madhyamakasastra of Nagarjuna with the commentary Prasannapada, ed. Critically by Dr.PL.Vaidya, Dharbhanga: The Mithila Institute of Post graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning , 1960, p.145

knowledge of objects. Now if atman is different from the *skandhas* then it should also have its own characteristics. But if *ātman* turned out to be something nonexistent as sky flower then we cannot ascribe any property to that *ātman*. So it cannot be said that atman has existence apart from the five *skandhas*. Again as *ātman* is not distinct from the *skandhas* so it cannot be said that *skandhas* are in atman or the atman is in the *skandhas*. If there were difference between the two then one holding the other could have been imagined. But there is no separation between the two so the container-contained relationship is beyond imagination. Moreover, if it is said that the *skandhas* are contained in the self then that will lead to the problem of unity of self. And if it is claimed that the atman is in the *skandhas*, then that will again lead to another big problem because constantly changing entities like the five *skandhas* cannot have any permanent entity like the *ātman* as their part. Hence Nāgārjuna showed that none of the alternatives are possible and if there is no *ātman* over and above the five *skandhas*, then properties like eternity and non-eternity cannot be ascribed to that *ātman*. Further in *Ratnāvalī* it is said- “*Ahaṃkāre sati punaḥ karma janma tataḥ punaḥ*”⁹ That is, from the notion of ‘*ahaṃ*’ arises action leading to further birth. There are various forms of *avidyā* and the ignorance regarding no-self is one of them. The notion of self that man possesses leads him to various actions both good and evil and these actions in turn again lead to further birth. Ignorance, action and birth-these three mutually cause each other without any beginning middle and end and in this way the wheel of our cyclic existence moves like a wheel of a fire band and man revolves in the cycle of birth and death. When notion of self ceases there arises no action and simultaneously no birth. Nāgārjuna in his *Ratnāvalī* said- *Ahaṃkāraḥ*

⁹ Ratnavali 1.35, p.85

kṣayaṃ jāti tataḥ karma ca janma ca//.¹⁰ Similar view is expressed in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* also- *Mametyahamiti kṣīṇe bahirdhādhyātmam eva ca/ Nirudhyata upādānaṃ tat kṣayājjanmanaḥ kṣayaḥ//*¹¹ That is, when notions relating to I or mine faded then there is cessation of *upādāna* and that results in the cessation of further birth. It is painful to be born into this mundane world again and again. If there is cessation of birth then after death in this life men will not be entangled into this wheel of cyclic existence again and if men can free himself from this mundane world then he will get rid of all worldly sufferings. The cessation of all worldly ties is *Nirvāṇa*. The main aim of Buddhist philosophy is to attain *Nirvāṇa*. The notion of eternal self is the root of I-ness which leads to all worldly sufferings. We believe our self to be dearest and become very much attached to it. This attachment acts as a hindrance in our way of realizing *Nirvāṇa*. So showing the futility of the existence of an eternal self, Nāgārjuna actually paved the way to *Nirvāṇa*.

So far what we have discussed is about *Pudgala nairātmya* which refers to the selflessness of individual. In contrast to this there is another sort of *nairātmya* called *dharma nairātmya* which refers to the selflessness of all *dharma*s. According to the *Mādhyamikas* this *dharma nairātmya* indicates *Śūnyatā* or essencelessness of entities. Now we will move on to the discussion of Nāgārjuna's notion of *Śūnyatā*

3.1.3: Notion of *Śūnyatā*

Nāgārjuna is well known as a champion of the theory of *Śūnyatā*. It is the central concept around which his entire philosophy evolves. *Śūnyatā* is a Sanskrit term which is generally translated into English as emptiness or

¹⁰ *Ratnavālī*, 1.37, p.86

¹¹ *MMK*, XVIII.4, Kalupahana, David, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā of Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991, P.265.

voidness. The Mādhyamikas hold the view that “all things are void” (*śūnyāḥ sarvabhāvāḥ*). Opponents have failed to grasp the real meaning of the term and criticized mādhyamikas as nihilistic one. If we take the view “all things are void” in literal sense then it will surely contradict the verdict of our experience and our life will have no meaning. No philosophy can develop if there is universal nothingness. We know śūnyatā is an important concept in the philosophy of Nāgārjuna and it is quite absurd for such a great philosopher to propagate utter voidness. ‘Śūnya’ though literally means void, is not void in the true sense of the term. ‘Śūnyatā’ is used by Nāgārjuna in a philosophically technical sense as essencelessness having no existence of its own, being destitute of any character, which has its basis in pratītyasamutpāda. So for Nāgārjuna, dependent origination, lack of intrinsic nature (niḥsvabhāvatā) and being śūnya mean the same thing. In his Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, he said: “yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ śūnyatām tāṃ pracakṣmahe”.¹² That is to say, whatever is dependently originated that is void. Voidness or śūnyatā does not mean nothingness but rather the fact that all things lack intrinsic essence. Lacking such static essence does not make them nonexistence-it makes them thoroughly relative. So from the above discussions it is clear that mādhyamika philosophy does not propagate nihilism. Rather it should be noted that śūnyatā avoids the two extremes of eternalism and nihilism and it is the *madhyamā pratipat*. Madhyamā pratipat is one of the crucial concepts of Buddhist philosophy. The word ‘*madhyamā*’ is understood in the sense of avoiding the two extremities and following a ‘mean between the two’. Śūnyatā should not be considered as another view. It is said in the last verse of Saṃskāraparikṣā, that- “Śūnyatā sarva-drṣṭināṃ proktā niḥsaraṇaṃ jinaiḥ/ yeṣāṃ tu śūnyatā-drṣṭis tān asādhyān

¹² Nāgārjuna, *Madhyamakāśāstra of Nāgārjuna with the commentary Prasannapadā*, ed., Dr.P.L.Vaidya, Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute of Post graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, 1960,p.219.

babhāṣire//”¹³. That is, emptiness is the relinquishing of all views. Those who assume emptiness to be another view, they are incorrigible. Generally from the standpoint of common sense, it is believed by all that all entities exist and they all have their own inherent essence, independent of others. Nāgārjuna shows that this belief is not correct. He makes use of the technique of *catuṣkoti* (tetralemma) and *prasaṅga* to attack any essentialist conception. He shows that all entities lack inherent essence, they are *catuṣkoti vinirmukta* and hence *śūnya*. All phenomena are not real in the true sense of the term, they are only conventionally real and true. In this connection mention should be made of the two types of truth-conventional truth (*saṃvṛti satya*) and absolute truth (*paramārtha satya*). *Paramārtha satya* or absolute truth is the knowledge of the real as it is without distortion. Absolute truth is beyond the scope of discursive thought language and empirical activity, whereas, *saṃvṛti satya* is truth so called conventionally believed in common parlance. *Samvṛti* truth is that which covers the real nature of things. Now everything is *śūnya* from the ultimate standpoint. Nāgārjuna has never ignored the *saṃvṛti* or *vyavahārika satya*. Nāgārjuna mentions the importance of *vyavahāra* or empirical reality in attaining *paramārtha* or absolute reality. In his view, without recourse to empirical reality, the absolute truth cannot be taught and without knowing the absolute truth, *Nirvāṇa* cannot be attained. Thus it can be said that, *Samvṛti* or pragmatic reality is the means (*upāya*) for reaching the ultimate reality which is the goal (*upeya*). Nāgārjuna never ignored the empirical reality and has given great importance to leading an ethical life.

¹³ Kalupahana, David, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā of Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991, p. 223

Now let us turn our attention to the discussion of Śūnyatā in Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK). In this text Nāgārjuna showed that all objects are in some way dependent on some causes and conditions and hence are śūnya that is lack own nature (*svabhāva*). In order to prove the absence of intrinsic nature of objects, Nāgārjuna at first cited an argument saying-

“Bhāvānāṃniḥsvabhāvatvaṃanyathā-bhāvadarśanāt.”¹⁴

As in case of existent objects there is perception of change so it should be admitted that they are *niḥsvabhāva*. If they would have possessed self nature no change would have been possible. But as they change we have to admit that they lack intrinsic nature.

Now opponents can say that positive entity (*bhāvapadārtha*) which is *niḥsvabhāva* cannot be existent. Here it is said –the nature of *bhāvapadārtha* is śūnya but if the locus is non-existent(*asat*) no quality (*dharma*) can be ascribed to it. For example, son of a barren woman cannot be claimed to have a black complexion as he has no existence in reality. If Śūnyatā is said to be the quality of positive entity then they cannot be *niḥsvabhāva*.

“Asvabhāvobhāvonāstibhāvānāṃśūnyatāyataḥ.”¹⁵

The opponent further says if the positive entity does not have any nature then how can, we talk of its change.¹⁶

The point here is that change is always of something. As *bhāvapadārtha* has no *svabhāva* whose change will it be? It will then not

¹⁴*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, XIII.3, P. 105

¹⁵*Ibid*, XIII.3, P.105

¹⁶“kasyasyādanyathābhāvaḥsvabhāvaścennavidyate.”-*Ibid*, XIII.4, P.105

be possible to speak of any change with respect to positive entity. Now from the opponents arguments, it follows that Nāgārjuna has fallen into a great dilemma. Nāgārjuna has to accept *svabhāva* in order to accord for change. If he denies the former, he will have to deny the latter. But change is the basis of his argument for *Śūnyatā* or *niḥsvabhāvatā*. Now if he denies change, he will not be able to establish emptiness (*niḥsvabhāvatā*).

Nāgārjuna dismisses opponent's arguments saying-

“Kasyasyādanyathābhāvaḥsvabhāvayadividyate.”¹⁷

That is, if positive entities were endowed with intrinsic nature i.e they were not *śūnya* then their change would not have been possible, as only *Śūnyatā* can establish the change of entities. Now according to Candrakīrti, a commentator of Nāgārjuna, by ‘*Svabhāva*’ of any entity we understand that attribute which is invariably related with that object i.e to say it is never the case that the object exists but that attribute is not present in that object with which he is invariably related. Prasannapada says- “Ihayodharmo yam padārthaṃnavyabhicarati, satasyasvabhāvaitivyapadiśyate, aparapratibaddhatvāt”¹⁸ For eg. Hotness is the nature of fire. There can never be any fire which has no hotness. Hotness is inherent in fire and is related with it in such a way that there can be no change to it. To exist in fire, this nature of hotness does not depend on anything else i.e *akṛtrim*. Sometimes we perceive hotness in case of water (hot water). But that is caused by various factors like contact with fire etc. So hotness is not a nature of water. Nāgārjuna opines that *svabhāva* is something that is *akṛtrim* (natural) and not dependent upon

¹⁷ *Ibid*, XIII.4, 105

¹⁸ *Prasannapadā*, 13.4, p.105

other thing than itself.¹⁹ If any entity is invariably related with its nature (*svabhāva*) there can be no change of that *svabhāva*. Like for example instead of hotness of fire, coldness of fire is not experienced. When *svabhāva* is understood in this way then no change can be explained. But in reality we do perceive change with respect to positive entities hence we have to say they that they lack *svabhāva* i.e intrinsic nature.

Though in our ordinary life, we think that entities change, Nāgārjuna by another argument showed that change with regard to positive entities is not possible at all. He said-

“Tasyaiva nānyathā bhāvonāpy anyasyaivayujyate
yuvān ajīryate yasmādyasmāj jīrṇon ajīryate.”²⁰

That is to say, Change is not possible either of something in itself or to a different thing because a young person doesnot become old neither does an old person again become old. When we talk of any change we want to say at first that the entity is remaining one and the same i.e identical only its property is changing. Now as we know identity (*abheda*) is an internal relation which an object bears with itself. But when there is change of any entity it becomes a completely different entity. Now change is only possible between two unchanged object and not between two distinct objects. In case of a young person, he can never be old because when he is changing to an old person he is no longer a young person. Therefore the relation between an old person and the young one is difference of two distinct entities. So in this case there will be no change. Moreover an old person cannot again become old because he is already an old person. So if we think that the relation between

¹⁹ Akṛtrimahsvabhāvo hi nirapekṣaḥ paratra ca, *MMK*, XV.2, P.115.

²⁰ *Ibid*, XIII.5, p.106

change and the object changing is independent then change cannot be explained.²¹

Further according to Nāgārjuna's view, object changes i.e to say it changes its state so in that case identity can be meaningful like milk becomes curd by changing its state. If change were to be in itself then milk itself becomes curd. But it cannot be said that milk itself is turning to curd. If it cannot be admitted that milk itself is turning to curd then it should be said that something other than milk is changing to curd which is absurd. Nāgārjuna said-

“Tasyacedanyathābhāvaḥkṣīramevabhaveddadhi

Kṣīrādanyasyakasyaciddadhibhāvobhaviṣyati.”²²

Here the point is that it is generally assumed that an object is changing to another yet amidst this change there is an identity between them as in case of milk and curd. The object remains same even if milk changes to curd. But it seems untenable. While preparing coffee we use milks but not curd i.e they donot serve the same purpose. Now to resolve this problem it should be said that milk and curd are two distinct entities. But change can never take place between two distinct entities. We have to say that change taking place in something other than milk results in curd which is contrary to our experience. Thus change is not possible in any way. So we have to say that the notion of change is meaningless and according to Nāgārjuna it will not be proper to talk about nature of entities with respect to something which is not possible at all. The arguments through which Nāgārjuna proves the unreality of change

²¹Garfield, J., The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1995, p.210-211.

²²Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, XIII.6, p.106

presupposes a particular notion of change which is different from his opponents. The opponents, by change understand that the object remains fixed and its qualities changes but Nāgārjuna does not accept this view. For him, change implies that one object changes to another object.

Now opponent raises questions against this concept of *niḥsvabhāvatā*. According to them Nāgārjuna can never say positive entities lack intrinsic nature because he intended to prove emptiness which is the nature of positive entities. Nāgārjuna replied by saying –

“Yadyaśūnyaṃbhavetkiṃcitsyācchūnyamitikiṃcana

nakiṃcidastyāśūnyaṃcakutaḥśūnyaṃbhaviṣyati.”²³

If there exists something called ‘*aśūnya*’ then there can be something called *Śūnya* or empty. As there is absence of *aśūnya* so there is nothing called *śūnya*. According to Nāgārjuna, *Śūnyatā* is not an attribute so there is no need of accepting any locus of that attribute. Here, the opponents have misunderstood the essence of *Śūnyatā* to mean another property and claiming the nature of object. But it is not another attribute. It is the common characteristics of all dharma.

It is said in the last verse of *saṃskāraparīkṣā*, it is said that emptiness is the relinquishing of all views. Those who assume emptiness to be another view, they are incorrigible.²⁴In 24th chapter of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, Nāgārjuna further put his focus in the analysis of the nature of emptiness. At first he has introduced the views of the opponents and then refuted them in order to establish the doctrine of *Śūnyatā* firmly. Opponent’s view is that

²³*Ibid*, XIII.7, P.107

²⁴“Śūnyatāsarva-drṣṭīnāṃproktāniḥsaraṇaṃjinaiḥ/yeṣāṃtuśūnyatā-drṣṭistānasādhyānbabhāṣire.”-
Ibid, XIII.8, P.108

“Yadisūnyamidamsarvamudayonāstynavyayah

Caturnāmāryasatyanamabhavasteprasajyate.”²⁵

That is if all entities are empty then there will be no origination or destruction of any object. The thing that is empty does not exist like the barren woman and will not have any origination and destruction like her. Similarly if all objects are empty i.e do not exist then the four noble truths which are fundamental to a Buddhist will also be nonexistent. The four noble truths are –

- i. There is suffering
- ii. There are causes of suffering
- iii. There is cessation of suffering
- iv. There are ways for the cessation of sufferings

It is said ‘*Pañcaupādānaskandha*’ (*Rupa, vijñāna, vedanā, saṃjñā and saṃskāra*) which are dependently originating are *Dukkha*. If everything is empty, then these five aggregates will also be empty and will be without emergence and ceasing. If they are without emergence and ceasing then they cannot be termed as *Dukkha*. If there is no suffering then other three truths there are causes of suffering, there is cessation of suffering and there are ways for the cessation of sufferings will also be meaningless. Thus very foundation of Buddhism will be shaken. If the four noble truths are absent then understanding (*Parijñā*), Relinquishing(*Prahāna*), Cultivation(*Bhāvanā*) and Realization(*Sakṣikarma*) will not be possible. *Parijñā* is the right understanding regarding the nature of suffering. *Prahāna* refers to the cessation of all defilements that are the roots of the causes of sufferings.

