Research Article

Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamaka Philosophy: Pratītyasamutpāda, Niḥsvabhāvatā And The Logical Establishment Of The Middle Way In The Light of The Mūlamadhyamakakārikā: A Critical Study

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Abstract :

The present research paper is a text-based critical study of the Mādhyamaka philosophy of ĀcāryaNāgārjuna (approximately second-third century CE). In modern studies Nāgārjuna has been read at times as a śūnyavādin (nihilist), at times as an absolutist, at times as an empiricist and at times as a philosopher of language. Amid these mutually conflicting readings, this paper asks which meaning of 'śūnyatā' proves most consistent with the internal logical structure of the Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (Mūla-mādhyamikakārikā). The method of study is text-critical, interpretive and comparative; the edition of J. W. de Jong (1977) has been taken as the basis for the Sanskrit text, and the traditional interpretation has been checked against Candrakīrti'sPrasannapadā. The principal conclusions of the paper are these: (a) the definition of 'svabhāva' given in Mūla-mādhyamikakārikā 15.1-2 is itself the key to understanding śūnyatā; hence śūnyatā is not the negation of things, but the negation of their independent, uncreated and absolute svabhāva; (b) Mūla-mādhyamikakārikā 24.18 binds pratītyasamutpāda, śūnyatā, upādāya-prajñapti and madhyamāpratipad into a single logical thread; (c) the dvisatya framework saves śūnyatā from colliding with ethical and epistemological practice; (d) the use of the catuṣkoṭi is not the establishment of a fifth position, but the refutation of all possibilities of grasping at svabhāva; (e) the 'non-difference' of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa should, in essence, be understood in the sense of sameness in svabhāva-śūnyatā, and not in the sense of an identity of substance. The conclusion of the paper is that 'niḥsvabhāvatā-vāda' is a more appropriate term than 'śūnyavāda' for Nāgārjuna's system.

Keywords: Nāgārjuna; Mādhyamaka; śūnyatā; niḥsvabhāvatā; pratītyasamutpāda; dvisatya; catuṣkoṭi; Mūlamadhyamakakārikā.

Introduction and Research Problem :

Among the profound questions that Indian philosophers have raised on the mutual relation of being, knowledge and language, Nāgārjuna's questions occupy a special place because of their logical edge. His objections were not confined to the Buddhist Abhidharma tradition; many later philosophers had to defend afresh, in their own positions, the notion of an entity established by own-nature (svabhāva-siddha padārtha). Since the middle of the twentieth century, Western scholars too have tried to read him in the context of Kant's dialectic, Hegel's dialectic, Wittgenstein's linguistic analysis and deconstruction.[1]

The central problem of this entire discourse is what is meant by 'śūnyatā'. If 'everything is empty' is taken to mean 'nothing exists', then karma, its fruit, the path, nirvāṇa and even the word of the Buddha himself become meaningless. If it is taken to mean 'no thing possesses an independent svabhāva', then the relative, functioning existence of things is preserved. The question is: which of these two readings is supported by the original text, and on what logical structure does it rest?

Literature Review :

Modern literature concerning Nāgārjuna can broadly be placed in five streams. The first is that of nineteenth-century European Buddhist studies, which applied the label 'nihilism' to many aspects of Buddhist thought; an early example of this tendency is the work of Saint-Hilaire (1860).[2] The second stream is that of Stcherbatsky (1927) and Murti

(1955): Stcherbatsky read śūnyatā as 'relativity', whereas Murti regarded Mādhyamaka as an absolutist dialectical system and compared it with Kant's transcendental dialectic.[3] In the third stream stands Kalupahana (1986), who regards Nāgārjuna as a faithful, empiricist exponent of the Buddha's original pratītyasamutpāda thought and rejects the absolutist reading.[4] The fourth stream is that of scholars in dialogue with analytic philosophy - Garfield (1995; 2002), Siderits and Katsura (2013), Westerhoff (2009) - in whose work there is an emphasis on the dvisatya, the 'emptiness of emptiness' and theories of meaning.[5] The fifth stream is that of historical-textual studies: Ruegg (1981) surveyed Mādhyamaka literature, Lindtner (1982) presented a list of Nāgārjuna's authentic works, and Walser (2005) reconstructed his socio-historical setting.[6] In addition, Huntington (1989) cautioned against reading Mādhyamaka through Western metaphysical categories, while Hayes (1994) judged several of Nāgārjuna's arguments to be logically flawed.[7]

