

1. Introduction to Madhyamika Tradition

i. **Historical background**

1st stage

i.i. Nagarjuna

Acarya Nagarjuna undoubtedly is one of the greatest Buddhist philosophers that lived in India. His fame is such that in the Tibetan region and china he is considered as The second Buddha. As it is usual in Indian religious history, records are neither very accurate nor very abundant. This is go with the case of Acarya Nagarjuna. There are only few sources and these are full of mythology and such other mythical information. Hence it is extremely difficult to draw a very accurate picture of Acarya Naharjuna.

Scholars have pointed out that best two available sources of information on Acarya Nagarjuna Are: (Tibetan Sources)

i. The account provided by the Tibetan national Bu-Ston (1290-1364).

ii. The historical records left by another Tibetan called Taranatha (1608).

According to Bu-Ston Acarya Nagarjuna was from a place called Vidharbha in the Maharastra District. It is said that he entered monkhood at a very early age, entered university of Nalanda and studied under reputed teacher called Rahulabhadra and later he became very famous philosopher. Accoridng Taranatha's account he was well known monk held in great honour by both Theravada (Hinayana) and Mahayana monks, to whom he offered advice and guidance.

iii. According to Chinese Sources

Besides these sources, there are Chinese accounts of Acarya Nagarjuna's life. According to them, Acarya Nagarjuna was from South Indian Brahmin family: he mastered Vedas and later entered monk hood. It is said that he first studied Theravada and later learnt Mahayana sutras from a old teacher living at the foot hill of Himalaya mountain. These accounts contain a lot of miraculous events that raise Acaraya Nagarjuna to a super-man status. Thus one such incident says that he entered the Naga-world and obtained the Mahayana texts that were hidden there for safety.

There are historical noteworthy facts that could be drawn from all these accounts.

(1). He is connected to south India

(2) He was a reputed philosopher

(3).He was closely associating a royal family called **Satavahana** and he developed a personal friendship with king **Pulumai 2nd**. **it is** also accepted that the place called Nagarjuna Konda whereas Nagarjuna lived. Yet, we cannot forget the fact that there have been more than one Nagarjuna, and that is one factor that makes exact identification very difficult. This also makes it extremely difficult to fix his date. Modern scholars who have considered the available facts place him between the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D. Perhaps he is closer to the second than to 3rd century.

Max Vallezar -Second century A.D., and Robinson-Third century A.D.,

His writings

Just as it is difficult to construct an account of his life, it is also not an easy task to say exactly what books were written by him. Some sources say that he authored over 100 books. This undoubtedly is an over exaggeration. As there had been many Nagarjunas, it is a problem to fix the true writings of Acarya Nagarjuna.

Taranatha offers the following list of books and they are: 1. Mulamadhyamakakarika, 2. Yuktisataka, Sunyatasaptati, 3. Vigrahavivartani, and 4. Vaidalyapakarana.

Bu-Ston. Lists books: 1. Mulamadhyamakakarika, 2. Sunyatasaptati, 3. Yuktisataka, 4. Vigrahavivartani, 5. Vaidalyasastra,

Besides, these books: such as Ratnavali, Catuhsatava, Pratityasamutpada-hrdaya, Bhavasankrati Prajnadanda, Suhurlekha, are also popularly attributed to Acarya Nagarjuna.

The following texts translated into Chinese and now extant only in Chinese are also considered as his works: Mahaprajnaparamitasastra, Dasbhumikasastra, Dvadasamukhasastra. Other than these, Chinese tradition also assign to Acarya Nagarjuna the following texts: Eka-sloka-sastra, (taisho 1573), Astadasasunyata sastra, Bodhisambarasastra (1660), (1616), Bodhisattvacaryavatara, (1662), etc.

Whether all these could be attributed to Acarya Nagarjuna, the founder of Madhyamaka, can not be certainly decided. Lindtner is who has done a deep study of this subject says that his primary works of Nagarjuna are: Mulamadhyamakakarika, Sunyatasaptati, Vigrahavivartani, Vaidalyaprakarana, Vyavaharasiddhi, Yuktisataka, Catuhstava, Ratnavali, etc.

Robinson

A comparison of these lists would enable us to arrive at some probable decision regarding what truly are the works of Nagarjuna. This could be done by taking the names of the books that commonly occur in all his works.