²⁵*Ibid*,XXIV.1,P.209

Bhāvanā refers to the practice of the ways that removes suffering and *sakṣikarma* means complete practice of eight fold paths that leads to nirvana. If this fourfold activities are absent, the four noble fruits would not also be present. In absence of the fruits there will not exist either the person who have already attained those fruits or those who are in the way to attain those fruits. We know that *Buddha*, *Dharma* and *Samgha* are fundamental to Buddhism. *Samgha* is created by those who have reached the *mārgas* and those who have attained the fruits. If those people do not exist there will be no *saṃgha*. If there are no noble truths, saddharma will not be possible. If there is no dharma then there will be no Buddha because through Dharma one who attains enlightenment is known as Buddha. The opponents are also of the view that *Śūnyatā* not only creates problem in the supra- mundane world but also in this very empirical world. If everything is said to be *śūnya*, then virtues, vices, good results and bad results all will become *śūnya*. There will be no place for morality. All daily actions will also get stopped.

Now in answering to the opponents' series of criticisms, Nāgārjuna said that the opponents interpreted the term *Śūnyatā* in their own way to stand for total nonexistence. As a result they are enumerating all the problems that will follow from the dictum- everything is *śūnya*. They actually failed to grasp the real meaning of *Śūnyatā*. Nāgārjuna in the 18th chapter of MMK elaborated the nature of *Śūnyatā* in these words-

“Aparapratyayamsāntamprapañcairprapanchitam

Nirvikalpamnanārthametamtattvasyalakṣanam”²⁶

²⁶*Ibid*, XVIII, 9, P. 158

That is to say, the character of reality is such that it is not dependent on another, peaceful and not fabricated by mental fabrication, not thought and is without distinction.²⁷

Nāgārjuna stated the necessity of *Śūnyatā* in the following verse of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*-

“Karmakleśaksayanmokṣaḥkarmakleśavikalpataḥ

Teprapancatprapancastuśūnyatāyamniruddhyate.”²⁸

That is to say liberation comes through waning of defilements of action (*karmakleśa*) and these defilements results from *vikalpa*. When the realization of *Śūnyatā* arises all these *vikalpas* cease to exist because *Śūnyatā* is such a state which cannot be explained through words. So for liberation *Śūnyatā* is essential.²⁹

3.1.4: *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* and the Two Truth Theory

The discussion of the two truth theory is very important in the philosophy of Nāgārjuna. It should be noted here that the distinction between two truths –*Paramārtha satya* and *Samvṛti satya* is not a new discovery of Nāgārjuna but long before we get to see its discussion in *Mahāyana sūtra* texts. The novelty of Nāgārjuna lies in the fact that he has not only made distinction of two truths but mentioned their relation as well. In Ch-24 of *Mūlamadhyamaka kārikā* sloka 8-10, we get reference of two truth:

“Dve satye samupāśritya buddhānāṃ dharma deśanā,

²⁷ Garfield,p.251

²⁸ *MMK*,XVIII.4,p.149

²⁹ Majumdar Shreyasee, “Nāgārjuna’s notion of Śūnyatā: A Critical Analysis” *Rabindra Bharati Journal of Philosophy*, Vol- XIX, 2018, Kolkata: Department of Philosophy, Rabindrabharati University, 2021,p.68-78.

Loka-saṃvṛti-satyam ca satyam ca paramāṛthataḥ

Ye'nayor na vijānanti vibhāgaṃ satyayordvayoh,

Te tattvaṃ na vijānanti gambhīraṃ Buddha-sāsane

Vyavahāraṃ anaśṛitya paramāṛtho na deśyate,

Paramāṛtham anāgamyā nirvāṇaṃ nādhigamyate.”³⁰

The teaching of the doctrine by the Buddhas is based upon two truths: Conventional truth (*Loka-saṃvṛti* or *vyavahārika satya*) and Ultimate Truth (*Paramāṛtha satya*) Those who do not understand the distinction between these two truths, do not understand the profound truth embodied in the Buddha's message. Without relying upon convention, the ultimate fruit is not taught. Without understanding the ultimate fruit, freedom is not attained.³¹ The main thrust of Nāgārjuna's philosophy has been captured in these three slokas. In Nāgārjuna's philosophy the relation between *Paramāṛtha satya* and *vyavahārika satya* is that of goal and means or in philosophical terminology *upeya-upayabhava sambandha*. Commentator Candrakīrti in his *Madhyamakavatara* text has uphold the notion of madhyamika philosophers by his statement: ‘*Upāyabhutam vyavahāra satyam upeya-bhutam paramāṛtha satyam*’. *Vyavahāra satya* is the upāya and *paramāṛtha satya* is the upeya. *Pratītyasamutpāda* is equated Individual has to realize *paramāṛtha satya* in order to attain *Nirvāṇa*.

As a primary requisite of realizing this truth one has to attain moral teachings (*dharma deśanā*) and has to apply it in everyday life. So

³⁰ *Mūlamadhyamaka kārikā*, 24.8-10, Kalupahana, David, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā of Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991, p.331-333.

³¹ MMK, 24.10, Kalupahana, David, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā of Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991, p.333.

Nāgārjuna discussed about ethical and social political matters too in his writings like *Ratnāvalī* and *Suḥṛllekha* though the main intention of his philosophy is to establish *śūnyatā*.

Though *Vyavahārika satya* is regarded as the means which will lead to *Paramārtha satya* but Nāgārjuna never thinks that these two types of *satya* reveal two different types of objective reality. Because according to Nāgārjuna, all *tattvas* of the world are *niḥsvabhāva* –essenceless. Rather, it can be said that these two truths are in fact two ways of seeing facts- apparently and other rightly. Moreover, so long a disciple does not learn the teachings relating to dharma (*dharmadeśanā*) from his guru, he can never create right notions regarding the definition & nature of *skandha*, *dhātu*, *āyatana*. When an individual learn about the nature of *dhātus*, *āyatanas* etc.through teachings of gurus,then slowly afterwards when *Prajñā* develops, he realizes that everything is essenceless and thus *śūnya*. So the *skandha*, *dhatu*s and *āyatanas* which appear in their way in *vyavahārika satya*,posits as *śūnyatā* in the supramundane (*paramārtha* level). *Vyavahārika satya* is the stepping stone to reach *pāramarthika satya*. In his auto commentary *Akuto bhoyā*, on *Mūlamadhyamakāsāstra*, Nāgārjuna has mentioned about the distinction of two truths by saying the first one is *sarvadharmatpādadarśana* and second one as *sarvadharmānutpādadarśana*. It should be remembered that, it is not possible for any learned men to reach the reality, without resorting to the *saṃvṛti satya*, One need to have some understanding of the moral principles before one could actually think of *Nirvāna*. Understanding of *saṃvṛti* and depending upon that gaining some knowledge of *paramārtha* could serve as a guide for the attainment of freedom.

Nāgārjuna, by accepting the difference between these truths and recognizing the *upāya-upeya sambandha* between them, established one

hand the essencelessness of all objects from ultimate standpoint and on the other showed the utility and importance of different Buddhist notions of *skandha, dhātu, āyatana* in the conventional level. In the level of ordinary beings there is utility of distinction of two truths. For beings already alleviated to the level of Buddha, *samvṛti satya* becomes irrelevant and so there remains only one truth-*Paramārtha*.³²

3.2: Nāgārjuna's Dialectical Arguments and Development of Skeptical Thought

Nāgārjuna, a popular *vaiśiṣṭika* philosopher, has employed the method of Catuskoti along with *prasaṅga* to nullify all the opponent's views. He set forth no thesis of his own rather suspended judgements regarding reality. We get to see his dialectical arguments and thus development of skeptical thoughts best in two of his writings – *Vigrahavyāvartanī* and *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa*. In both of these works he refuted the *Pramāṇa-Prameya* dichotomy.

3.2.1: Vigrahavyāvartanī and Refutation of Pramāṇa-Prameya Dichotomy

Pramāṇavādins (cognitivists) claim that it is possible to have indubitably true presentational cognition (*pramā*) on the basis of *pramāṇas*.³³ They hold that there is a means of valid knowledge (*pramāṇa*) and objects of valid knowledge (*prameya*). This *pramāṇa-prameya* dichotomy received serious criticism from Nāgārjuna. In both *Vigrahavyāvartanī* and *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa* of Nāgārjuna we find various arguments put forth to

³² Taken help from the Bengali book *Nāgārjuner Darśan Parikramā* by Prof.M.Chattopadhyay.

³³ Mohanta, Dilip Kumar, 'Cognitive Skepticism of Nāgārjuna', Conference paper, 20th World Philosophy Congress at Boston, 1998 >
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282151705_Theory_of_Knowledge_Cognitive_scepticism_of_Nāgārjuna.

nullify the views of the *pramāṇavadins*. In *Kārikās* 31 to 51 of *Vigrahavyāvartanī* there are a series of objections presented against the *Prāmaṇavadīns* to show the futility of the so-called *Prāmaṇa* and *prameya* dichotomy. According to the *Naiyāyikas*, the Realist philosophers that objects of knowledge (*prameyas*) are established through instruments of knowledge (*pramāṇa*)³⁴ like perception, inference etc. just as things to be measured are established through measuring instruments. So admission of *pramāṇa* is needed. To Nāgārjuna this is untenable and in *karika* 31 of *Vigrahavyāvartanī* he questioned that if *prameyas* are established by means of *pramāṇas* then how are those *pramāṇas* established? Here an answer may be given that the *pramāṇas* are established without the help of any *pramāṇas*. But it cannot be accepted because if they are established independent of any other instrument of knowledge then the opponent will have to reject their thesis that “all objects are established through instruments of true cognition”. To avoid this problem it can be said that the *pramāṇas* are established through other *pramāṇas*. But this alternative is also problematic. If *pramāṇa* 1 is established by *pramāṇa* 2 and for that *pramāṇa* 2, which in turn will require *pramāṇa* 3 in this way that would lead to *anavastha* i.e. infinite regress. If *pramāṇas* are established by other *pramāṇas* - homogenous or heterogeneous- there will be an infinite series of *pramāṇas*; and in that series there will be no beginning, no middle, and no end.³⁵ Again it would be not be proper to hold that all objects are established through *pramāṇas* except the *pramāṇas* themselves. In that case some entities will be ascertained through *pramāṇas* while some

³⁴ “*Pramāṇataścārtha-pratipatteḥ*” - 4/2/29 , Tarkabagish, Phanibhusan , *Nyāyadarshan*(Vol-5), Kolkata: Paschimbanga Rajya Pustak Parsad , 2011, p.154-155

³⁵ *Nādeḥ siddhistatrāsti naiva madhyasya nāntasya*//32// - Nāgārjuna, *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, ed. E. H. Johnston and Arnold Kunst, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2002, p.31.

other would be independent of *pramāṇas*, which is a clear case of discordance and the opponents have to specify special reason for that.

In order to avoid the problem of ascertainment, the opponents, taking resort to the analogy of fire which illuminates itself and other things, may opine that the *pramāṇas* also establish themselves and other things. To Nāgārjuna it is improper to suggest that the *pramāṇas* prove themselves and as well as the objects. The analogy of fire, he thinks, is not a good one, as fire does not illuminate itself. Nāgārjuna argues, A pot covered by darkness, can be illuminated by fire but fire not being covered with darkness can never be illuminated. Therefore, the claim that *pramāṇas* prove themselves and others like fire is unjustified.

Further if it is said, fire illuminates itself just as it illuminates other things, then it should be mentioned that fire consumes itself in the same manner in which it consumes other things. But it is counter-intuitive to suppose that fire burns or consumes itself. So the given analogy that fire illuminates itself in the same way, in which it illuminates others, is untenable.

Moreover, it is well-known that fire and darkness, are opposite in nature. In this situation, if we say that fire illuminates itself as well as other things we have to accept the thesis that darkness conceals itself and other things. But if it were the case (i.e. darkness concede by itself) it would not have been perceived. Nevertheless, the perception of darkness is proved by experience. Thus the statement that fire illuminates both other things and itself is not tenable.

Further according to Nāgārjuna, illumination is obstruction caused to darkness but as darkness is essentially contradictory to fire, there

cannot be any darkness in fire nor can it be present in the locus of fire.³⁶ As it is evident, there is nonexistence of darkness in fire or in the locus of fire, then by virtue of whose obstruction does fire illuminates itself and other things?

In reply opponent may say that it is in the very process of its origination fire removes darkness. This removal enables fire to illuminate itself and the things which surrounds it. Consequently, there is no inconsistency in thinking that fire illuminates itself and other things as well.

For further clarifications here the opponents may say that if there is nonexistence of darkness in fire or in its locus, it is owing to the fact that in the very process of its origination fire illuminates both other things and itself. In reply, Nāgārjuna will mention that illumination is possible only after removal of darkness and darkness can be removed either coming in contact with it or without being connected with it. Now in the very process of its origination fire, which is contrary to darkness by nature, cannot come in contact with it; and so fire cannot remove it and hence illumination is not possible in case of it. Moreover it cannot be said that fire illuminates itself without coming in contact with darkness, because in that case one have to concede that fire being present in one particular place would destroy darkness of the entire world, which is quite unnatural.³⁷

Again if *Prāmaṇas* are self-established, they would not be dependent on something else – nor even on *prameyas*. But if *pramāṇas*

³⁶ “*Prakāśāśca nāma tamasaḥ pratighātaḥ/ Yasmāccāgnau nāsti tamo nāpi ca yatrāgnistatrāsti tamaḥ,..*” - *Ibid.*, p.34.

³⁷ “*....nanvidāmnīmiha samsthito agniḥ sarvalokadhātusthamupahaniṣyati tamastulyamayamaprāptaḥ/na caitadevaṃ dṛṣṭam*” - *Ibid.*, p. 35.

are independent of *prameyas*, they would become *pramāṇas* of nothing. Thus it is obvious that *pramāṇas* cannot be independent of *prameyas* and hence cannot be claimed to be self-established either.

Now in case of *pramāṇas* being established only in relation to *prameyas*, the *prameyas* would become prerequisite in ascertainment of *pramāṇas*. In that case establishment of *prameya* by means of *pramāṇa* would tantamounts to reestablishment of a thing which is already established. Again, where *pramāṇas* are established only in relation to *prameyas* there *prameyas* cannot be said to be established by means of *pramāṇas*. And once it is conceded that *prameyas* does not depend on *pramāṇas* for their establishment, the establishment of *pramāṇa* would become useless.

Further, if *pramāṇas* are said to be established in relation to the *prameyas* then surely there will be inter-change of the designations ‘*pramāṇa*’ and ‘*prameya*’.³⁸ Now if the *prameyas* are established through the establishment of *pramāṇas* and the *pramāṇas* are established through the establishment of *prameyas* then neither of the two will be established. Since if the *prameyas* depend upon *pramāṇas* for their ascertainment and if those *pramāṇas* in turn again depend upon those very *prameyas* then the *pramāṇas* will not be able to establish the *prameyas* because the *pramāṇas* are not established due to their cause, the *prameyas*, not been established. Again, if *pramāṇas* depend upon *prameyas* for their ascertainment and those *prameyas* again are to be established by those *pramāṇas* itself, then it will not be possible for the *prameyas* to establish the *pramāṇas* since the *prameyas* are themselves non-established in the absence of their cause – the *pramāṇas* not having been established.

³⁸ “*atha tu pramāṇasiddhirbhavatyapekṣiva te prameyāṇi/ Vyatyaya evaṁ sati te dhruvaṁ pramāṇaprameyāṇām*”- *Ibid.*, p. 37.

For example, if the son, is produced by his father and the father (as father) is produced by the very son, the question will arise who is produced by whom? The ‘father’ is occupied with the symptom of being a son as well as being a father. In such a situation it is really difficult to decide who is father and who is son. Being produced by father and being the producer of his father the so-called son has both the symptoms of son as well as father. It seems absurd from common sense point of view; as no father is ever produced by his son. Nevertheless the fatherhood of a person is proved when his children come into being; and in this sense father is produced by his son or daughter. Not only that if the objects of knowledge owe their establishment to the instrument of knowledge and vice-versa how the so-called instrument would be established? If the cause is not established the effect is bound to remain un-established.