The value of these studies is indisputable, but generally either text-based analysis or comparative philosophical re-reading has predominated. This paper attempts to join the two: each doctrinal position is first examined in the root kārikā and in Candrakīrti's traditional commentary, and only then compared with modern readings.

Research Questions, Objectives and Hypothesis :

Research questions: (1) What are the definitions of 'svabhāva' and 'śūnyatā' within the Mūla-mādhyamikakārikā, and what is the relation between them? (2) On what arguments does the equation of pratītyasamutpāda, śūnyatā and the Middle Way rest? (3) How do the dvisatya and the catuṣkoṭi answer the charge of 'śūnyavāda'? (4) What is the coherent meaning of the non-difference of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa?

Objectives : To answer the above questions on the basis of the root kārikās, to clarify the status of technical terms, and to remove the misconceptions current in the earlier literature.

Hypothesis:Nāgārjuna's negation is aimed not at 'bhāva' but at 'svabhāva'; hence his system is not existence-negating but svabhāva-negating.

Research Methodology :

The study combines philological (text-critical), hermeneutic (interpretive) and comparative methods. De Jong's critical edition is the base text for the Sanskrit; in cases of variant readings, the editions of Vaidya and of La ValléePoussin have been consulted.[8]Pāli sources have been taken from the editions of the Pali Text Society.[9] Sanskrit and Pāli quotations are given in Devanagari, and a Roman (IAST) transliteration line for the principal kārikās is also provided alongside, so that checking the text is easier. The translations and glosses are the author's own; where the interpretation of a scholar has been relied upon, it is explicitly acknowledged with name and year.

Historical and Conceptual Context :-

Chronology and Textual Tradition: There is no consensus on the dates of Nāgārjuna's life. Most modern scholars place him between the latter half of the second century and the first half of the third century; his Suhṛllekha is believed to be addressed to aSātavāhana king, which suggests his connection with the Āndhra region of South India.[10] In the Tibetan tradition his age is stated to be about six hundred years, which it is appropriate to understand as a symbolic statement rather than a historical fact.[11] The Chinese biography translated by Kumārajīva (Taishō 2047) also preserves traditional material about his life.

Many works are current under Nāgārjuna's name. Lindtner has placed the Mūla-mādhyamikakārikā in the category of authentic works, along with the hymns, Vigrahavyāvartanī, Śūnyatāsaptati, Yuktiṣaṣṭikā, Ratnāvalī and others; this list is not wholly accepted among scholars, and therefore the present paper relies mainly on the Mūla-mādhyamikakārikā and the Vigrahavyāvartanī, whose authenticity is the least disputed.[12] Moreover, several ācāryas named 'Nāgārjuna' in the tradition - particularly one or more Nāgārjunas associated with rasaśāstra and tantra - appear to have become conflated; therefore, for the identification of the philosopher Nāgārjuna, textual evidence is indispensable, and not merely similarity of name.

Abhidharma, Prajñāpāramitā and the KātyāyanaSūtra :

By Nāgārjuna's time the Sarvāstivāda-VaibhāṣikaAbhidharma had built an elaborate system for the analysis of dharmas.