Aryadeva

However, the next source considered is Catuhstaka of Acarya Aryadeva who is supposed to be a Sri Lankan as well as the immediate disciple and successor of Acarya Nagarjuna. His works deal very minutely about the **absence of a substance** (nihsvabhavata) The first part of the work is about the religious discipline presented by the refutation of opponents' philosophical views.

Naga.

Nagabodhi= Tathagatabhadra

He has written commentary to Mulamadhyamakakarika, it is '*Pancavinsat sahasrika maha prajnaparamita*'.

2.nd stage

i. Buddhapalita (Prasangika) (470-540)(theory no views-only refute the opponents' views) Buddhapalita is the author of *Madhyamakavrtti*. (no Sanskrit) He is considered as the foremost exponent of the Prasanghika system of Madhyamaka.

Candrakirti- (Prasannapada-commentary).

Most renowned of the commentators is Acaraya **Candrakirti** (600-650) A.D.. His commentary on the Karika is called *Prasannapada*, (it is one of the main commentaries preserved in Sanskrit) and it is this work that truly established the Prasangika method of interpreting Madhyamaka philosophy. In this work Acarya Candrakirti is very critical of Acarya Bhavaviveka's interpretations and he adheres to the interpretation of Acarya Buddhapalita.

The prasangika method of interpretation which holds that Acaraya Nagarjuana is using the dialectical method to show the inner conflicts in the views out forward by teachers of other school of thought. By showing these inner contradictions Nagarjuna completely refutes and shows their absurdity. The prasngika system says that Acarya Nagarjuna , after refuting others view, does not himself present a view, because a madhyamaka is a person who has given up all views. In western philosophy this is called 'reduco ad absurdum'. _ which means reducing the views of the opponents into mere absurdities. For this, he uses a very systematic dialectical method of argument, bringing out the inner conflicts in the views presented by other schools.

i. iii. Bhavaviveka (Svatantrika)(positivists)

Bhavaviveka's commentary is called the *Prajnapradipa* and in this he presents the svatantrika method of interpretation of Madhyamaka. This school holds that refuting the opponent view is not enough and there should be a view that Nagarjuna presents. While it is true that a Madhyamaka cannot have view of his to present in place of the views he refutes, Madhyamaka philosophy becomes meaningless if we assume that it presents no view. Though Acaraya Nagarjuna presents no counter view, he has some objective and this is to present the real teaching of the Buddha. In other words, to clean the Buddhist thought of all wrong views, and take it back to its original purity.

Dedicatory Verse of MK.

*Anirodham anutpadam anucchedam a♣a♣vatam- anekartham ananartham
anagamam anirgamam*

*Ya /pratitya samutpadam prapancopa amam ivam-desayamasa sambuddha tam
vande vandatam varam.*

“ I salute him, the fully enlightened, the best of speakers, who preached the non-ceasing and the non-arising, the non-annihilation and the non-permanence, the non-identity and the non-difference, the non-appearance and the non-disappearance, the dependent arising, the appeasement of obsessions and the auspicious.”

This introductory verse appear to be equivocal and therefore, could account for most of the conflicting views in the two major Madhyamaka Traditions.

Prasangiakas comment on this verse - refute the views of their opponents

Svatantrikas- all these term in accusative case refer to one doctrine, namely, dependent arising (pratityasamutpada) So, Candrakirti wrote the Prasannapada by emphasizing the significance of dependent arising (pratityasamutpada)

Yogacara

As time passed by, sunyata was raised to the level of an **Absolute Reality** , and hence only sunyata (emptiness) was considered to be real . This along with other factors, it reasonably appears, to be the cause of the rise of Yogacara . When sunyata was considered the reality , there rose the idea that everything is void everything is nothing, everything is empty, then it is a kind of nihilism . To a certain extent it is against this view that the Vijnaptimatra-mind only teaching put forward by Yogacara teachers like Acarya Asanga and Acarya Vasubandhus arose. While admitting that everything is empty, this school put forward the new idea that **mind is real. (cittamatratra)** This gave rise to the **Alayavijnana** concept.