Lastly, the *pramāṇas* cannot either be said to be established accidentally either. To Nāgārjuna everything is dependently originated nothing happens unconditionally or accidentally. Nothing is established by itself. So, establishment of *pramāṇa* cannot occur automatically.

Hence Nāgārjuna comes to the conclusion that *pramāṇas* cannot be established by any means. They cannot be established by themselves (*svataḥ*), nor mutually (*parasparataḥ*) i.e. by one another, nor even extrinsically (*parataḥ*) i.e. by other *pramāṇas*. On the other hand they are neither established by means of *prameyas* nor accidentally.³⁹

³⁹ “Naiva svataḥ prasiddhirna parasparataḥ parapramāṇairvā/ Na bhavati na ca prameyairna cāpyakasmāt pramāṇānām”//kā. 51// - Ibid., p.40.

3.2.2: *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa* and A Systematic Refutation of Knowledge Claims

In *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa*(VP) Nāgārjuna also showed the futility of the *pramāṇa-prameya* dichotomy. In VP, Nāgārjuna tried to establish that *Pramāṇa* and *Prameya* both are seen as being confused.⁴⁰ The term ‘*Pramāṇa*’ etymologically means ‘*Pramākarāṇam*’ i.e. instrumental cause of valid cognition; whereas ‘*Prameya*’ refers to the object of that valid cognition. Hence it seems clear that the *Pramāṇa* can be regarded as *Pramāṇa* only in reference to *Prameya* or knowable objects. On the other hand the *Prameya* can be regarded as *Prameya* only in relation to a *Pramāṇa* or instrument of knowledge. The case bears resemblance with the father son relation. A person can be described as a father only in relation to his son and vice-versa.⁴¹ On the basis of *Pramāṇa* the *Prameya* is established as *Prameya*. Again in relation to the *Prameya*, the *Pramāṇa* is established as *Pramāṇa*. Viewed from one perspective, *Prameya* is the *sādhya* or probandum and the *Pramāṇa* is *Sādhana* or Proban; from another it is *Pramāṇa* which becomes *Sādhya* and the *Prameya* as *Sādhana* (proban). Thus the so called distinction between *Pramāṇa* and *Prameya* becomes meaningless.

Moreover as *Pramāṇa* and *Prameyas* are mutually dependent notions they cannot be claimed either as real (existent) or as unreal (non-existent) or both (existent and non-existent). Here the logic is clear. If something is real (like a pot), then it cannot depend on some other thing for its existence. Again if something is unreal like a sky-lotus that too would not be dependent on anything, for an unreal thing cannot depend on something.

⁴⁰ *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa*, T.Tola& C.Dragonetti , p.58.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.99.

Here the opponents may argue that the recognition of the *Pramāṇa* is a must. Nāgārjuna does not agree with the opponent here. He asks, how can the *Pramāṇas* be established? There are two alternatives left. Either the *Pramāṇavādīns* will admit that *Pramāṇas*, like all the other *Prameyas*, are subject to justificatory condition, or they must admit that *Pramāṇas* are not established by means of other *pramāṇas*. But both of these alternatives are untenable. If it is admitted that the *Pramāṇas* are established by other *Pramāṇas* there will be an infinite regress⁴² in the long run. If it is said that the *Pramāṇa* 1 is established by *Pramāṇa* 2 then that *Pramāṇa* 2, in turn, will owe to *Pramāṇa* 3 for its establishment that will result in *regresus ad infinitum*. In this difficult situation the principle “*Pramāṇas* are established by means of other *Pramāṇas*” will be ruled out.

“Let us consider the second alternative i.e, *Pramāṇas* are established independent of other *Pramāṇas*. If the opponent admits this alternative then their thesis that all objects are established by means of *pramāṇa* will be abandoned.

In order to manage the problem, the Naiyāyikas affirms that *Pramāṇas* like lamplight are self-established (*svayamsiddha*).⁴³ A lamplight illuminates itself and other objects simultaneously. Similarly a *pramāṇa* establish both itself and other objects. According to Nāgārjuna this argument is unsatisfactory and so he criticized the opponents. To Nāgārjuna, the analogy of lamplight and *pramāṇa* is unfit. Here his arguments are same to that of *Vigrahavyāvartanī*. In the 12th Kārikā of *Vāidalyaprakaraṇa*, Nāgārjuna raises another objection against the

⁴² *Ibid*,p.101

⁴³ *Vāidalyaprakaraṇa*, T.Tola & C.Dragonetti , ed.p.60./ Nyāya Sutra, 2.1.18.

Pramāṇa-Prameya dichotomy.⁴⁴ He puts forth that *Pramāṇa*, can neither precede *Prameya*, nor can it be preceded by the *Prameya*, nor can they be simultaneous. If the *Pramāṇa* comes before the *Prameya*; if the latter is non-existent then whose establishment would *Pramāṇa* serve? *Pramāṇa* cannot be preceded by *Prameya* either. If *Prameya* is established as *Prameya* prior to the occurrence of *Pramāṇa* then *Pramāṇa* could not be considered as *Pramāṇa*. If *Pramāṇa* comes posterior to *Prameya* then the *Pramāṇa* becomes useless and fails to be designated as *Pramāṇa*. The idea of a non-existent *Pramāṇa* of an existent *Prameya* would be as absurd as a hare's horn. The third alternative is also not tenable as the cause and the effect cannot exist at the same moment. Two simultaneously occurring things cannot be related in causal relation with one another. Thus the *Pramāṇa-Prameya* relation cannot take place in past, present or future.

Thus it can be said that there is no *pramāṇa* and consequently no *prameya* in an absolute sense. In this way Nāgārjuna tried to prove the futility of the *pramāṇa- prameya* dichotomy. From the discussion and arguments of the two texts *Vigrahavyāvartanī* and *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa* it seems that Nāgārjuna is doing a sort of 'cognitive scepticism', terminology coined by Prof.Mohanta.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa*, T.Tola & C.Dragonetti , ed.p.63.

⁴⁵ Mohanta, Dilip kumar, 'Cognitive scepticism of Nāgārjuna'.

CHAPTER 4:

RECONCILIATION OF SKEPTICISM AND MORALITY IN NĀGĀRJUNA'S PHILOSOPHY

So far, we have seen Nāgārjuna as an exponent of dialectical philosophy who is busy to refute the claim of the *pramānavādins* by taking the sword of *prasāṅga* at his hand and has declared everything to be *śūnya* in the sense of dependently originated. It is however a partial reflection of his philosophical thought. He has not given up his moral faith. In this chapter the researcher has tried to present an outline of Nāgārjuna's ethical philosophy. Then focus has been given on the seeming conflict between Skepticism and Morality and thereafter resolution of the same with special reference to Nāgārjuna has also been provided.

4.1: An Outline of Nāgārjuna's Ethical Thought

The ethical discussions have never been neglected in the philosophy of Nāgārjuna. He has neither denied the reality of this mundane world nor ignored the necessity of morality for the upliftment of humanity. Two of his works namely *Ratnāvalī* (RV) and *Suḥṛllekha* (SL) are replete with ethical discussions. The aim of the text *Ratnāvalī* is to rouse the feeling of *Dharma* in the king. *Dharma*, which stands for morality here, is good in all respects i.e in respect of beginning, continuity and completion (*ekānta kalyāṇam*). *Dharma* leads to *abhyudaya* first which in turn leads to *naiḥśreyasa*. Those who are able to attain happiness (*abhyudaya*) by following the path of *dharma*, gradually can achieve liberation.¹

¹ *Prāgdharmābhudayo yatra paścān naiḥśreyasodayaḥ/ Saṃprāpyābhyudayaṃ yasmādeti naiḥśreyasaṃ kramāt// Ratnāvalī 1.3-* Chatterjee, H.N, *The Philosophy of Nāgārjuna as contained in the Ratnāvalī*, Calcutta: Saraswat library, 1977, p.83

Nāgārjuna in his ethical theory distinguishes between abhyudaya and naiḥśreyasa. Abhyudaya is worldly pleasure whereas naiḥśreyasa is liberation. One who strives for abhyudaya always thinks which action will bring in pleasure but those who aim for naiḥśreyasa search for the way to liberation. The distinction between abhyudaya and naiḥśreyasa drawn by Nāgārjuna is not something novel in Indian philosophy. Similar distinction has been found in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad. In a conversation between Yājñavalkya and Maitreyee the distinction between śreya (ultimate good) and preya (mundane happiness) has been mentioned. Ordinary men only seek for worldly pleasure but when they fail to achieve desired goal suffer from frustration and unhappiness. On the other hand, those who are in search of liberation do not seek for any mundane pleasure but their only aim is to attain that stage which will lead to enlightenment. The relation between Abhyudaya and Naiḥśreyasa in the case of human beings is that-Abhyudaya comes first and Naiḥśreyasa follows later. Faith and wisdom are their means respectively. A person having faith or śraddhā proceeds towards a moral life whereas possession of wisdom helps him to realize the true nature of reality.

Nāgārjuna thinks that all sorts of evil actions lead to different types of sufferings whereas virtuous actions results in happiness. In fact, Nāgārjuna has enumerated ten actions, as virtuous, which he describes as ‘white’ or *śukla*, white being the symbol of purity. And the opposite of these actions are considered to be black i.e impure in character. Of these ten virtuous actions, three are physical, four are verbal and the remaining three are mental. To quote *Ratnāvalī*,

Ahiṃsā cauryaviratiḥ paradāravivarjanam/

Mithyāpaiśunyapāruṣyābaddhavadēṣu saṃyamah//

Lobhavyāpādanāstikyadr̥ṣṭīnām parivarjanam/

Ete karmapathāḥ śuklā daśaḥ kṛṣṇā viparyayāt/²

Abstaining from killing and stealing, forsaking the mates of others, refraining from lying, divisive speech, harsh words, frivolous talk, to give up greed and ill feeling toward others and also to remove all wrong views. – are the ten virtuous acts and their opposites are non-virtuous. In addition Nāgārjuna has also prescribed some other minor ethical codes to follow in life namely-Refraining from intoxication, having an honest livelihood, not harming, giving with love, honouring the honourable and showing love and friendliness to others.

Nāgārjuna has vehemently criticized the doctrine of asceticism prevalent in his time. According to some schools of Indian philosophy it is believed that by asceticism i.e bodily mortification one can achieve highest truth but Nāgārjuna does not adhere to such view. According to him no morality is possible by mortifying one's body. By physical mortification we can never refrain from harming others or be able to help others. For this one should practise *dāna*, *śīla* and *kṣamā*. But if instead of following the path of charity, morality and forgiveness, one goes on mortifying one's body then one deceives oneself and others. As a consequence one will revolve in this cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*).

Nāgārjuna regards forgiveness, charity and morality as great virtues. Forgiveness (*kṣamā*) is one of the greatest qualities of a person. One having forgiveness or mercy can win over an opponent easily. Mercy is forgiving an individual who has done wrong to you without harming him back or getting angry with him. To Nāgārjuna, practicing *saddharma*

² *Ratnāvalī*, 1.8-9, p.83

is to show charity, mercy and morality. *Karunā* is the basis of these three virtues.

Nāgārjuna prescribes in his *Suhṛllekha* to ponder over the four *Brahmavihāras* namely *Maitrī*, *karunā*, *muditā* and *upekkhā*. In *Ratnāvalī* also great emphasis is given on practicing *maitri*, *karunā* etc. The four sublime states (*brahmavihāras*) – Loving kindness (*Maitri*), Compassion (*karunā*), Sympathetic joy (*Muditā*) and equanimity (*Upekkhā*) are sublime as they are the ideal conduct to be followed. These four are also known as the boundless states (*appamaññā*) because in their perfection and true nature they should not be limited. They are extended to all beings. They should be nonexclusive and impartial not bound by selective preferences. They should be one's inseparable companions. A mind that has attained to that boundlessness of the *Brahma-vihāras* will not harbor any sort of hatred be it with regard to nation, race, religion or class.

Maitri(Pali: *mettā*):- It is the loving kindness displayed to all one met with. It is embracing all beings equally and impartially be it friend or enemy. All the three *Brahma-vihāras* are based on the foundation of *mettā*, which is the sublime nobility of heart.

Karunā:- Generally translated as compassion, it makes narrow heart wider. Compassion is praying for the rescue of all beings from sufferings in life. It is the ability to feel the distress of others as if of oneself.

Muditā:- It is often translated as sympathetic joy. It is a pure joy at the happiness of others which is unadulterated by self interest. One's life will gain in joy by sharing the happiness of others as if it were ones. It is the medicine for the poisons of envy, jealousy and derision.

Upekṣā (Pali:Upekkhā):- It is often translated as equanimity. It is a perfect, unshakable balance of mind, rooted in insight. Equanimity is the culmination of the other *brahmavihāras* and includes them fully.

In Buddhist philosophy it is said that individuals should ponder upon those powers (*bala*) that will help in the way to liberation. These powers are Faith (*śraddhā*), Energy (*vīrya*), mindfulness (*smṛti*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*prajñā*).

1. Faith: It refers to firm belief in truth. It controls doubt.
2. Energy: The endeavour to realize the truth is called energy. It controls laziness.
3. Mindfulness: It is to be mindful about the past experience of truth and its form.
4. Concentration: To meditate deeply about truth is concentration. It controls distraction.
5. Wisdom: It helps to fully know the real truth and controls ignorance.

In Theravāda tradition the Pañca bala has been mainly accepted. But we find implicit acceptance of all these five powers even in the philosophy of Nāgārjuna. In *Ratnāvalī*, though the major emphasis is given on faith and wisdom still in some way or the other there is mention of these five powers.

In Theravada tradition, we find mention of ten *pāramitās*. But in Nāgārjuna's *Ratnāvalī* we find acceptance of Six *pāramitās*, which are really the chief factors in a bodhisattva's discipline. *Pāramitā* is translated as transcendental virtue, highest perfection etc. The six *pāramitās* are as follows:- 1. Generosity (*dāna*) 2. Morality (*śīla*) 3.

Patience (*kṣānti*) 4. Diligence (*vīrya*) 5. Meditation (*dhyāna*) 6. wisdom (*prajñā*).

1. Dāna- pāramitā :- The literal meaning of the word *dāna* is “giving” . Other equivalents are “generosity”, “liberality”, “charity”. *Dāna* should mainly be based on the feeling of mercy and compassion. One should neither talk of his charitable deeds nor should repent for his generosity after bestowing gifts on others. The donor should be even happier than the recipient of the gift. He should be happy and joyful when he gives away anything. Charity leads to the accumulation of puṇya and to happy rebirths on earth or in a heaven of the devas. His generosity should be absolutely disinterested. One should not offer anything which may be used to inflict injury on other living beings. One should not give anybody the instruments for suicide or self -torture.

2. Śīla- pāramitā:- It bears a great significance in Buddhist ethics. Sila, the second pāramitā among the pāramitās accepted by Mahāyāna, includes all the virtues. All auspicious actions depend on śīla. Śīla is attained by completely extinguishing the fire of the passions. Śīla is often defined as the control and restraint of kāya, vāk and manas. It is rooted in the absence of sensuality and hatred. Śīla or morality means conducting oneself in accordance with Buddhist precepts. It is often understood as referring to the five moral precepts and the ten good and meritorious ways of actions.