In it the permanent existence of the pudgala (person) was rejected, but the fundamental dharmas were considered to possess 'svalakṣaṇa' and 'svabhāva'. Nāgārjuna's fundamental objection lies precisely at this point: if the argument of anātmavāda applies to the pudgala, then the same argument must apply to dharmas as well. The Prajñāpāramitā literature, especially the Aṣṭasāhasrikā, had already taught the svabhāva-śūnyatā of dharmas in this very direction.[13]

A caution is necessary in this connection. The line 'rūpaṃśūnyatā' of the Prajñāpāramitāhṛdayasūtra is often cited as a precursor of Nāgārjuna's thought. But according to the study of Nattier (1992), this short sūtra is probably a later composition, and its content has been compiled from the larger Prajñāpāramitā texts.[14] It is therefore safer to call it a later, condensed formulation of the same tradition than to call it a source prior to Nāgārjuna. For comparison, its text is as follows:

rūpaṃśūnyatāśūnyataivarūpam | rūpānnapṛthakśūnyatāśūnyatāyānapṛthagrūpam | yadrūpaṃsāśūnyatāyāśūnyatā tad rūpam ||

It should also be noted here that the original text is a prose sūtra, and not a śloka. Gist: Form (rūpa, the material aggregate) is not different from śūnyatā, and śūnyatā is not different from form - that is, śūnyatā is not the absence of a thing, but the name of the true nature of that very thing.[15]

A more direct scriptural basis for Nāgārjuna is the sūtra which is cited in Mūla-mādhyamikakārikā 15.7 as the 'Kātyāyanāvadāna'. In the Pāli tradition its cognate text is found in the Kaccānagotta-sutta (Saṃyuttanikāya 12.15), where the Tathāgata teaches the Dhamma from the middle, abandoning both extremes - 'everything exists' and 'everything does not exist':[16]

sabbaṃatthītikhoKaccānaayamekoanto | sabbaṃnatthītiayaṃdutiyoanto |
eteteKaccānaubho ante anupagammamajjhenaTathāgatodhammaṃdeseti ||

Pratītyasamutpāda: The Foundation of Mādhyamaka :

Pratītyasamutpāda literally means 'arising in dependence on something'. In the Pālisuttas its formula is found in many places, for example in the Nidānasaṃyutta of the Saṃyuttanikāya and in the Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhayasutta of the Majjhimanikāya. The Pāli text employs the verb 'hoti':

imasmiṃ sati idaṃhoti, imassuppādāidaṃuppajjati | imasmiṃsatiidaṃnahoti, imassanirodhāidaṃnirujjhati ||

Gist: When this exists, that comes to be; from the arising of this, that arises; when this does not exist, that does not come to be; from the cessation of this, that ceases. This formula shows the existence of an event to be not independent, but dependent on a network of conditions. Nāgārjuna's originality lies in his having made this dependence a logical instrument against the notion of 'svabhāva'.[17]

The Definition of 'Svabhāva': The Key Kārikā :

The fifteenth chapter of the Mūla-mādhyamikakārikā (Svabhāvaparīkṣā) defines 'svabhāva', and this very definition is the pivot of the argument of the entire work. According to Nāgārjuna, svabhāva would be that which is neither made (arisen from causes and conditions) nor dependent on another.

nasaṃbhavaḥsvabhāvasyayuktaḥpratyayahetubhiḥ | hetupratyayasaṃbhūtaḥsvabhāvaḥkṛtakobhavet ||
svabhāvaḥkṛtakonāmabhaviṣyatipunaḥkatham | akṛtrimaḥsvabhāvo hi nirapekṣaḥparatraca ||

The structure of the argument is simple yet decisive. (i) The definition of svabhāva is: uncreated and independent. (ii) Whatever arises from causes and conditions is created and dependent. (iii) Therefore no pratītyasamutpanna thing can possess svabhāva. From here arises the equation 'pratītyasamutpanna = niḥsvabhāva = śūnya'. It is only by letting this definition slip out of sight that the error of understanding śūnyatā as 'non-existence' is born.[18]

In the eighteenth kārikā of the twenty-fourth chapter (Āryasatyaparīkṣā), Nāgārjuna binds four concepts into a single formula:

yaḥpratītyasamutpādaḥśūnyatāṃtāṃpracakṣmahe | sāprajñaptirupādāyapratipatsaivamadhyamā ||

Gist: What is pratītyasamutpāda, that we call śūnyatā; that (śūnyatā) is upādāya-prajñapti (dependent designation), and that alone is the madhyamāpratipad. Grammatically, 'sā' refers to 'śūnyatā'; hence it is śūnyatā that is called prajñapti and the Middle Way. The tradition regards this as the heart-verse of Mādhyamaka, but no traditional designation such as 'tripadīkārikā' is attested for this verse, so the present paper has not used it.[19]