Sunyata doctrine exerted great influence on Later Buddhist thought and, specially on Mahayana. In fact sunyata is one of the two pillars of Mahayana and the other the Alayavijnana of Yogacara. Though Madhyamaka itself, as a distinct school of philosophy, lost its significance, it lived through Mahayana, for sunyata was adopted by Mahayana as its fundamental teaching.

Santideva

Another note worthy interpreter of Prasangika method was master Santideva (691-743). Two of his most important works are Bodhicaryavatara and Siksasamuccaya. The 9th chapter of the Bodhicaryavatara is specially important for any study of the Madhyamaka philosophy and sunyata. The Siksasamuccaya, on the other hand, is a handbook on the practical aspect of Madhyamaka.)

Third Stage

i. Santaraksita, (Tatva sangraha), Kamalasila and

Santaraksita and Kamalasila (8th century) was influenced by the development of Buddhist 'idealism' the Yogacara of Cittamatratna tradition. So, their philosophy is a mixture of both Yogacara and Madhyamaka. They said Madhyamaka philosophy emphasizes the **Negativism** while Yogacara philosophy emphasis **Positivism**

i. Beyond India

Though sunyata concept and its main exponent Acarya Nagarjuna as well as his Mulamadhyamaka-karika faded away from India, mainly due to the absorption of sunyata concept by Mahayana, it continued to survive very vibrantly in China and Tibet.

i. Chinese Prajnaparamita translation

Bern wu

ii. Kumarajiva's translation

Xing kong

The doctrine of sunyata along with Madhyamaka school went to China as early as the 4th century A.D. just within two centuries after its origin in India. Master Kumarajiva (344-413 A.D.), the great Buddhist savant, who tirelessly worked to spread Buddhism in China, is considered as to have introduced this teaching to China. Master Kumarajiva, perhaps is the greatest of all translators. Though it is not possible to as certain with certainty the exact number of his translations, there is no doubt with regard to the fact the his main focus was the rendering of Sanskrit texts dealing with the sunyata concept including Nagarjuna's Karika. His services were further

continued with much vigor and enthusiasm by his eminent disciples such as Sheng-Zhao who helped Master Kumārajīva in his translation wrote.

They are as follows: I. **Zhong Lun**, (**Madhyamakakarika**) II. **Bai Lun**, (**Catussataka**) III. **Shi Er Men Lun**, (**Dvadasa-dvara-sastra**) IV. **Da Zhi Du Lun**, (**Mahaprajnaparamita sastra**) Considering three of them which belonged to the Madhyamaka tradition was called in China “**San Lun**”, and also as all these four books, belonged to Madhyamaka tradition, it is called “**Si Lun**”. Another name was “**Zhong Guang Pai**”. According to preface of the book called ‘*Bora Wu Zhe Lun*’ and ‘*Gao Seng Zhuang*’ Kumārajīva translated these books after he was brought to China as a prisoner in 401 A.D. He lived in Cao Chang temple in the ancient city of Chang An in China. (Modern Xi’an in Sha’anxi province).

iv. Tibet

Around the 8th century A.D., Madhyamaka tradition was introduced to Tibet. Master Kamalasila and his immediate disciple Acarya Santaraksita are also responsible for introducing Buddhism to Tibet. It happened in two stages:

1. (1st phase) during the period of king **Sronbtstan sgam-po** translations. It is known as ‘**Era of old translation**’. (629- 650 A.D.) **Savatantrika books**.
2. (2nd phase) Glan-Dar-Me king’s period –Era of new translation (836-841. A.D.) **Prasangika books**

Perhaps, the greatest Tibetan teacher of Madhyamaka philosophy was **Zone-ka-ba** (1357-1419) who was basically a follower of the Prasangika school. He tried to present a **smooth blend** of both **prasangika** and **svatantrika** views.

Zonk-ka-ba hold the view that Prasangikas emphasizes the **negativism and nihilism**. So, they deny the conventional world and that Svatantrikas are more positivists (positivism-Anubhutipadaya) and realists. So, they emphasize much of positivism. Thus in fact there is no contradiction of our perception regarding the truth *samvrti* and *sunyata*.

Read

1. D. J., Kalupahan, *Nagarjuna The Philosophy of the Middle Way*. p101-103.
2. K. K., Inada, *Nagarjuna A translation of his Mulamadhyamakakarika*,
3. Asanga Tilakaratna, *Sunyataবাদে Darsanaya ha Caranaya*.

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