3. Kṣānti-pāramitā :- It is the third pāramitā in order. This pāramitā has been rendered as forbearance, patience, endurance etc. Śāntideva, the author of *Bodhicaryāvatāra* praises kṣānti in these words:

“Na ca dveṣasamaṃ pāpaṃ na ca kṣāntisamaṃ tapaḥ/

tasmāt kṣāntiṃ prayetnena bhāvayet vividhairnayaiḥ//”³

That is to say, no evil is equal to hatred and no austerity is equal to patience. Therefore, one should diligently cultivate patience by a variety of means. Patience may be a motive in the midst of any adversary. It is necessary for the moral and spiritual development of human beings. Kṣānti can be described as the opposite of krodha (anger), dveṣa (hatred), pratigha (repugnance) and vyapāda (malice). It is defined as freedom from anger and excitement. Kṣānti has three connotations:

- i) Parāpakāramarṣaṇakṣānti (Enduring and pardoning injuries and insults)
- ii) Duḥkhādhivāsanākṣānti (Patient endurance of pain and hardship)
- iii) Dharma-nidhyānakṣānti (Patience in reflecting upon the law)

4. Vīrya- pāramitā:- It is surely an important pāramitā. It has been translated as “strength”, “energy”, “zeal”, “power” etc. Vīrya is an important category in Buddhist philosophy. Enlightenment depends entirely on vīrya; where there is vīrya there is bodhi. Vīrya is the chief and paramount cause of all the auspicious principles that are conducive to enlightenment. Vīrya destroys all pain and darkness and it has therefore been praised by all Buddhas. It ensures success and protection and counteracts all fears and evil proclivities. *Vīrya* is of two kinds – i) The *vīrya* of preparation and initiative (*sannāha vīrya*) ii) The *vīrya* of practice and activity (*prayoga vīrya*)

5. Dhyāna-pāramitā:- The Sanskrit word *dhyāna* (Pāli *jhāna*) means Concentration and is almost synonymous with *Samādhi*. It is also

³ Bodhicaryāvatāra 6.2, Sharma, T.R, “Bodhisattva and Pāramitā”, Dharmapracaya: Aspects of Buddhist Studies : Essays in Honour of N.H.Samtani, eds. Lalji Sravak and Charles Willemen, Buddhist World Press, Delhi,2012,p.391.

rendered as meditation, trance and contemplation. Dhyāna is mainly the means of experiencing and attaining serenity and calmness. Among the six pāramitās, *Dhyāna pāramitā* comes before Prajñā pāramitā. In many schools of Buddhism, wisdom is thought to emerge from meditation.

6. Prajñā –pāramitā:- This perfection represents the summum bonum of Buddhist philosophy. Prajñā has been translated as “gnosis”, “wisdom”, “insight”, “intuition”. The essence of this *pāramitā* is the supreme wisdom, the highest understanding. This flawless wisdom eliminates all false and distorted views of the absolute. With the perfection of wisdom, we develop the ability to recognize the truth behind this world of appearance. The opposite of prajñā is often said as avidyā, moha and daṣṭaprajñā (non-wisdom).

In Ratnāvalī chapter 5, we find a detailed discussion of ten bhūmis known as *bodhisattva-bhūmis*. A Bodhisattva has to pass through these ten stages of development (*daśa bhūmis*). These are as follows:- 1. *Pramuditā* (Joyous stage)- It is the joyful stage on the path to buddhahood. In this stage a Bodhisattva has realized the voidness of self (*pudgala nairātmya*) as well as voidness of the worldly beings and objects (*dharma nairātmya*). A bodhisattva has joy, faith, pleasure, elevation, energy and lack of pride, malice and anger. He practices the perfection of giving (*Dāna pāramitā*). He is the refuge of all sentient beings. He realizes that he has risen above ordinary worldly beings.

2. *Vimalā* (Immaculate stage) – It is the stage of purity. In this stage a Bodhisattva realizes that he is free from sin or evil deeds. He involves himself in ethical deeds and mainly practices the *sīla pāramitā* without neglecting other pāramitās. He becomes great rescuer of beings by following ten meritorious actions himself and exhorts others to follow

them. A bodhisattva who has practiced the first bhūmi and seeks the second one develops ten cittā sayas i.e ṛju, mṛdu, karmanya, dama, sama, kalyāṇa, asaṃskṛta, anapekṣa, udari and māhātmya. When these cittāsayas are developed, he gets established in the second bhūmi, Vimalā. He naturally refrains from killing, stealing, misconduct, telling lies, malignant speech, harsh speech, frivolous talk, avarice, malice and possess right view.

3. Prabhākari (Stage of illumination) – When a bodhisattva cultivates the perfection of kṣānti, the pacifying light of wisdom arises in him. In this stage he has completed the dhyānas and acquired abhijñā, frees himself from attachments, hatred and delusion (rāga, dveṣa and moha). While in the third bhūmi, the bodhisattva realizes that the constituted beings and things are impermanent, momentary, full of suffering and subject to causal law. He longs for Buddha-knowledge. He again thinks about the misery of living beings and resolves to help and liberate them.

4. Arcismati- At this stage the Bodhisattva practices passionlessness and detachment and burns the twin coverings of defilements and ignorance. He cultivates vīrya pāramitā and practices 37 bodhipaksya dharmas.

5. Sudurjaya- This is the stage where dhyāna pāramitā has been cultivated. He develops wisdom and comprehends four noble truths. He understands two truths- conventional and absolute and realizes that everything is empty. It becomes difficult for māra to win over a person belonging in this stage. Due to staying in this bhūmi, one comes to be regarded as the king of the gods abiding in the joyous land (tusita loka).

6. Abhimukhi-The Bodhisattva specially cultivates prajñā pāramitā at this stage. He comprehends the dependent origination of worldly beings and

objects. His mind is predominated by perfect knowledge and he proceeds to approach the good qualities of Buddha.

7. Dūraṅgamā- In this stage, the number of good qualities gets increased and in each moment there is the possibility of the equipoise of cessation. Through true realization of the four noble truths he comes to be known as ‘Ācāryamahānupa’.

8. Acalā- A bodhisattva cultivates the perfection of aspiration at this stage. By attaining perfection, he becomes Brahmā i.e master of a thousand world.

9.Sādhumati- The Bodhisattva possesses perfect wisdom by becoming Brahmā (master of million worlds). He possesses good thoughts on account of the *pratisamvids* acquired by him and cultivates the perfection of strength and thereby making necessary preparation for leading all sentient beings to *Nirvāna*.

10. Dharmamegha (Cloud of the doctrine) – In the last stage the Bodhisattva cultivates perfection of knowledge and acquires infinite wisdom and become supreme great lords. As a result the rain of holy doctrine (saddharma) falls on him. He attains the excellence and preeminence of Buddha. He receives consecration from all Buddhas for Buddha-hood.⁴

As it is evident from the above discussion, Nāgārjuna never denied the importance of morality in our mundane life rather pointed out its importance in overall human development. It is very much true that without leading a moral life it is not possible to attain the ultimate good.

⁴ Majumdar, Shreyasee, “Philosophical views embedded in *Ratnāvalī*: A Study”, *M.Phil Dissertation (unpublished)*, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, 2017, p. 59-64

4.2: Skepticism and Morality: A Conflict

It is commonly supposed that Skepticism and Morality can never go together. In ordinary life, when there arises any doubt in mind regarding any issue or matter we find it difficult to accept or follow. The man who has given up his faith has no compulsion to obey the rules of life and is assumed to be consequently incapable of achieving well-being.

This common sense belief finds acceptance in scriptures also. In Gita, we find “*Ajñas casraddadhanas ca samsayatmā vinasyate/ nayam loko ‘sti na paro na sukham samyayatmanah//*” (Gīta 4.40). That is to say, The one who is devoid of proper knowledge, who lacks trust and who is a skeptic perish. They could neither enjoy happiness in this mundane life nor in the higher life. There is no sense of well-being for the skeptic. At the very outset it seems inconsistent to uphold Skepticism on one hand and engage in moral practices on the other. A skeptic is one who has given up his own faith on different knowledge claims. Skeptic may be radical or moderate. A radical skeptic denies all sorts of knowledge claims whereas a moderate skeptic simply denies the possibility of some knowledge. A moral skeptic never says that there are no objective moral values, principles or truths rather challenge the possibility of knowledge regarding moral values, principles or truths. If one has no knowledge concerning morality it is not possible to lead a perfect ethical life. No successful volition (*pravṛtti*) is possible without certainment of object (*artha niscaya*). As is evident, Skepticism and Morality are in two opposite poles and is hard to weave them together.

4.3: Resolution of the Apparent Conflict

Viewing the rivalry between skepticism and morality, it seems bewildering how a Philosopher like Nāgārjuna can uphold moral views

keeping intact his Skeptical approach? If we think deeply then we will understand that this problem is not a problem at all. The rivalry between morality and skepticism is only apparent, they are not mutually exclusive. There are many skeptics who have upheld skeptical attitude keeping intact their moral outlook. For instance, in principle Hume is a skeptic who opined that the logical outcome of cartesian skepticism is a universal type of skepticism from which it is difficult to refrain. But this does not imply that he had no moral standpoint. He talked about morality as well. We can quote the famous dialogue of Hume “Be a Philosopher but amidst all your Philosophy still be a man. Pyrrho, known as the father of Greek skepticism, is a well-known skeptic but he preached his skepticism with an intention of reaching ‘ataraxia’, a tranquil state of mind. Moral way of living and well being was never neglected by Pyrrho though he was in favour of suspending judgements regarding reality. It should be kept in mind that Skepticism is not only doubting it is a type of investigation and enquiry that sometime may leads to suspension of judgement also but that for the greater well-being.

Greek Philosopher Socrates once said that “An unexamined life is not worth living”. That is to live a fruitful moral life, examination of one’s own life is essential. We should not take anything for granted.

Jaina Philosophy, being a relativistic philosophy preached morality of the highest level. Jaina philosophy talks of non-absolutism. An individual possesses relative knowledge. The reality is manifold in nature and there is innumerable aspect of reality and from a particular place in a particular time, we know a particular aspect of object and that is not the final knowledge of the object. So doubt is very much there. Preaching doubt about the common understanding, they are asking everyone to practise morality. Relativism sometimes leads to skepticism. Both oppose

the presence of any absolute knowledge. It is generally said that Jaina philosophy is not skeptical as there is scope of certain knowledge or kevalijñāna. But that is restricted to the kevalis only. There is every possibility of doubt in case of common people. They are asking to follow the moral principles keeping relativism and skepticism on the other hand.

No philosophical system has ever denied Morality in Indian philosophy. Morality per excellence has been exhibited in Buddhist philosophy besides Jaina Philosophy. Buddhist philosophy is mainly known to be an ethical tradition and Nāgārjuna being a dedicated Buddhist preached morality keeping intact his Skeptical approach.

Nāgārjuna has preached his moral philosophy mainly through *Ratnāvalī* and *Suḥrillekha*. From the detailed discussion of morality it is clear that Nāgārjuna has laid great importance on moral life. But question arises that is his moral philosophy compatible with his skepticism? Some doubts that how can one who has preached *śūnyatā* of all entities talk of moral life- all discussions regarding morality seem to them as meaningless.

In reply first of all we should remember that the term *Śūnya* or *śūnyatā* is never used in the sense of void or zero. The opponents have wrongly taken it in the sense of nothingness so they have raised all sorts of doubts. The term is used in technical sense to mean dependant origination of entities. Dependent origination refers to essencelessness (*svabhāva śūnya*). Further no one can be a skeptic in all walks of life. When one takes critical stance then he can be considered a skeptic in other places when he is not in critical mood he can pass positive judgements. In this regard he can talk very well about morality. Moreover Nāgārjuna has differentiated between two types of truth in his philosophy-*Vyavahārika satya* and *pāramārthika satya* and it is admitted

that *vyavahārika satya* is the means to achieve *pāramārthika satya*. So in the conventional (*vyavahārika*) level the discussion of morality is not meaningless rather very important in reaching the Ultimate level. In his moral discussions, we get to see his Mahāyāna outlook. In *Ratnāvalī* and *Suḥrillekha* it is found that Nāgārjuna himself has talked of the good of others rather than thinking of one's own well-being. According to Mahāyāna ideology, helping others is the main point of morality. According to Hinayāni viewpoint, the main aim is to cultivate good qualities within oneself but without undermining the hinayānin view, Mahayanins hold that through doing good for others individual can develop *kuśal dharma* (good qualities) within oneself. From that perspective, the practise of *pāramitā* and *brahma-vihara bhāvanā* becomes significant. In Nāgārjunian moral philosophy the concepts of *karunā*, *Dāna*, *śraddha* (faith) are witnessed to occur in several places. Another important concept of Mahayana philosophy is that of *Prajñā*. Attainment of *Prajñā* is not possible without practise of morality. Realization of *śūnyatā* is essential in the advancement towards *Nirvāna* but alone it is not sufficient, we need to lead a moral life as well. In Nāgārjuna's moral philosophy we find a synthesis of *prajñā* and morality.

The main aim of Nāgārjuna's skeptical outlook is to unveil the reality and make us understand that everything is *śūnya* and we cannot pass any judgement about reality. When we will realize that everything is *śūnya* that is without self-nature we will not be entangled in the net of various vices like anger, greed, conflict etc. If we can be free from all the malices and cultivates the good virtues then we can ultimately reach the stage of ultimate good. Thus in Nāgārjuna's Philosophy there is no incompatibility in upholding skeptical approach and keeping a moral outlook rather both are necessary and can be viewed as the two sides of the same coin.

CHAPTER- 5:

A SYNTHESIS OF NĀGĀRJUNA’S DEVOTIONAL ATTITUDE AND SKEPTICAL OUTLOOK

5.1: A Brief Outline of Nāgārjuna’s ‘Collection of Hymns’

In the Tibetan Buddhist Canon a series of hymns attributed to Nāgārjuna, the founder of the Madhyamaka school of Buddhism has been preserved. According to Tibetan Tengyur, mention of 18 ‘Collection of hymns’ are found as writings of Nāgārjuna. These are: *Dharmadhātustava*, *Nirāupamyastava*, *Lokātītastava*, *Cittavajrastava*, *Paramārthastava*, *Kāyatrayastava*, *Sattvāradhanastava*, *Prajñāpāramitastotra*, *Acintyastava*, *Stutyotītastava*, *Niruttarostava*, *Āryabhattacharakamanju-sriparamārthastuti*, *Astamohāsthāncaityastotro*, *Dvādaśkaraṇastotra*, *Bandanāstotra*, *Narokoddhārastava*. Some modern scholars doubt as to whether all these are writings of Nāgārjuna but regarding the *Catuḥstava*, a collection of four texts there is hardly any confusion.¹ According to TRV Murti, “There is no reasonable doubt with regard to *Catuḥstava* being the work of Nāgārjuna. These are feeling verses of the highest devotion; they show that Nāgārjuna like saṃkara had the religious strain also well developed in him”². In the words of Prof. Lindtner, “Thus MK (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*), SS (*Śūnyatāsaptati*) and VV (*Vigrahavyāvartanī*) were intended to be studied by philosophically

¹ Chattopadhyay, Madhumita, *Nāgārjuner Darśan Parikramā*, Kolkata: Mahabodhi Book Agency, 2015, p.181

² Murti, T.R.V, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, Kolkata: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1955, p.90

minded monks. CS (*Catuḥstava*) is a document confessing its author's personal faith in the Buddha's deśana..."³

Question can be raised that in the hymns, is the object of praise different in each text or is it the same in all? In reply it can be said that in the hymns- three types of praise are seen – praise related to bhūmi, praise related to mārga or path and the one related to result or phala. *Cittavajrastava* and *Dharmadhātustava* are hymns related to bhumi. *Sattvārādhana*stava is an example of hymns related to mārga. *Prajñāpāramitastotra* is the praise of *Prajñā*. In *Kāyatrāyastotra* we witness the praise regarding *phala* or result. In spite of differences, it can be said that, either directly or indirectly the praise in the hymns are directed to Lord Buddha. It will be found on analysing that, main tenets of Mādhyamika philosophy *śūnyatā*, *Pratītyasamutpāda*, *niḥsvabhavatva* etc. are reflected in almost all hymns.

As the number of collection of hymns is huge, it is not possible to discuss all here. As per the need of the work, here we will discuss only three texts- *Dharmadhātustava*, *Lokātītastava* and *Paramārthastava*.