Immediately after this kārikā, the argument of 24.19 confirms it: there is no dharma that is not pratītya-samutpanna; therefore there is no dharma that is not śūnya.[20]

apratītyasamutpannodharmaḥkaścinnavidyate | yasmāttasmādaśūnyo hi dharmaḥkaścinnavidyate ||

Refutation of the Four Alternatives of Origination :

The work begins with the very demonstration of this method of argument. In the maṅgalaśloka, pratītyasamutpāda is qualified by these eight negations - 'anirodha, anutpāda, anuccheda, aśāśvata, anekārtha, anānārtha, anāgama, anirgama' - and the first kārikā of the first chapter negates all four possible modes of origination:[21]

anirodhamanutpādamanucchedamaśāśvatam | anekārthamanānārthamanāgamamanirgamam ||
yaḥpratītyasamutpādaṃprapañcopaśamaṃśivam | deśayāmāsasaṃbuddhastaṃvandevadatāṃvaram ||
nasvatonāpiparatonadvābhyāṃnāpyahetutaḥ | utpannājātuvidyantebhāvāḥkvacanakecana ||

Gist: No bhāva (thing) is ever found anywhere arising from itself, from something wholly different, from both, or without a cause. What deserves attention is that the negation is not of 'origination', but of that origination which is held to be svabhāva-established; relative origination - that is, pratītyasamutpāda - remains outside this negation. This is why 'anutpāda' and 'pratītyasamutpāda' can occur together in the maṅgalaśloka.[22]

Śūnyatā: The Meaning of Niḥsvabhāvatā, Not of Śūnyavāda:-Terminological Clarification: In Sanskrit the ordinary meaning of 'śūnya' is empty, but in Nāgārjuna's usage the synonym of 'śūnyatā' is 'niḥsvabhāvatā', as is clear from 15.1-2 and

24.18 cited above. This philosophical use of the word is independent of the mathematical

'zero'. It is through failure to recognize this distinction that 'śūnyavāda' came to be taken as 'denial of existence', whereas Nāgārjuna himself anticipated this objection and replied to it.

The argument of the twenty-fourth chapter is of special importance in this direction. There the opponent says that if śūnyatā is accepted, the noble truths, the Saṅgha, karma and its fruit will all come to an end. In reply Nāgārjuna turns the charge around: it is in fact only when svabhāva is accepted that change, causation and the path of practice become impossible:

sarvaṃcayujyatetasyaśūnyatāyasyayujyate | sarvaṃnayujyatetasyaśūnyaṃyasyanayujyate ||

Gist: For whom śūnyatā is coherent, for him everything (cause and effect, the path, the fruit) is coherent; for whom śūnyatā is incoherent, nothing remains coherent. This statement proves śūnyatā to be not an opponent of everyday practice (vyavahāra), but its foundation.[23]

Śūnyatā Too Is Not a View :

Nāgārjuna also prevents śūnyatā itself from becoming a new doctrine (view, dṛṣṭi). If śūnyatā is grasped like the being of some thing, it becomes a new form of the very svabhāva-grasping for whose refutation it was taught:

śūnyatāsarvadṛṣṭīnāṃproktāniḥsaraṇaṃjinaiḥ | yeṣāṃtuśūnyatādṛṣṭistānasādhyānbabhāṣire ||

Gist: The Jinas have declared śūnyatā to be the means of escape from all views; for those for whom śūnyatā itself becomes a view, they declared them incurable. The implication is that śūnyatā is an expedient like a medicine, and not a destination like a doctrine. Before this, in 13.7, the same point is made in another way: if anything were non-empty, then calling something 'empty' would be meaningful; when nothing is non-empty at all, the basis for saying 'empty' also does not remain in the form of svabhāva. Modern scholars read this very passage as the 'emptiness of emptiness'.[24]

yadyaśūnyaṃbhavetkiñcitsyācchūnyamapikiñcana | nakiṃcidastyaśūnyaṃcakutaḥśūnyaṃbhaviṣyati ||