5.2: Sanskrit Texts of *Lokātītastava*, *Paramārthastava* and *Dharmadhātustava*

Lokātītastava:

“lokātīta namas tubhyaṃ viviktajñānavedine /

yas tvam jagaddhitāyaiva khinnaḥ karuṇayā ciraṃ // 1 //

skandhamātravinirmukto na sattvo 'stīti te matam /

³ Lindtner, Ch. *Nāgārjuniana: Studies in the Writings and Philosophy of Nāgārjuna*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2011, p. 265

sattvārthaṃ ca paraṃ khedaṃ agamaḥ tvaṃ mahāmune //2//

te 'pi skandhāḥ tvayā dhīman dhīmadbhyaḥ saṃprakāśitāḥ /
māyāmarīcigandharvanagarasvapnaśaṃnibhāḥ //3//

hetuḥ saṃbhavo yeṣāṃ tadabhāvān na santi ye /

kathaṃ nāma na te spaṣṭaṃ pratibimbasaṃ matāḥ //4//

bhūtāny acakṣurgrāhyāṇi tanmayaṃ cākṣuṣaṃ kathaṃ /

rūpaṃ tvayaivaṃ bruvatā rūpagrāho nivāritaḥ //5//

vedanīyaṃ vinā nāsti vedanāto nirātmikā / tac ca vedyāṃ svabhāvena
nāstīty abhimataṃ tava //6//

saṃjñārthayor ananyatve mukhaṃ dahyeta vahninā /

anyatve 'dhigamābhāvas tvayoktaṃ bhūtavādinā //7 //

kartā svatantraḥ karmāpi tvayoktaṃ vyavahārataḥ / parasparāpekṣiki tu
siddhis te 'bhimatānayoḥ //8//

na kartāsti na bhoktāsti puṇyāpuṇyaṃ pratītyajam /

yat pratītya na taj jātaṃ proktaṃ vācaspace tvayā ²¹ //9//

ajñāyamānaṃ na jñeyaṃ vijñanaṃ tad vinā na ca /

tasmāt svabhāvato na sto jñānajñeye tvaṃ ūcivān //10//

lakṣyāl lakṣaṇaṃ anyac cet syāt tal lakṣyaṃ alakṣaṇaṃ / taylor abhāvo
'nanyatve viśpaṣṭaṃ kathitaṃ tvayā // 1 1//

lakṣyalakṣaṇanirmuktaṃ vāgudāhāravarjitaṃ / śātaṃ jagad idaṃ
dṛṣṭaṃ bhavatā jñānacakṣuṣā // 12//

na sann utpadyate bhāvo nāpy asan sadasan na ca / na svato
nāpi parato na dvābhyām jāyate katham //13//

na satah sthitiyuktasya vināśa upapadyate /

nāsato 'śvaviśāṇena samasya śamatā katham //14//

bhāvān nārthāntaram nāśo nāpy anarthāntaram matam /

arthāntare bhaven nityo nāpy anarthāntare bhavet // 1 5//

ekatve na hi bhāvasya vināśa upapadyate / prthaktve na hi bhāvasya
vināśa upapadyate //16//

vinaṣṭāt kāraṇāt tāvat kāryotpattir na yujyate / na cāvinaṣṭāt svapnena
tulyotpattir matā tava //17//

na niruddhān nāniruddhād bījād ankurasambhavaḥ /

māyotpādavad utpādaḥ sarva eva tvayocyate //18//

atas tvayā jagad idaṃ parikalpasamudbhavam /

parijñātam asadbhūtam anutpannam na naśyati //19//

nityasya saṃsṛtir nāsti naivānityasya saṃsṛtiḥ / svapnavat
saṃsṛtiḥ proktā tvayā tattvavidāṃ vara //20//

svayaṃkṛtam parakṛtam dvābhyām kṛtam ahetukam / tārnikair iṣyate
duḥkham tvayā tūktam pratītyajam //21 //

yah pratityasamutpādaḥ śūnyatā saiva te matā / bhāvaḥ svatanthro nāstīti
siṃhanādas tavātulaḥ //22//

sarvasamkalpanāśāya śūnyatāmṛtadeśanā / yasya tasyām api grāhas
tvayāsāv avasāditaḥ //23//

nirīhā vaśīkāḥ śūnyā māyāvat pratyayodbhavāḥ /

sarvadharmās tvayā nātha niḥsvabhavāḥ prakāśitāḥ //24//

na tvayotpāditam kim cin na ca kim cin nirodhitam / yathā pūrvam
tathā paścāt tathatām buddhavān asi //25//

aryair nisevitām enām anāgamyā hi bhāvanām / nānimittam hi
vijñānam bhavatīha katham cana //26//

animittam anāgamyā mokṣo nāsti tvam uktavān / atas tvayā
mahāyāne tat sākalyena deśitam //27//

yad avāptam mayā puṇyam stutvā tvām stutibhājanam /
nimittabandhanāpetam bhūyāt tenākhilam jagat //28//”⁴

Paramārthastava:

“katham stoṣyāmi te nātham anutpannam anālayam/

lokopamām atikrāntam vākpathātītagocaram / / 1 //

tathāpi yādṛśo vāsi tathatārtheṣu gocaraḥ / lokaprajñaptim āgamyā
stoṣye 'ham bhaktito gurum //2//

anutpannasvabhāvena utpādas te na vidyate /

na gatiḥ nāgatir nāthāsvabhāvāya namo 'stu te //3//

na bhāvo nāpy abhāvo 'si nocchedo nāpi śāśvataḥ / na nityo nāpy
anityas tvam advayāya namo 'stu te //4//

na rakto haritamāmjiṣṭho varṇas te nopalabhyate/ na pīyākṛṣṇśuklo vā
'varṇāya namo 'stu te //5//

⁴ Tola,F and Dragonetti,C, ‘Nāgārjuna’s Catustava’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 13, D.Reidel Publishing Company, 1985,p.10-12.

na mahān nāpi hrasvo 'si na dīrghaparimaṇḍ alah / apramāṇagatiṃ prāpto
'pramāṇāya namo 'stu te //6//

na dūre nāpi cāsanne nākāṣe nāpi vā kṣitau / na saṃsāre na nirvāṇe
'sthitāya namo 'stu te //7//

asthitah sarvadharmeṣu dharmadhātugatiṃ gataḥ / pariṃ gaṃbhīratāṃ
prāpto gaṃbhīāya namo 'stu te //8//

evaṃ stutaḥ stuto bhūyās athavā kim uta stutaḥ / śūnyeṣu sarvadharmeṣu
kaḥ stutaḥ kena vā stutaḥ //9//

kas tvāṃ śaknoti saṃstotum utpādayayavarjitam / yasya nānto na
madhyam vā grāho grāhyam na vidyate //10//

na gataṃ nāgataṃ stutvā sugataṃ gativarjitam / tena puṇyena loko 'yam
vrajatāṃ saugatīṃ gatim // 11 //”⁵

Dharmadhātustava:

“dharmadhāto' namas tubhyaṃ

sarvasattveṣv avasthita |

yasya te aparijñānād

bhramanti tribhavālaye || <1>

ye eva dhātuḥ saṃsāre

śodhyamānaḥ sa eva tu |

⁵ Ibid,p. 19-20

śuddhaḥ sa eva nirvāṇe

dharmakāyaḥ sa eva hi || <2>

yathā hi kṣīrasammiśraṃ

sarpimaṇḍaṃ na dṛśyate

tathā hi kleśasammiśro

dharmadhātur na dṛśyate || <3>

yathā viśodhitaṃ kṣīraṃ

ghṛtadravyaṃ sunirmalam |

tathā viśodhitāḥ kleśā

dharmadhātuḥ sunirmalaḥ || <4>

yathā dīpo ghaṭastho hi

na kiñcid avabhāṣate |

tathā kleśaghaṭastho hi

dharmadhātur na bhāṣate || <5>

yena yena hi pārśvena

cchidrībhavati tad ghaṭam |

tena tena hi pārśvena

raśmayas tasya nirgatāḥ || <6>

yadā samādhivajreṇa

bhinnaṃ bhavati tad ghaṭam |

sa tadākāśaparyantaṃ

samantād avabhāṣate || <7>

dharmadhātur na cotpanno

na niruddhaḥ kadācana |

sarvakālam asaṅkliṣṭa

ādimadhyāntanirmalaḥ || <8>

yathā vaiḍuryaratnaṃ hi

sarvakālaprabhāsvaram |

pāṣāṇakośe sañchannam

ābhā tasya na rājate || <9>

evaṃ hi kleśasañchanno

dharmadhātuḥ sunirmalaḥ |

nāsau bhrājati saṃsāre
nirvāṇe tu prabhāsvaraḥ || <10>

gotre ca sati vyāyāmo
jātarūpanidarśanāt |
gotre asati vyāyāmaḥ
śramaḥ kevalam iṣyate || <11>

yathā hi tuṣasañchannaṃ
na dhānyaṃ tat phalaṃ matam |
tathā hi kleśasañchanno
nāsau buddheti kalpyate || <12>

yathā hi tuṣanirmuktaṃ
tat phalaṃ pratibhāsate |
tathā hi kleśanirmukto
dharmakāyaḥ prabhāsate || <13>

upamā kriyate loka
kadalyā nāsti sārātā |

phalāni tasya sārāṇi

bhakṣyate amṛtopamā || <14>

evaṃ hy asāre saṃsāre

nirvṛte kleśasāgare |

phalaṃ tasyāpi buddhatvam

amṛtaṃ sarvadehinām || <15>

evaṃ hi sarvabījeṣu

sādṛśyāṃ jāyate phalaṃ |

bījair vinā phalaṃ nāsti

kaḥ prājñāḥ pratipatsyate || <16>

bījabhūtas tv asau dhātur

dharmāṇām āśrayo mataḥ |

śodhyamānaḥ krameṇaivaṃ

buddhatvāspadam āvahet || <17>

nirmālau candrasūryau hi

āvṛtau pañcabhir malaiḥ |

abhranīhāradhūmena

rāhuvaktrarajādibhiḥ || <18>

evaṃ prabhāsvaraṃ cittam

āvṛtaṃ pañcabhir malaiḥ |

kāmavyāpādamiddhena

auddhatyavicikitsayā || <19>

agniśaucaṃ yathā vastraṃ

malinaṃ vividhair malaiḥ|

agnimadhye yathā kṣiptaṃ

malaṃ dagdhaṃ na vastratā|| <20>

evaṃ prabhāsvaraṃ cittam

malinaṃ rāgajair malaiḥ|

jñānāgninā malaṃ dagdhaṃ

na dagdhaṃ tat prabhāsvaraṃ|| <21>

śūnyatāhārakāḥ sūtrā

ye kecid bhāṣitā jinaiḥ|

sarvais taiḥ kleśavyāvṛttir

naiva dhātor vināśanam|| <22>

pṛthivyantarhitam toyam

yathā tiṣṭhati nirmalam|

kleśair antaritam jñānam

tathābhāti sunirmalam|| <23>

dharmadhātur yato nātmā

na ca strīṇṛnapuṃsakaḥ|

sarvagrāhavinirmuktaḥ

katham ātmeti kalpyate|| <24>

sarve dharmā hy asaṃsaktāḥ

strīpuṃstvaṃ hi na vidyate|

rāgāndhavinēyārthāya

strīpuṃstvaṃ hi pradarśitam|| <25>

anityaduḥkhaśūnyeti

cittanidhyaptayas trayah|

paramā cittanidhyaptir

dharmāṇāṃ niḥsvabhāvatā|| <26>

yathā hi garbho garbhīṇyāṃ

vidyate na ca dṛśyate|

tathā hi kleśasañchannāṃ

dharmatattvaṃ na dṛśyate|| <27>

caturṇāṃ hi vikalpānāṃ

utpattir bhūtabhautikā|

ahaṃmamaavikalpo hi

nāmasañjñānimittajaḥ|| <28>

prañidhānāṃ hi buddhānāṃ

nirābhāsam alakṣaṇam|

pratyāmavedyayogitvād

buddhānāṃ nityadharmatā|| <29>

yathā śaśaviṣṇāṃ hi

kalpyamānaṃ na vidyate|

tathā hi sarvadharmeṣu

kalpitaṃ naiva vidyate|| <30>

paramāṇurajaḥ kintu

goviṣānaṃ na vidyate|

yathā pūrvam tathā paścāt

tasya kiṃ kalpyate buddhaiḥ|| <31>

pratītyopadyate caiva

pratītya ca nirudhyate|

ekasya sambhavo nāsti

kathaṃ bālair vikalpyate|| <32>

śaśagośṛṅgadrṣṭānatam

ubhau kalpitalakṣaṇau|

madhyamā pratipadyeta

yathā sugatadharmatā|| <33>

yathā candrārkatārāṇaṃ

svaccha udakabhājane|

drśyate pratibimbaṃ hi

tathā niṣpannalakṣaṇam|| <34>

ādhimadhyāntakalyāṇam

avisamvādakaṃ dhruvam|

yasya caivamvidhānātmā

katham ātmeti kalpyate|| <35>

grīṣmakāle yathā vāri

uṣṇam ity abhidhīyate|

tad eva śītakāleṣu

śītam ity abhidhīyate|| <36>

āvṛtaṃ kleśajālana

cittam ity abhidhīyate|

tad eva kleśāpagamād

buddha ity abhidhīyate|| <37>

cakṣuḥ pratītya rūpaṃ ca

avabhāsāḥ sunirmalāḥ|

anutpannāniruddhās te

dharmadhātum prajānatha|| <38>

śrotram pratītya śabdaṃ ca

cittaṃ vijñaptayas trayah|

śrūyate svavikalpena

dharmadhātur alakṣaṇah|| <39>

ghrāṇaṃ gandhāśritaṃ ghrāṇi

arūpam anidarśanam|

ghrāṇavijñānatathātā

dharmadhātur vikalpyate|| <40>

jihvā svabhāvaśūnyā hi

rasadhātur viviktatā|

apraṭiṣṭhitavijñānaṃ

dharmadhātusvabhāvatā|| <41>

śuddhakāyasvabhāvena

sparsāpratyayalakṣaṇam|

pratyayebhyo vinirmuktaṃ

dharmadhātum vadāmy aham|| <42>

manaḥ pradhānadharmeṣu

kalpyakalpanavarjitam|

dharmāṇām niḥsvabhāvatvaṃ

dharmadhātur vibhāvyate|| <43>

paśyate śṛṇute ghrāti

svādate sprśatīti ca|

dharmān vijānate yogī

evaṃ niṣpannalakṣaṇam|| <44>

cakṣuḥ śrotraṃ ca ghrāṇaṃ ca

jihvā kāyo manas tathā|

ṣaḍāyatanaṃ viśuddham

etat tattvasya lakṣaṇam|| <45>

cittam eva dvidhā dr̥ṣṭaṃ

loki lokottaraṃ ca yat|

ātmagrāheṇa saṃsāraḥ
pratyātma tathātā hi tat|| <46>

rāgakṣayo hi nirvāṇaṃ
dveṣamohakṣayaś ca yat|
tasya bodhāya buddhatvaṃ
śaraṇaṃ sarvadehinām|| <47>

asmim kalevare sarvaṃ
jñānam ajñānam eva ca|
badhyate svavikalpena
mucyate svaparijñayā|| <48>

bodhir na dūre nāsanne
na gatā nāpi vāgatā|
na dṛśyate dṛśyate caiva
atraiva kleśapañjare|| <49>

uktaṃ ca sūtravargeṣu
viharaty ātmacintakaḥ|

prajñādīpavīhāreṇa

paramāṃ śāntim āgataḥ|| <50>

prajñādīpavīhāreṇa

paramāṃ śāntim āgataḥ|| <50>

na bodher dūraṃ sañjñī syān

na sāsannā ca sañjñīnaḥ|

ṣaṇṇāṃ hi viṣayābhāso

yathābhūtaṃ pariññāyā|| <51>

yathādakena sammiśraṃ

kṣīraṃ ekatra bhājane|

kṣīraṃ pibanti haṃsā hi

udakaṃ ca tathā sthitam|| <52>

evaṃ hi kleśasammiśraṃ

jñānaṃ ekatra bhājane|

pibanti yogino jñānaṃ

ajñānaṃ sphorayanti te|| <53>

aham mameti vā grāho
yāvad bāhyo vikalpyate|
dr̥ṣṭe viṣayanairātmye
bhavabījaṃ nirudhyate|| <54>

buddho hi parinirvāti
śucir nityaśubhālayaḥ|
kalpayanti dvayaṃ bālā
advayaṃ yogināṃ padam|| <55>

duṣkarair vividhair dānaiḥ
śīlaiḥ sattvārthasaṅgrahaiḥ|
sattvopakāraṣāntyā ca
dhātupuṣṭir iyaṃ tridhā|| <56>

vīryaṃ ca sarvadharmeṣu
dhyāne cittaṃ pracāritam|
prajñāyām acalaṃ nityaṃ
bodhipuṣṭir iyaṃ punaḥ|| <57>