Illustrations: The Chariot and Fire-Fuel :

To explain śūnyatā, the illustration of the chariot is famous in the Buddhist tradition. It has two distinct Pāli sources, which are often conflated. The first is the dialogue of the bhikkhunīVajirā and Māra, in which, by the analogy of the designation 'chariot' arising from the combination of the parts of a chariot, the designation 'sattva' (being) is shown to depend on the skandhas; the second is the dialogue of King Milinda and the venerable Nāgasena in the Milindapañha, where this same illustration comes in detail.[25]

kiṃ nu sattotipaccesiMāradiṭṭhigataṃ nu te | suddhasaṅkhārapuñjoyaṃnayidhasattūpalabbhati || yathā hi aṅgasambhārāhotisaddorathoiti | evaṃkhandhesusantesuhotisattotisammuti ||

Gist: From the combination of parts the word 'chariot' is current; in the same way, when the skandhas exist, the sammuti (worldly designation) 'being' is current. It should be noted that this illustration is not found in the Mūla-mādhyamikakārikā itself; the Mādhyamaka tradition developed it later, especially in Candrakīrti's sevenfold analysis. In the Mūla-mādhyamikakārikā the illustration for this same argument is its own, that of fire and fuel: if fire and fuel were one, agent and object would become one; if they were wholly different, the fuel would be without fire and the fire independent of fuel - both situations are incoherent:

yadindhanaṃsacedagnirekatvaṃkartṛkarmaṇoḥ | anyo 'gnirindhanādanyoyadīndhanamanagnikam ||

The essence of both illustrations is the same: the 'whole' (aṅgin) is proved neither identical with its parts nor different from them; yet in everyday life one travels sitting in a chariot and food is cooked with fire. Being niḥsvabhāva and being functional in everyday practice are not mutually contradictory.[26]

The Dvisatya Doctrine :

The principal instrument which makes śūnyatā coherent with everyday practice is the dvisatya. According to Nāgārjuna, the Buddhas' teaching of the Dharma rests on two truths:

dvesatyesamupāśrityabuddhānāṃdharmadeśanā | lokasaṃvṛtisatyaṃcasatyaṃcaparamārthataḥ ||

The next two kārikās clarify the purpose of this division and its constructive aspect:

Ye 'nayornavijānantivibhāgaṃsatyayordvayoḥ | tetattvaṃnavijānantigambhīrebuddhaśāsane ||
vyavahāramanāśrityaparamārthonadeśyate | paramārthamanāgamyanirvāṇaṃnādhigamyate ||

Gist: Those who do not know the distinction between these two truths do not know the reality in the profound teaching of the Buddha; without relying on vyavahāra, the paramārtha cannot be taught, and without understanding the paramārtha, nirvāṇa is not attained. Two conclusions follow from these two kārikās. First, saṃvṛti-satya is no 'falsehood', but the medium by which the paramārtha is taught. Second, the paramārtha does not stand in some world apart from saṃvṛti; it is the true nature of that very world of everyday practice.

On the meaning of the word saṃvṛti, Candrakīrti, commenting on 24.8 in the Prasannapadā, enumerates three meanings: (a) covering, that is, avidyā which veils the true nature of things; (b) mutual arising, that is, the mutual dependence of things; and (c) convention or worldly usage.[27] From this threefold meaning it is clear that saṃvṛti-satya is not merely 'illusion', but also a system of conventions functioning in everyday practice. In this connection, a wide-ranging discussion of modern interpretations is available in the collection of the Cowherds (2011), where many Mādhyamaka and Tibetan interpretations of saṃvṛti-satya are compared.[28]

Catuṣkoṭi: The Mādhyamaka Method of Argument :