upāyasahitā prajñā

praṇidhānair viśodhitā|

baleṣu suṣṭhitam jñānam

dhātupuṣṭiś caturvidhā|| <58>

mā bhodhisattvān tu vandeti

atidurbhāṣitam kṛtam|

bodhisattvam ajīvaṃ tu

xxxx ~ - - x <59>

xxxx ~ -x

xxxx ~ - ~ x

xxxx ~ - x

xxxx ~ - ~ x <60>

xxxx ~ - x

sannidhāyātra cintayet|

guḍaśarkarakhaṇḍānām

utpattis tatra jāyate|| <61>

rakṣite bodhicitte hi
sannidhāyātra cintayet|
arhatpratyekabuddhānām
utpattis tatra jāyate|| <62>
yathā śālyāṅkurādīnām
rakṣām kurvanti kārṣikāḥ|
tathāśrayādhimuktānām
rakṣām kurvanti nāyakāḥ|| <63>
yathā kṛṣṇacaturdaśyām
dṛśyate candravigraham|
tathāgrayānādhimuktānām
dṛśyate buddhavigraham| <64>
yathaiva bālacandrasya
dṛṣṭā vṛddhiḥ kṣaṇe kṣaṇe|
tathā bhūmipraviṣṭānām
dṛṣṭā vṛddhiḥ kṣaṇe kṣaṇe|| <65>

yathā hi pañcadaśyāṃ vai
pūrṇacandro hi jāyate|
tathā niṣṭhāgatābhūmyāṃ
dharmakāyo hi jāyate|| <66>

dhimuktidṛḍhaṃ yasya
buddhe dharme ca nityaśaḥ|
utpādayati tac cittam
anivartyam bhava bhava|| <67>

kṛṣṇāśrayaparāvṛttiḥ
śuklāśrayaparigrahaḥ|
tadā tasyāvabodhena
muditety abhidhīyate|| <68>

malimaṃ nityakālaṃ hi
rāgādyair vividhair malaiḥ|
malābhāve ca yā śuddhiḥ
vimalety abhidhīyate|| <69>

nirodhāt kleśajālasya

prabhābhrājavinirmalā|

apramāṇāndhakārasya

vigatā tu prabhākārī|| <70>

śuddhā prabhāsvarā nityaṃ

saṅgajaiḥ parivarjitā|

jñānārciṣaiḥ parivṛtā

bhūmir arcīṣmatī matā|| <71>

sarvavidyākālāśilpa-

dhyānānāṃ ca vicitratā|

durjayānāṃ hi kleśānāṃ

vijayā tu sudurjayā|| <72>

tiṣṭhāṃ api bodhīnāṃ

saṅgrahaḥ sarvasampadām|

utpādavyayagambhīrā

bhūmis tv abhimukhībhūtā|| <73>

krīḍate raśmijālena

cakravyūhaiḥ samantataḥ|

trilokāt tīrṇapaṅkaughair

dūraṅgamā iti smṛtā|| <74>

buddhaiḥ sandhriyamāṇo'sau

praviṣṭo jñānasāgare|

anābhogavaśiprāptaḥ

akampyā mārakiṅkaraiḥ|| <75>

pratisaṃvitsu sarvāsu

sa yogī pāramīgataḥ|

dharmadeśana sāṅkathyair

hūmiḥ sādhumatī smṛtā|| <76>

kāyaṃ jñānamayaṃ rāmyam

ākāśam iva nirmalam|

sandhārayati buddhānām

dharmameghā samantataḥ| <77>

āśrayaḥ sarvadharmāṇāṃ

caryāphalaparigrahaḥ|

āśrayasya parāvṛttir

dharmakāyo'bhidhīyate|| <78>

acintyo vāsanād muktaś

cintyaḥ saṃsāravāsanah|

tvam acintyo'si sarveṣāṃ

kas tvā vijñātum arhati|| <79>

sarvavāgviṣayātītaṃ

sarvendriyam agocaram|

manovijñānagamyo'si

yo'si yo'si namo'stu te|| <80>

krameṇa samudānītā

buddhaputrā mahāyaśāḥ|

dharmameghena jñānena

śūnyaṃ paśyanti dharmatām|| <81>

yadā prakṣālitam cittam
uttīrṇam bhavasāgarāt|
ahāpadmamayaṁ tasya
sanaṁ sampratiṣṭhati|| <82>

anekaratnapattrābhaṁ
lakṣaṇojjvalakalpikam|
anekaiḥ padmaḥkoṭibhiḥ
samantāt parivāritam|| <83>

daśabhiś ca balair bālas
tiṣṭhate bālacandravat|
kleśair malinasattvānāṁ
na paśyati tathāgatam|| <84>

yadā pretāḥ samantāt tu
śuṣkaṁ paśyanti sāgaram|
tathaivājñānadagdhānāṁ
buddho nāstīti kalpanā| <85>
sattvānāṁ alpapuṇyānāṁ

bhagavān kiṃ kariṣyati|

jātya xx - -

xxx - - x <86>”⁶

5.3: Interpretation of *Lokātītastava* and *Paramārthastava*

In the Tibetan Buddhist canon, a series of hymns attributed to Nāgārjuna, the founder of the Madhyamaka school of Buddhism, has been preserved. The four hymns composed by Nāgārjuna namely *Lokātītastava*, *Niraupamyā*, *Acintya* and *Paramārtha* comprise the *Catuḥstava*.

Lokātītastava:

There are 28 verses in the *Lokātītastava*. In the 1st verse, homage is paid to the *lokātīta*, the one who has gone beyond the world. He is versed in pure knowledge, and has suffered pain, out of compassion only for the welfare of all living beings. It is said that the *lokātīta*, suffered much pain for the living beings, who himself declared to be non-existent. According to Buddhist framework, five skandhas make an individual. When the *skandhas* come to an end, living beings are liberated.

It is mentioned in *Lokātītastava* that, the tathagata have shown to the wise men that the skandhas are similar to a magical illusion, a mirage, a gandharva's city, a dream. Here the significance lies in the fact that although beings have only an illusory existence, Buddha feels compassion for them. Further in next verse, Nāgārjuna pointed out to the fact that the thing which is dependent upon causes and conditions has no existence of its own. That is, conditionedness is the root of unreality of

⁶ Zhen, Liu, *The Dharmadhatustava: A Critical edition of the Sanskrit text with the Tibetan and Chinese translations, a diplomatic transliteration of the Manuscript and notes*, Beijing: China Tibetology Publishing House; Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2015, p. 8-27

everything. As elements are not perceived through the eye, then the objects constituted by the elements are also not perceived. Moreover, sensation does not exist without the sensible so it is without substance and the sensible too does not exist with its own being. He further opined that if there is identity between the word and its object; then the word would produce effect of the object. We can understand the situation with an analogy, if word and object are same then the mouth would get burnt by the very utterance of the word fire and if there were difference there would be inexistence of knowledge. The existence of both the agent and also its action is mutually dependent. The action loses its meaning without an agent and agent also is useless or to say does not exist in the absence of any action. Similarly, there is no agent to experience in the absence of experience. Merit and demerit are born in dependence and that which is in dependence does not arise.

Verse 10 says that, the object i.e the knowable does not exist when it is not known and without it knowledge does not exist either- therefore the knowable and knowledge do not exist. Nāgārjuna declares that the *jñāna-jñeya* both are non-existent. It is to be noted here that in other writings he mentioned the non-existence of *pramāna* and *prameya*. They are both *śūnya* i.e dependently originated. Here he is using the terms *jñāna* and *jñeya* instead of *Pramāna-prameya* but the point of focus remains same.

In the verse 11 it is said, if the essential characteristic were different from the object which it characterizes, that characterised object would be without an essential characteristics, if there were identity of both then both would be inexistent. This world, which is without essential characteristics and characterized object and devoid of utterances through words, has been proclaimed by the blessed to be *śānto* or calm.

It is said that, A thing does not comes forth either if it is already existent nor if it is non-existent nor if it is both existent and non-existent, neither from itself nor from other thing nor from both.

On the other hand, destruction is not possible for an essentially existent being, cessation be for a non-existent being similar to the horns of the horse. The being destructed cannot be considered as something different from the being existent nor as something non-different. If it were different it would be permanent. If it were non-different it would not exist. For in case of identity of both, the being destructed is not possible for the being existent, similarly in case of seperateness also, the being destructed is not possible for the being existent. It is not logical to hold the emergence of an effect from an already destroyed cause, neither from a not destroyed cause.

The birth of a sprout is either from a seed not yet destroyed or from a seed already destroyed. All birth or origination has been declared by the *lokātīta* to be similar to the birth of a magical illusion. Therefore this world born from imagination has been fully understood by you to be inexistent – not arisen does not perish.

There is neither transmigration of what is permanent, nor transmigration of what is non- permanent. Nāgārjuna says that transmigration has been proclaimed by the Omniscient Lord to be like a dream.

The blessed have declared suffering to be born in dependence which is said to be produced by itself or others by the logicians.

The Buddha regarded Dependent origination to be just voidness. There is no independent being. Everything is *śūnya* or void. The blessed

have indicated to the realization of voidness in His teachings only for destruction of all mental creations.

Hinayānins have declared the non-self of individual (*pudgala nairātmya*) only. *Mahāyānins* have also talked of selflessness of all entities (*dharma nairātmya*). It is said that all *dharma*s are inert, dependent and void like a magical illusion. They have arisen out of conditions, therefore lack own essence and hence they are *śūnya* (void).

True Reality is the same as always and is unalterable. Reality is void and voidness can only be realized by following the methods taught by Mahayana Philosophy.

Buddha has taught that without realization of voidness or without proper knowledge of reality, liberation is not possible.

In the last verse of this hymn, Nāgārjuna is praying that let all living beings be free from the bondage of empirical reality through the merits he gained by praising the Blessed. ⁷

Paramārthastava:

There are 11 verses in the *Paramārthastava*. In the very first verse, Nāgārjuna, credited too have written *Paramārthastava* is doubting as to how to praise the Lord who has not been born, who remains no where and is beyond all comparisons. Buddha being void is devoid of all characteristics of empirical reality. Now, if there is no agent naturally question arises as to whom to praise and how. In the next verse, Nāgārjuna is saying that whatever the lord is-that is in the sense of true reality but Nāgārjuna is praising or paying homage to the lord out of

⁷ Tola,F and Dragonetti.C, ‘Nāgārjuna’s Catustava’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 13, D.Reidel Publishing Company, 1985,p.44.

devotion. Since there is no forthcoming, neither going of any agent with an own being. Therefore the lord whom he is praising is also devoid of an own being.

The lord is neither an existing being nor a non-existent being nor liable to destruction nor eternal nor permanent nor impermanent. Thus Nāgārjuna is paying homage to the lord devoid of duality. No colours either red or green or others are perceived in the lord. Hence homage is paid to the one, devoid of colour. He is neither big nor small; neither long nor round, he is in a measureless state. Thus Nāgārjuna is paying homage to one devoid of measure. The lord is neither far nor near, neither in the space nor on earth, neither in the *saṃsāra* nor in the *nirvāna*. Thus homage is paid to one who is in no place. Here we may mention that as such there is no difference between *Samsāra* and *Nirvāna* from the ultimate point. Lord is not in the *dharma*s and has reached the extreme profundity. Thus homage is paid to the profound.

Now in verse 9, Nāgārjuna is questioning that praised in this way, lord is also being praised but has the lord been praised in truth? As all the *dharma*s are void, who is praised and by whom is he praised? Who can praise the lord devoid of birth and destruction for whom there is neither end nor middle, nor perception nor perceptible object? The point here is that everything in this world is void then there can be no one who can perform the task of praising and similarly there can be no one who can be praised in reality. But it is as a matter of convention the lord is praised.

In the last verse, Nāgārjuna is saying that having praised the lord, the well-gone, merit has been gained and by virtue of this merit let the world follow the path of the well-gone.

5.4: An Overview of *Dharmadhātustava*

The Sanskrit term *Dharmadhātu*, derived from the Sanskrit root words, *dhatu*, meaning “sphere” or realm and *dharma* meaning truth here, signifies “Realm of Truth”. The text *Dharmadhātustava*, also known by the name *Dharmadhātustotra* is attributed to Nāgārjuna by Scholars. It contains 101 verses as per the Tibetan and English translations. The Sanskrit original was assumed to be lost but in Tibet a Sanskrit manuscript was found and published recently in 2015. In this thesis, the researcher has provided the Sanskrit text taken from Liu Zhen’s book and as it is evident, all the 101 verses are not found in the Sanskrit one, some verses are found missing there. Now let us concentrate on the main theme of *Dharmadhātustava*.

The main theme of *Dharmadhātustava* is that *dharmadhātu* or luminous mind sometimes becomes veiled by adventitious stains but essentially remain untainted by them. When these stains get removed, it manifests itself with all its qualities. In this text by citing different instances the main point that has been highlighted is that there is no basic difference between *Samsāra* and *Nirvāna*. When *Citta* or *Dharmadhāu* is veiled by afflictions (*Kleśas*) then that state is termed *Samsāra*. Whereas, when the *citta* becomes free from all the afflictions (*kleśas*), then that is called *Nirvāna*. Thus it can be said that the same *Citta* is *samsāra* from one perspective and *Nirvāna* from the other. *Citta* or *dharmadhātu* is self-manifested and is present everywhere and at all times. We fail to realize it in our mundane life as it gets adulterated at that level. There are three stages of *Dharmadhātu* from the perspective of Sensible beings. When the *dharmadhātu* is fully covered by afflictions then it is called the stage of ordinary beings. Next, when these afflictions gradually get removed then that is the stage of *Bodhisattva*. In the third stage, when these

afflictions get removed totally then that is the state of ‘Buddhahood’. For instance, same water is said cold in winter and hot in summer. Due to weather condition the same water becomes different, similarly when *citta* is full of afflictions it is called sentient beings, when it is free from all sorts of afflictions it is termed ‘Buddha’. The other topics that are discussed in this text are: How is Buddha revealed to sentient beings, how *dharmadhātu* is the main basis of *Samsāra* and *Nirvāna* and how the *pāramitās* are way to reveal *Dharmadhātu*.

In the first verse of *Dharmadhātustava*, Nāgārjuna has paid homage to Manjusri and bowed to *Dharmadhātu*, who dwells in every living beings. But owing to their lack of awareness about this *dharmadhātu*, ordinary men revolve in the cycle of this worldly existence constituted by *skandha*, *dhātu*, *āyatana*. One remains unaware of *Dharmadhātu* when one’s mind is afflicted with *kleśas*. That is we individual get entangled in the cycle of worldly existence due to our afflictions of mind. So when the *citta* or mind is free from all sorts of afflictions then one gets rid of this cyclic existence. This stage can be termed *Nirvāna*. As such there is no difference between *Samsāra* and *Nirvāna*. They are two sides of the same coin. Both exists in the same domain. There is only a perspectival difference. When the *Citta* or *dharmadhātu* is veiled with various impurities and one fails to grasp the real nature of *Dharmadhātu* then it is viewed as *Samsāra*. Whereas, when the same *Citta* is pure i.e free from impurities, then it is considered as *Nirvāna*. That is to say, one transcends the limit of worldly existence and realizes *Nirvāna* when one can eliminates all sorts of evil dispositions. To Nāgārjuna, Pure *Citta* or *Dharmadhātu* is the main reality which is equal to *Dharmakāya*, *Nirvāna* and *Buddhatva*.

Nāgārjuna explained the status of *Samsāra* and *Nirvāna* with the help of various instances. For example, if Butter is mixed up with the milk, one cannot separately identify Butter. Whereas, if one churns the milk and segregates butter from it, then butter is identified. Similarly real nature of *Dharmadhātu* is manifested when all the afflictions are removed from the *citta*.

In another instance, Nāgārjuna has talked of a lamp light which if kept in a covered vase cannot illuminate itself and the surrounding unless there are holes around the vase to reflect its rays. Similarly *Dharmadhātu* cannot reveal itself when it is veiled in defilements. When the defilements get removed the self-manifesting *citta* unveils itself.

Further, Nāgārjuna has cited the example of a precious Gem which shines at all times but remains gleamless when kept hidden in its ore before extraction. In the same way *Dharmadhātu* fails to illuminate itself when covered with evil dispositions. *Dharmadhātu* is omnipresent and self-revealing but presence of afflictions overshadows its luminous nature.

So individual should strive to eradicate all sorts of vices.