Catuṣkoṭi (tetralemma) considers four alternatives for a proposition: (1) it is, (2) it is not, (3) it both is and is not, (4) it neither is nor is not. In Indian thought the catuṣkoṭi is found even before Nāgārjuna, so it would not be right to call it his own discovery; his distinction lies in its use. According to the study of Ruegg (1977), several types of use of the catuṣkoṭi are found in Buddhist literature, and in Mādhyamaka its principal use is the negation of all svabhāva-based possibilities of statement about reality.[29] A key passage for this is Mūla-mādhyamikakārikā 18.8:

sarvaṃtathyaṃnavātathyaṃtathyaṃcātathyamevaca | naivātathyaṃnaivatathyametadbuddhānuśāsanam ||

Here 'tathya' (real), 'atathya', 'ubhaya' and 'anubhaya' - all four alternatives - come as the teaching of the Buddha's dispensation, which commentators generally understand to mean that the Buddha spoke different words at different levels according to the capacity of the listener. 22.11 states this even more directly: that 'śūnya', 'aśūnya', 'ubhaya' and 'anubhaya' - even these four - are said only for the sake of prajñapti (conventional designation), and not to describe the 'svabhāva' of reality:

śūnyamitinavaktavyamaśūnyamitivābhavet | ubhayaṃnobhayaṃcetiprajñaptyarthaṃtukathyate ||

On this, two mutually opposed modern readings are found. Garfield and Priest (2003) read the catuṣkoṭi as an indication of the 'limits of thought' and connect it with a paraconsistent logical system; in contrast, many traditional and classical readings take it merely as the negation of every possibility of svabhāva-grasping.[30] This paper's view is closer to the second reading, because in the Mūla-mādhyamikakārikā the ground of the negation of each koṭi is the refutation of the presupposition of svabhāva, as is clear from 15.7 and 15.10:

Kātyāyanāvadānecāstītināstītiicobhayam | pratiṣiddhaṃbhagavatābhāvābhāvavibhāvinā ||
astītiśāśvatagrāhonāstītyucchedadarśanam | tasmādastitvanāstitvenāśrīyetavicakṣaṇaḥ ||

Gist: The Bhagavān, knower of bhāva and abhāva, in his teaching to Kātyāyana negated all three - 'it is', 'it is not' and 'both'; to say 'it is' is śāśvata-graha, to say 'it is not' is uccheda-darśana; therefore the discerning person should rely on neither existence nor non-existence. Thus the use of the catuṣkoṭi is not the establishment of a fifth koṭi, but a means of freedom from all conceptual attachments (dṛṣṭis). This is the confirmed position of this paper, but disagreement among scholars on this still remains.[31]

The 'Non-Difference' of Saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa :

The most disputed passage of Nāgārjuna's philosophy is the statement on the relation of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa in the twenty-fifth chapter (Nirvāṇaparīkṣā):

nasaṃsārasyanirvāṇātkiṃcidastiviśeṣaṇam | nanirvāṇasyasaṃsārātkiṃcidastiviśeṣaṇam ||
nirvāṇasyacayākoṭiḥkoṭiḥsaṃsaraṇasyaca | natayorantaraṃkiṃcitsusūkṣmamapividyate ||

Gist: There is no distinction (differentiating element) of saṃsāra from nirvāṇa, and no distinction of nirvāṇa from saṃsāra; whatever the koṭi (limit/state) of nirvāṇa is, that is the koṭi of saṃsāra; not even the subtlest difference is found between the two. Three readings of this statement are possible. (a) Identity of substance (saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are one and the same thing), which is not supported by the text, because the kārikā speaks of the absence of 'viśeṣaṇa' (differentiator) and does not establish oneness. (b) Sameness in svabhāva-śūnyatā (both are equally niḥsvabhāva, hence there is no svabhāva-born difference between them); this is the accepted reading of this paper and is close to the Candrakīrti tradition. (c) Difference of perspective (the same world seen through avidyā is saṃsāra and seen through prajñā is nirvāṇa), which is more sādhanā-oriented.[32]

Kārikā 25.24 of the same chapter makes it still clearer that the paramārtha is not the experience of a separate world, but the name for the cessation of all upalambha (apprehension of objects) and prapañca (conceptual proliferation):

sarvopalambhopaśamaḥprapañcopaśamaḥśivaḥ | nakvacitkasyacitkaściddharmobuddhenadeśitaḥ ||

Gist: The cessation of all upalambhas is itself the cessation of prapañcas, and that is śiva (auspiciousness); the Buddha did not teach any dharma (a svabhāva-established principle) anywhere, to anyone. In this statement too, what is negated is not 'dharma-teaching', but the teaching of any svabhāva-established dharma.