In this regard, another example presented by Nāgārjuna is that of Grain covered in husk. So long the grain remained in the husk, it is not found. But when all the husks are removed, we get the Grain. In the like manner, *Dharmadhātu* when free from negative dispositions reflect with its own glow. When this ever shining *Dharmadhātu* is tormented by *kleśas* then it is termed Sentient beings but that same *Dharmadhātu* when manifests itself being free from these *kleśas* it is termed “Buddhahood”

Now question may arise if the *Dharmadhātu* is self-luminous then how can get veiled? In reply it can be said :

“Spotless are the sun and moon,

But obscured by fivefold stains:

These are clouds and smoke and mist,

Rahu’s face and dust as well.

Similarly, mind so luminous

Is obscured by fivefold stains.

They’re desire, malice, laziness,

Agitation and doubt too”.⁸

That is to say as the sun and moon which are by nature speckless becomes veiled by various stains like cloud mist etc. similarly the ever luminating mind becomes shadowed by stains of desire malice etc.

When mind gets deluded by desire, malice etc it loses its self-luminous nature. Individuals afflicted with various vices fail to realize Buddha nature. They suppose that there is no one called Buddha. When individuals will attain true wisdom he will be free from ignorance advancing towards attaining Buddha-hood. In the stage of pure wisdom there prevails eternal bliss. According to Nāgārjuna, *Prajñā* is not generated within individual from outside. It exists within individuals at all times. *Prajñā* remains even in the afflicted mind but individuals fail to grasp it. This is our permanent abode. Just as a Swan takes away milk

⁸ Brunnholz, K, *In Praise of Dharmadhātu: Nāgārjuna and the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje*, trans and introduced by Karl Brunnholz, , New York: Snow Lion Publication , 2007, p. 119

separating it from water, a wise man can attain *Prajñā* (wisdom) by removing evil stains. *Prajñā* differentiates between mundane and supra-mundane matter. *Prajñā* or realization of the true reality removes all sorts of attachments and make a person reluctant towards both *samsāra* and *Nirvāna*.

According to Nāgārjuna, one bereft of true wisdom and tormented by various afflictions is bound in this finite existence. But when all the defilements ceases to exist and individual is established in wisdom then he excels the mundane boundary to uplift himself to the stage of ‘Buddha’. In other words, Buddhata is no stage outside to be reached. It remains within an individual itself. But due to ignorance, attachments and negative traits he fails to grasp the knowledge of true reality and thus Buddhata remain unmanifested within oneself. That same individual becomes ‘Buddha’ when he attains wisdom (*bodhi*) and is free from all afflictions (*kleśas*). Nāgārjuna opines that there is no difference between *Dharmadhātu*, *Nirvāna* and *Buddhata*.⁹

Here we find, the same idea has been echoed in the philosophy of Tagore as well. In Tagore’s view, the finite self (*choto ami*) and the Infinite self (*Baro ami*) dwell in the one and same locus. When an individual is confined to a limited periphery with all sorts of vices like ego, passions, hatred, anger, greed, self-interest, ignorance about true reality etc. then it is his finite self. Whereas, in course of time when the finite self becomes successful in getting rid of all these vices and attains true realization then the finite-self crosses the bar of finitude and gets alleviated to Infinite self. That is to say, the Infinite manifests itself in the limited domain. The individual becomes one with Infinite.

⁹ The Outline of Dharmadhātustava presented here is with the help of the text: Brunnholz, K, *In Praise of Dharmadhātu: Nāgārjuna and the Third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje*, tr and introduced by Karl Brunnholz, New York: Snow Lion Publication, 2007.

Tagore writes,

Simar majhe ashim tumi bajao apon sur

Amar modhye tomar prokash tai eto modhur....

Or in other song,

Tai tomar anonda amar'par

Tumi tai esecho niche....

5.5: Revealing the Compatibility between *Buddha Bandanā* and Skeptical Approach

Nāgārjuna in his *Vigrahavyavartanī* and *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa*, has nullified the *pramāna-prameya* dichotomy and declared that everything is *śūnya*. He is termed as a cognitive skeptic by Prof. Dilip Kumar Mohanta. We find that Nāgārjuna has paid his homage to Buddha through numerous 'Collection of hymns'. Now naturally question arises whether it is possible for Nāgārjuna to pay homage to Buddha and keep his skeptical approach intact. If everything is *śūnya* then there will be neither any object of praise nor any agent to be praised. But we get to see Nāgārjuna praising Lord Buddha variously in different devotional texts. This seems absurd. But Nāgārjuna clarifies this apparent inconsistency in the 1st kārikā of *Stutyatītastava*.

“The Tathāgata who has travelled

The unsurpassable path is beyond praise

But with a mind full of respect and joy

I will praise the one beyond praise.”¹⁰

According to Prof. Ch.Lindtner, “...these hymns are outbursts of a sincere and enthusiastic appraisal of the Buddha as the teacher who out of sheer compassion took pains to propagate his conviction of the emptiness of all phenomena.”¹¹ In Indian Philosophy, right from the beginning importance was given on Bhakti or devotion. In *Theravāda* tradition importance was not given to Bhakti for liberation but later on Mahāyāna Buddhists have reemphasized the significance of bhakti in one’s life. Nāgārjuna’s hymns are outbursts of that devotional mentality. He presented various philosophical theories combined with devotion in all these *collection of hymns*. In all these texts we get to see that the doctrines of Mādhyamika philosophy like *śūnyatā*, *pratītyasamutpāda* etc. have been highlighted.

There is no contradiction in Nāgārjuna’s paying homage to Buddha and upholding skeptical attitude. We must not forget that Nāgārjuna’s skepticism is not of the destructive type it is rather constructive. His main intention of holding skeptical approach is to unveil the real nature of reality in front of us and make us aware that all the entities in this life are neither static nor do they have any essence. *Śūnyatā* is the universal basic theory of the world and it is the core of all elements-everything is dependently originated and hence they are ultimately *śūnya*. This *śūnyata* is also called *dharmatā*, *tathatā*. Besides *prajñā*, another quality that has made Buddha unique is *Karunā* or *Mahākarunā*. In *Dharmadhātustava*, we find that the concept of *Śūnyatā* and that of *karunā* get finely woven. *Karunā* is not a mere sentiment it arises from

¹⁰ Lindtner, Ch. *Nāgārjuniana: Studies in the Writings and Philosophy of Nāgārjuna*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2011, p 53

¹¹ Ibid ,p. 123

the feeling of unity and sameness. If our vision gets coloured by ignorance we fail to realize the essencelessness of entities likewise in an afflicted mind this sameness is not felt. When through wisdom (*Prajñā*) we will be able to remove all afflictions then we will be able to realize the *Dharmadhātu*, *Nirvāna* or Buddha in whichever name we may call it. All these refer to a single truth. There is no contradiction between the concept of *śūnyatā* propagated by Mādhyamikas and the theory of *Dharmadhātu*—they are two sides of the same coin.

Moreover we must remember that Nāgārjuna's skepticism is not an end in itself, it is a means to well-being. Similarly his main purpose of *buddha bandanā* which is a reflection of his devotional heart is also for the well-being of all mankind and also to show people that Lord Buddha who is the epitome of *śraddhā*, *karuṇā* and all other virtues, having realized the ultimate reality and has reached the other shore.

CONCLUSION

This entire work revolves round the philosophy of Nāgārjuna. Extensive study has been made to revisit the skepticism of Nāgārjuna. To make the case easy, it has been tried to provide a general outline of Skepticism and its development in Greek as well as modern western tradition. Then the trend of Indian skepticism in the pre and post Nāgārjunian era has been discussed. In the 3rd Chapter, the dialectical philosophy of Nāgārjuna has been highlighted. Here attempt has been made to show how Nāgārjuna's skeptical approach is embedded in his dialectical writings like *Vigrahavyāvartanī* and *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa*. At the very outset, it may seem apparently that Nāgārjuna's skeptical approach is incompatible with his ethical and devotional mentality. But we have endeavoured to show in this work that Nāgārjuna's skeptical attitude is not incompatible with his moral outlook or *Buddha-bandanā*. He never undermined the importance of mundane life and accepted the necessity of morality for the upliftment of humanity. He even paid his homage to Buddha for the greater well-being of individual. His skepticism is not a destructive one rather constructive.

Now at the cost of repetition let us reopen the issue here again which has already been mentioned in the Introduction: How far is it justified to designate Nāgārjuna a skeptic. Regarding the issue of calling Nāgārjuna a skeptic, a lot of heat has been generated in both ends. The researcher has already claimed in the Introduction that Nāgārjuna is a skeptic. Numerous experts like Prof. Matilal, Prof. Gokhale and Prof. Mohanta also considered him as a skeptic. It is no denying the fact that the term skeptic is not directly found in Indian context, but here we get the term *vaiṭaṇḍika* who resembles to a great extent the attitude of the

skeptics. Throughout, the work revealed that Nāgārjuna is a skeptic. In both *Vigrahavyāvartanī* and *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa* he nullified the *pramāṇa-prameya* dichotomy and talked about the essencelessness of everything. As such no one can be a skeptic in all walks of life. Pyrrho preached skepticism with the intention of reaching *Ataraxia*. Hume, often considered a skeptic in western scenario, talked of professing skepticism but never practised skepticism. His skepticism may be called mitigated skepticism. Nāgārjuna's attitude is towards anti-essentialism but he also has some purpose. Someone is a skeptic does not imply he will have no purpose in mind or he will deny this mundane life and existence altogether. As such there can be no hard core skeptic. When one is in a critical mood one can be referred as a skeptic but one cannot be critical at all times. Nāgārjuna issued positive statements in his *Ratnāvalī* and *Suhṛllekha* regarding morality but that can never refute the possibility of Nāgārjuna being a skeptic.

Further, in calling, Nāgārjuna a Skeptic the distinction between *svāntika* and *Prāsaṅgika* becomes relevant. *Svāntika* is one who employs separate arguments or reasonings (*svatantra*). Bhāvaviveka is considered as an exponent of Svāntika School. He was of the opinion that autonomous syllogistic reasoning is always required for clarity. Buddhapaṇit and Candrakīrti on the other hand are considered as exponent of Prāsaṅgika School. The name *prāsaṅgika* is derived from 'prasaṅga', a method involving negative form of argumentation (reduction ad absurdum) where aim is to point out the absurdity and logical inconsistency in opponents' argument without setting forth independent syllogism of one's own. Candrakīrti rejected Bhāvaviveka's argument that autonomous arguments should be employed in commentaries which will clarify the original text, pointing that Nāgārjuna himself in his auto

commentary on the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* also didn't use autonomous arguments.¹ Nāgārjuna himself employed *prasaṅga* method in his writings and as a *prāsaṅgika mādhyamika* he is aptly called a skeptic.

Now taking it for granted that Nāgārjuna is a skeptic let us ask: what is the nature of his skepticism? As already discussed there are various forms of skepticism like Metaphysical, Cognitive, Philosophical and so on. Some scholars like Prof. Mohanta, are of the opinion that he is a cognitive skeptic. He nullified *pramāna-prameya* dichotomy, making a critique of opponents' views, suspended his own judgements. But the author of this thesis thinks that Nāgārjuna should not be confined only to the periphery of Cognitive skepticism. He may start with cognitive skepticism but goes beyond transcending it. We are not designating him as a Philosophical skeptic in the terminology of Ayer either. Nāgārjuna's skepticism seems to be of a different sort. Prof. Matilal considered him as a mystical skeptic.² He has opined that there is a close connection between Indian skepticism and Indian Mysticism. There may occur transition from skepticism to mysticism. The term 'mystical' signifies some extra-terrestrial matter, veiled in mysteries. A mystic has a commitment for supramundane entity and it is supposed that he has given up faith in empirical life. But Nāgārjuna has no commitment to extra mundane entity. He is talking of *Śūnyata* just to unveil the true nature of reality to the common men. His skepticism is the foundation to reach ultimate well-being. Hence rather than viewing Nāgārjuna's position as mystical, we prefer to call his position as involved skepticism or better to

¹ Based on a class lecture delivered by Prof. Madhumita Chattopadhyay.

² Matilal, Bimal Krishna, *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, p.26

coin the term Concerned skepticism following Prof. Pradeep Gokhale³. It is not just a mere theoretical exercise but it is engaged and concerned more with the practical life. Nāgārjuna's skepticism is concerned skepticism in the sense that by showing how things lack their own nature and hence ultimately undecidable, he would at the same time point out how this realization of undecidability itself has emancipating value. Nāgārjuna has tried to provide solution to the problems of human life.

The nature of his skepticism suggests that it is directed to well-being. Buddha was always concerned with the welfare of human-beings. His teachings are all directed towards upliftment of humanity. As an advocator of Buddha, main aim of Nāgārjuna's philosophy is also Well-being of Individual. Now as we are talking of well-being, at the outset we must provide a general outline of well-being. The quest for well-being has been the goal of human existence since the dawn of civilization. *Collins English Dictionary* defines well-being as the condition of being contented, healthy or successful. According to *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Well-being is most commonly used in philosophy to describe what is instrumentally or ultimately good for a person. Popular use of the term well-being usually relates to health. Philosophical use is broader, but related and amounts to the notion of how well a person's life is going for that person. A person's well-being is what is 'good for' them.⁴

Well-being is a term with varied meaning. It is not easy to find a corresponding term of well-being in Indian context. One such term in Sanskrit (and also in Bengali) might be *sukha*. The word "kha" has multiple meanings. Among other senses, the word "kha" according to

³ Learnt from Prof.Gokhale while interaction with him also from one of his lectures where he described Nāgarjuna's Skepticism to be Concerned Skepticism.

⁴ Crisp, Roger, "Well-being", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N.Zalta , Stanford: Stanford University, 2017

Monier-Williams' Sanskrit- English Dictionary, means “an organ of the senses”, “empty space”, “sky” etc. The prefix “Su” means anything that is positive. So when the prefix “su” is added to “kha” and the word “sukha” is analysed as an adjectival compound then we get meanings like “that which has a positive space”. Although *sukha* is usually translated as happiness but etymologically it might denote all positive sensations; *sukha* then will mean something more encompassing than happiness. Now the opposite of well-being is ill-being. So if *sukha* is taken to mean well-being, then its opposite word might be either *a-sukha* or *duḥkha*. It is interesting to note that the common meaning of *a-sukha* is disease. The word for disease in Sanskrit is *byādhi*. In Sanskrit, the etymological meaning of *byādhi* is distress of the mind. Although in western medical science disease is generally related with the body, but we find that the oriental concept of disease has its root in the distress of the mind. The other Sanskrit word associated with ill-being is *duḥkha*. Like *sukha*, *duḥkha* has many etymological meanings because in the same way when the prefix “dus” is added to the word “kha” the resulting compound can be analyzed to mean among other things troubled sensation or emotion. The word *duhkha* does not then specifically refer to a given suffering, but it seems to reflect an overall state of unsatisfactoriness. In general *duḥkha* might include the whole range of negativity that one may experience. So if the term well-being is to be translated into an Indian concept, perhaps the word “*kalyan*” is more apt. The concept of *kalyan* includes the notion of welfare in it. Transcending *duḥkha* is a journey towards *kalyan*.⁵ In both Western and Indian tradition we get the notion of Well-being.

In Western tradition we get a Greek term *eudaimonia* which is commonly translated as “happiness”, but better to be described as well-

⁵ Basu Soumitra and Kar Gangadhar, eds., *Spirituality and Well-being*, Kolkata: Maha Bodhi, 2017.

being or human flourishing or good life. Further we find the idea of *ataraxia*, strongly associated with the Greek philosopher Pyrrho. *Ataraxia* refers to a state of perfect mental tranquility; it is a state of freedom from emotional disturbance and anxiety. It may be equated with well-being.

We witness the notion of wellbeing in the *Upaniṣads*. According to *Upaniṣads*, the different concepts of happiness and wellbeing are related to different sheaths or self-sense. *Annamaya koṣa -tr̥pti* (satisfaction of sensual pleasures). *Prāṇamaya* and *manomaya kośa - harṣa* (excitement associated with some events); *ullāsa* (feeling of pleasantness associated with the experience of natural beauty, a good breeze, etc.); *santosha* (being pleased by some interpersonal interaction). *Vijnānamaya koṣa - ānanda* (moments of bliss). *Ānandamaya koṣa – ānandamaya* (pervaded by bliss).⁶

In *Gita* and *Dhammapada* also we find notions of Well-being. Belonging to two different traditions—Hindu and Buddhist respectively, both can be called manuals of Human well-being.

The idea of Well-being is vibrant in the Philosophy of Tagore as well. To Tagore, real well-being lies in *Ananda*. His mission was Divinization of Man and Humanization of God. To him, the almighty expresses His *Ananda* (Joy or Bliss) in creation and that gets manifested in His created beings as well. Rabindranath believes that individual Joy lies in realization of God within one's soul.

Tai tomar ananda amar 'par

Tumi tai esecho niche...

⁶ Kiran kumar,S.K, "An Indian Conception of Wellbeing", In Henry,J (Ed.), *European Positive Psychology Proceedings 2002*, Leicester, UK: British Psychological Society, 2003

This almighty is engaged in the sport of creation and destruction. He in the form of ‘Nataraj’ is performing rhythmic dance. That dance symbolizes both the art of his creation and destruction. The rhythm of Nataraj’s dance resonates in the poet and he writes,

Mamo chitte niti nritye ke je nache

Ta ta thoi thoi ta ta thoi thoi ta ta thoi thoi

There is an expression of ecstasy and Joy in that dance and pain-pleasures, good-evil, smiles-tears all are ingredients of that Ananda or Joy.

Hasi kanna hira panna dole bhale

Kape chhonde bhalo mondo tale tale...

Sorrows, happiness, smiles, tears- all are part of this life but encompassing all these there is *ananda* or bliss or joy. We often say that pain (*duḥkha*) is opposite of pleasure but *duḥkha* is not opposite of *Ananda*. Both pain and pleasures are components of *Ananda*. Tagore observed that there is a flow of bliss in this world.

Ananda dhara bohiche bhubone...

We should broaden our outlook and have to go beyond the binaries of pain and pleasures. The bliss may contain sorrows besides happiness but we should consider those sorrows as small and trifle. *Ananda* is much greater than everything and include pain and pleasures smiles and tears. We have to fulfill our life with perpetual love.

Tagore writes,

...Chari dike dekho chahi

Hridoyo proshari

Khudro dukkha sab tuchchho mani

Premo bhoriya laho shunyo jeebone.

Now let us get back to Nāgārjuna again. His skepticism is surely directed to *kalyan* i.e well-being. Though a thinker of so early time still his philosophy is relevant even today. His skeptical attitude has practical utility. It aims to alleviate the anxiety, worries and sufferings of mankind. In relation to this, let us quote verses 39 and 73 from *Śūnyatāsaptati*:

Since ultimately action is empty,

If it is understood it is seen to be that way

Since action does not exist

That which arises from action does not exist either.

When one understands that this arises from that

All of the false views are thereby refuted

Hatred, anger, delusion are eliminated.

And undefiled, one achieves *Nirvāna*.⁷

Nāgārjuna intends to say that action is *śūnya* i.e do not have essences, but they have causal roles nevertheless. So Nāgārjuna denies that the actions we witness in the world have any sort of nature or essence independent of their causal roles. But eternalist view, a type of false view claims that there are such essences and that explaining causal relations requires them. Another sort of false view, the nihilist view holds that

⁷ Garfield, J., *Empty words: Buddhist philosophy and cross cultural Interpretation* , Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, p 5

there are neither essences nor causal relations. Nāgārjuna's position as we know is middle path refuting both extreme views of eternalism and nihilism. The quotes also reveal a central point of Nāgārjuna's soteriology. Eternalist and Nihilist views are thought to beget hatred, anger and delusion whereas Nāgārjuna's middle way between the extremes is thought to lead to the soteriological goal- the extinction of suffering. From this it is clear Nāgārjuna's skepticism is soteriologically motivated.

Nāgārjuna has some similarities in thought and outlook with many other philosophers and thinkers. He was of the view that as everything is *śūnya* i.e. *catuṣkotivinirmukto* nothing can be said conclusively about the ultimate reality. German Philosopher Kant also opined that it is the tendency of human mind to raise questions, all of which are difficult to answer. Human reasoning has limitation, it cannot know anything and everything. We should first judge the power of reason itself. According to Kant, beyond this phenomenal world everything is unknown and unknowable. As stated by Albert Camus the absurdity is the gap between "aspiration and reality". In essence, Camus thinks life is absurd because we want to attain knowledge of ultimate things in this life (eg. The existence or non-existence of God, the conditions for good and evil,) but we ultimately cannot know them. This desire to know the ultimate things has been a problem in philosophy since the ancient Greeks. As far as ultimate questions are concerned, Camus takes the line of thinking that places such questions as unknowable and this defines his notion of absurdity.

Here we will see that Nāgārjuna also has similarity in attitude with Pyrrho, Wittgenstein and J.Krishnamurti.

Nāgārjuna's skepticism has close parallels with Pyrrhonian skepticism. Kuzminski in his book *Pyrrhonism: How the ancient Greeks reinvented Buddhism* argues that Pyrrho of Elis (ca.365-270 B.C.E) developed his form of skepticism after coming in connection with Indian philosophers on his journey with Alexander, the Great. During their sojourn in India. Pyrrho and his teacher, Anaxarchus met Indian *Gymnosophists* (naked wise men) and it is said that Pyrrho's philosophy developed as a result of such meetings. When he returned from India, Pyrrho is said to have taught a philosophical ethics in the sense of how to live the best and happiest kind of life, in terms of the ideals of *apatheia*, 'being without passion' and *ataraxia* 'undisturbedness, calm'. The way to these ideals is said to consist in a form of skepticism about the knowledge gained through sense perception and thought rather than to believe we might be able to attain certainty, we should refrain from *doxai*, 'beliefs' or 'opinions' but maintain equanimity and hence undisturbedness.⁸ The questions naturally arise of what Pyrrho might have learned from Indian thinkers and whether his philosophy was perhaps inspired by Buddhists that he met in ancient Gāndhāra. Unfortunately answers to such questions are difficult. Pyrrho himself did not write down his philosophy and what we know about it consists in fragmentary quotations from the writings of his pupil, Timon and various anecdotes and lesser fragments. Nevertheless, modern scholars like Thomas McEvilley and Adrian Kuzminski have found close parallels between Pyrrhonian skepticism and Buddhist Madhyamaka thought, with precedents in earlier Buddhist scriptures. Take for example the following verses from the *Aṭṭhakavagga* of the *Sutta-nipāta*, regarded as one of the earliest records of the Buddha's teaching:

⁸ Jones, Dhivan Thomas, "Pyrrho and the Buddha: Reasons to be Sceptical", Review of *Greek Buddha: Pyrrho's encounter with early Buddhism in Central Asia*, by Christopher I. Beckwith, <https://thebuddhistcentre.com/westernbuddhistreview/pyrrho-and-buddha-reasons-be-sceptical> , 2015.

“They do not formulate, they do not prefer

They have not accepted any doctrines

A Brahman is not reckoned by virtue or vows.

Such a one, gone to the far shore, does not come back”. (803)

In such teachings, as in later Madhyamaka and as in Pyrrho we see that the path of not holding to views and opinions is said to lead beyond suffering. It seems that Pyrrho, may have brought the Buddha’s middle way philosophy back to Greece.⁹

It seems that Pyrrhonism and the Madhyamaka agree that appearances are mutually related. What Pyrrhonism calls “relativism” may correspond to what the Madhyamaka refer as “dependent origination.” Further, “what the Pyrrhonists call “dogmatism” (“dogma,” from *dokeo*, that which seems true), it seems Buddhists call “attachment,” or “clinging” (*upādāna*) to a fixed “view” (*dṛṣṭi*). Pyrrhonism and the Madhyamaka are also similar with regard to another point i.e suspension of judgment. What Pyrrhonism calls ‘suspension of judgment’ (*epoche*) seems consistent with what the Madhyamaka understand as recognition of ‘emptiness’ (*śūnyatā*-), leading to ‘the silence of the sages’. The latter can perhaps be correlated with Pyrrhonian *aphasia*, or non-assertion.”¹⁰

According to Nāgārjuna “emptiness” is not another view rather it is the relinquishing of all views. Those who take emptiness to be another view, they are incorrigible. ¹¹ Similar thing is seemed to be reiterated in

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ Kuzminski, Adrian, 2008, *Pyrrhonism: How the Ancient Greeks Reinvented Buddhism*, U.K: Lexington Books, p.55.

¹¹ “Śūnyatāsarva-dṛṣṭīnāmproktāniḥsaraṇaṃjīnaiḥ/yeṣāmtuśūnyatādrṣṭistānasādhyānbabhāṣire.”- MMK,XIII.8, Kalupahana, David, 1991, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā of Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way*, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, P.108.

the following statement by Sextus: “non-assertion is refraining from assertion in the general sense (which we say covers both affirmation and negation), so that non-assertion is the feeling we have because of which we say that we neither posit nor reject anything.”¹² The Pyrrhonists and the Madhyamaka claim not to establish “truth,” but only to clean away error, and this only in the interest of fostering tranquility or “inner peace,” a state free of attachment or aversion. In contrast to the dogmatists, they settle for suspension of judgment, or emptiness.

Nāgārjuna’s thought has some points of similarity with Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein is much later than Nāgārjuna in time frame and may be influenced by the Mahāyāna philosophy. “What makes the idea of Wittgenstein having been influenced by the Mahāyāna seem at least plausible is the fact that Arthur Schopenhauer is one of the few western philosophers who have been influenced by Buddhism and is also one of the few philosophers known to have influenced Wittgenstein.”¹³

Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus* has distinguished between sensical and non-sensical propositions. He has made his distinction with a view to find out the source of Philosophical problems. The problem lies in not understanding the logic of language properly. Now, we have to understand the logic of language for that we have to draw a boundary in regard to our thought process. What is that boundary – To what extent we can think meaningfully and not? But this is not possible. So in case of linguistic process, he has pointed out the boundary of meaningfulness and beyond that all are meaningless. The philosophers never distinguished between meaningfulness and meaninglessness. He is of the opinion that which is meaningful can be expressed in language and that which is

¹² Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism* (I, 192), p. 47-48

¹³ . Gudmunsen, Chris, *Wittgenstein and Buddhism*, London: Macmillan Education Ltd, 1977, p. 111

meaningless cannot be expressed. That is, he is distinguishing between what can be said and what cannot be said. Here we are reminded of Wittgenstein's famous quote: "What can be said at all can be said clearly; and whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent."¹⁴

We find similarity in approach of Wittgenstein with that of Nāgārjuna. As it is clear, Wittgenstein has pointed out that we cannot express everything and the attempt to express the inexpressible or to describe the indescribable leads to problems. Similarly, according to Nāgārjuna's dialectical arguments, nothing can be said conclusively about the reality. To him, the reality is *śūnya* (void) i.e. *catuṣkotivinirmukto* from the ultimate standpoint and so he suspended his own judgements and nullified only the opponents' views regarding matters concerning ultimate reality.

Both Nāgārjuna and Ludwig Wittgenstein held a therapeutic view of philosophy. They are concerned with the eradication of philosophical problems. For both of them, philosophical problems are a source of disquiet for all, so what their work offers is a soteriology- a means towards our salvation.

With regard to form, Nāgārjuna and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* have a striking resemblance. It seems that Wittgenstein has made certain metaphysical propositions when he said in *Tractatus 1* that- World is made up of facts, not of things and further in *Tractatus 2.01* and *2.02* respectively says that states of affairs consists of a combination of objects, which are logically simple. Then later it seemed that Wittgenstein is rejecting metaphysics. He claimed in *Tractatus 6.54*:

¹⁴ Based on an online Lecture by Prof. Priyambada Sarkar on Wittgenstein's Philosophy.

“My propositions serve as elucidations in this way, he who understands me eventually recognize them as nonsensical, when he has used –as steps to climb up over them (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it). He must overcome these propositions, and then will he see the world alright.”¹⁵

In Nāgārjuna also we find more or less similar structure: It seems that he is making some metaphysical propositions when he is saying in MMK that everything in this world is *śūnya* as they are dependently originated. Then Nāgārjuna further opines that nothing can be said about reality. In MMK he said:

“The victorious ones have said

That emptiness is the relinquishing of all views

For whomever emptiness is a view

That one has accomplished nothing.”¹⁶

We may find similarity in attitude of Nāgārjuna and Krishnamurti, a 20th century thinker. Nāgārjuna’s investigation led him to suspend judgement on various matters. His viewpoint is that nothing can be conclusively said about the reality. Similarly Krishnamurti, may be considered an absolute skeptic, was a true enquirer and investigator. His investigation leads him to un-conditioning of mind and total non-adherence to any theory or view point. According to him, truth cannot be grasped through any path either religion or any sect as it is a pathless land. According to Krishnamurti “all ideologies are utterly idiotic and

¹⁵ Smith, Joshua William, “Snakes and Ladders- Therapy as liberation in Nāgārjuna and Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*”, *Sophia* 60(2),2021> <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-020-00804-6>, p.4.

¹⁶ Garfield, J., *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna’s Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 212.

what is important is not a philosophy of life but to observe what is actually taking place in our daily life, inwardly and outwardly.”¹⁷ Krishnamurti’s skeptical attitude is not opposed to the well-being of the individual and the society rather it is a means to reach a conflict-free Society where there will prevail peace and happiness. Following Krishnamurti we can dream of such a society in which people will not be divided based on caste, religion, culture or country; rather they will all be united based on love and universal brotherhood.

By revisiting the Skepticism of Nāgārjuna, we have come to the conclusion that Nāgārjuna’s Skepticism is directed to well-being. His skepticism is concerned with the practical life, hence we are calling it involved or concerned skepticism. Lord Buddha preached the dependent nature of entity and was of the opinion that everything is ultimately *śūnya*- nothing can be said conclusively about the nature of reality. In both Pāli (10 questions) and Sanskrit (14 questions) we find many unanswered or unexpounded questions (Sanskrit>avyākṛta and Pali>avyakta)- these are basic philosophical questions over which Buddha maintained his silence. Nāgārjuna as a systematic messenger of Buddha clarified and propagated His messages. As a prāsaṅgika Vaitaṇḍika he also suspended judgements nullifying only the opponents’ views. His positive assertions related to Morality or Buddha bandana as already discussed are not totally opposed to his skeptical approach rather conducive to his ultimate goal. His notion of emptiness is to make people realize the actual reality. When people will realize that everything is dependently originated, hence essenceless and *śūnya* (*catuṣkotivinirmukto*), they will be free from attachments, malices etc. paving their way to empirical good (*abhyudaya*) and then Ultimate good

¹⁷ Krishnamurti J, *Freedom from the known*, ed. Mary Lutyens, Chennai: Krishnamurti Foundation, 2010, p. 15

(*Niḥśreyasa*). In Nāgārjuna's philosophy, *Śūnyatā* is not any view rather relinquishing of all views- Sarvadr̥ṣṭi śūnyatā. In Nāgārjuna we witness the employment of skepticism to promote his theory of *śūnyatā* and what the mādhyamikas call *Nirvāna* is nothing but the realization of *śūnyatā*. Thus Skepticism is directed towards attainment of *Nirvāna* in mādhyamika system. Like, Pyrrhonian Skepticism, in Buddhism too some kind of liberation from suffering is the main goal. Hence we can say that Nāgārjuna's skeptical attitude is not an end in itself rather it facilitates the way to ultimate well-being in the form of *Nirvāna*. His skepticism is not only of a theoretical level it is involved with life and good of people. Thus it can be said that, Skepticism is not always something negative; it can be a means to well-being. Whenever we try to theorize or adhere to any views, we invite more contradiction and conflict. In the words of poet and composer Rajanikanta Sen we can say,

“...Na rakhi jotil nyayer barota

Bicare bicare bare asarota....”

Reasoning is good and well accepted but too much argumentation in every step of our life begets rift within individuals. The process of argumentation often turns out to be endless so we should at times be tolerant enough and may seek an alternative way of suspending our own judgement for the greater interest of mankind. True reality cannot be grasped through reasoning or linguistic framework. So Nāgārjuna suggested us to suspend our judgements in cases where it is useless to pass judgements. Nāgārjunian Skepticism may be adopted as an alternative methodology in achieving the ultimate good. At this hour of crisis, when the society is witnessing much division, chaos, conflict and violence, Nāgārjuna's Skepticism can be a saviour of fallen humanity towards the way to well-being.

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