The Historical Development of the Mādhyamaka Tradition :

Nāgārjuna's disciple Āryadeva (Catuḥśataka) began the tradition of employing Mādhyamaka arguments against other philosophies. In later times a methodological disagreement appeared between the followers of Buddhapālita and Candrakīrti and the tradition of Bhāviveka, to which the names 'Prāsaṅgika' and 'Svātantrika' were given in Tibetan classification. The Prāsaṅgika side holds that the Mādhyamika should, rather than establishing any independent thesis (pratijñā) of his own, show the internal contradictions (prasaṅga) of the opponent's view; the Svātantrika side accepts the use of independent inference. It is necessary to remember that both these designations are originally products of the later Tibetan classification, and the Indian ācāryas did not call themselves by these names.[33]

In Śāntideva'sBodhicaryāvatāra, the philosophy of śūnyatā was joined with the bodhisattva-caryā and the practice of karuṇā, and this synthesis became the distinctive identity of Mahāyāna.[34] In Tibet, Candrakīrti'sPrasannapadā came to be regarded as especially authoritative in the Gelug tradition, an example of which is the commentaries of Tsongkhapa (1357-1419). In China, on the basis of the Madhyamakaśāstra translated by Kumārajīva (with Piṅgala's commentary, Taishō 1564) and the Dvādaśamukhaśāstra and Śataśāstra, the Sanlun (Tri-śāstra) school was formed, whose principal master was Jizang (549-623).[35]

Objections, Rebuttals and Comparative Analysis :-

Three Principal Objections : (a) **Objection of self-refutation:** If the statement 'everything is śūnya' is itself śūnya, then its truth becomes doubtful. Nāgārjuna replied in the Vigrahavyāvartanī that he has no such thesis as would be held to be svabhāva-established, so no fault attaches either:[36]

yadikācanapratijñāsyān me tataeṣa me bhaveddoṣaḥ | nāstica mama pratijñātasmānnaivāsti me doṣaḥ ||

This reply has also been criticised: Hayes (1994) holds that this claim of 'thesis-lessness' does not accord with Nāgārjuna's own usage in several places. The objection therefore cannot be called wholly ineffective, although the reply is present within the text.

(b) **Objection of the meaninglessness of everyday practice:** If everything is niḥsvabhāva, how will the system of karma-fruit and bondage-liberation stand? The answer to this has already been given in the dvisatya and in 24.14.

(c) **Objection of vitaṇḍā:** In the view of the Naiyāyikas, Nāgārjuna's style is 'vitaṇḍā'. In Nyāyasūtra 1.2.3 vitaṇḍā is defined as a debate in which no counter-position is established, and only refutation is carried out; in the fourth chapter of the Nyāyasūtra there is also a critique of the śūnyatā position.[37] The Mādhyamaka side says in reply that what remains after the refutation of svabhāva-grasping - relative, functioning everyday practice - is itself a constructive achievement, and the Middle Way is the name of precisely that.

(d)

Western and Modern Indian Readings :

Murti's (1955) absolutist reading, Kalupahana's (1986) empiricist reading, Garfield's (1995) reading centred on the dvisatya and theory of meaning, and Huntington's (1989) suspicion of Western metaphysical categories - these four agree that to call Mādhyamaka 'śūnyavāda' (nihilism) is misleading, but differ in further interpretation. The significance of the comparison with Wittgenstein is that both thinkers draw attention to the limits of language and concepts; but Nāgārjuna's ultimate purpose is the cessation of suffering (soteriological), and not merely linguistic therapy.

Relation to Vedānta :

There is considerable discussion among scholars on the relation between AdvaitaVedānta and Mādhyamaka. Śaṅkara in his Brahmasūtrabhāṣya (2.2.18-32) refuted Buddhist views, and in the context of 2.2.31 described śūnyavāda as 'contrary to all means of knowledge' (sarva-pramāṇa-viruddha).[38] Bhattacharya (1943) put forward the hypothesis of Buddhist influence in connection with Gauḍapāda'sĀgamaśāstra, but this hypothesis is disputed, and within the Vedānta tradition there are many objections to it. One fundamental difference is universally accepted: Advaita regards 'Brahman' as the ultimate truth, whereas in Nāgārjuna there is no svabhāva-established ultimate reality. Therefore, in discussing influence, it is necessary to keep both similarity and difference in view.

The Limits of Comparison with Contemporary Science :

Some modern writers compare śūnyatā with quantum physics or with scientific research on the constructed nature of the self. This comparison may be useful in a limited sense, but from the standpoint of this paper it needs methodological caution, because Nāgārjuna's purpose was not to describe the physical world, but to remove the suffering arising from the mental grip of 'svabhāva'; therefore such comparative readings should be regarded only as hypotheses.

A Consolidated Summary of the Principal Kārikās :

For convenience, the above discussion has been summarized in the following table (MMK = Mūlamadhyamakakārikā; VV =Vigrahavyāvartanī):-

No.	Reference	Subject	Mādhyamaka Position
1	a-mādhyamikakārikā 1.1	Four alternatives of origination	āva-established origination is impossible
2	a-mādhyamikakārikā 10.1	Fire-fuel	whole (aṅgin) is neither identical with nor different from its parts
3	-mādhyamikakārikā 13.7-8	he status of śūnyatā	Śūnyatā is an expedient (upāya), not a view
4	ūla-mādhyamikakārikā 15.1-2, 15.7, 15.10	Svabhāva-parīkṣā	Svabhāva is uncreated and independent; both extremes, asti and nāsti, are unacceptable

5	Mūla-mādhyamikakārikā 18.8; 22.11	Catuṣkoṭi	koṭis are prohibited as forms of svabhāva-grasping
6	ūla-mādhyamikakārikā 24.8-10, 14, 18, 19	visatya and śūnyatā	ītyasamutpāda = śūnyatā = prajñapti = madhyamāpratipad
7	-mādhyamikakārikā 25.19-20, 24	Saṃsāra-nirvāṇa	abhāva-born difference between the two; prapañcopaśama
8	VV 29	Reply to self-refutation	Absence of an independent thesis (pratijñā)

Conclusion :

The following conclusions are obtained from the study. First, because of the definition of svabhāva in Mūla-mādhyamikakārikā 15.1-2 - uncreated and independent - the meaning of śūnyatā is not the absence of a thing, but the absence of its svabhāva; in this view the name 'niḥsvabhāvatā-vāda' is more precise than 'śūnyavāda'. Second, the equation of four concepts in Mūla-mādhyamikakārikā 24.18 is not merely a poetic synthesis, but the logical consequence of the argument of 15.1-2. Third, the dvisatya framework does not abolish saṃvṛti, but establishes it as the necessary medium of the understanding of paramārtha. Fourth, the use of the catuṣkoṭi is not the establishment of a fifth koṭi, but a means of freedom from views as such, although there is disagreement among modern scholars on this. Fifth, it is more consistent with the text to read the 'non-difference' of saṃsāra-nirvāṇa not as identity of substance, but as sameness in svabhāva-śūnyatā.

Limitations and Future Research Directions: This paper has mainly taken the Mūla-mādhyamikakārikā and the VV as its basis; the conclusions can be further strengthened by comparison with the Ratnāvalī, Yuktiṣaṣṭikā and Śūnyatāsaptati, and by direct textual analysis of Tibetan and Chinese commentaries. The problem of identification between the philosopher Nāgārjuna and the Nāgārjuna tradition connected with rasa-tantra-āyurveda also awaits independent research. Nāgārjuna is given the title 'Second Buddha' in the tradition; this title is as much an expression of reverence as it is an acknowledgment of his logical contribution - for he established the 'Middle Way' as a coherent philosophical method, raising it from a merely ethical teaching.

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