

Hyperousiology of Nāgārjunian Philosophy: A Hermeneutical Reading

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Abstract - Nāgārjuna (ca. 150–250 CE) was a Buddhist philosopher and the founder of the *Mādhyamaka* school of Mahāyāna Buddhism. His philosophy is based on the Buddhist theory of 'dependent origination' (*pratitya-samutpada*) and its stance is that whatever exists, exists as being dependent on its causes and conditions. Nāgārjuna in his doctrine negates all positive claims. The main research problem addressed in this study is whether Nagarjunian negation establishes hyperousious. The research methodology employed in this paper is Hermeneutics. Particularly, Gadamerian hermeneutics is used in this study and reading in an open and inclusive character is protected. The understanding is taken as historical and a fusion of past and present horizons. When reading Śūnyatā philosophy of Nāgārjuna the notions of tradition and prejudice have also been considered in a Gadamerian sense. Negating propositional, linguistic or logical claims on the ultimate reality, Nirvāṇa, the Absolute, *Paramartha*, the Supreme reality, Nāgārjuna says in the *Mula-Madhyamika-karika* in *Atma Pariksha* that independently realized peaceful, un-obsessed *Nirvāṇa* is *Aparapratyayam*: the experience which cannot be imparted to any one by another. It has to be realized by everyone for oneself. It is *shantam*: it is an attitude unaffected by the empirical mind. Nāgārjuna reaches this teleological stance of Nirvāṇa through ultimate negation (*sarva drishti prahanaya yah saddharmam adeshayet*). When analyzing claims on Nāgārjuna's Nirvāṇa, it is something ultimately negated, cannot be hypostasized, but it is affirmed as hyperousious. The conclusion is that Nāgārjuna's philosophy is an attempt at establishing a "superessentiality". This can also be identified as *causa sui* within the horizon of beings and remain as a 'beyond' being, a nonbeing (non-thing).

Keywords: Nāgārjuna , Hyperousious Nirvāṇa, Mādhyamaka, Śūnyatā

I. INTRODUCTION

Nāgārjuna, often referred to as "the second Buddha", is a Buddhist philosopher who founded the Mādhyamaka School; one of the two principal schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Nāgārjuna's philosophy is fixed on the "middle way" in the early form Buddhism and hence, it has been popularly known as the Madhyamaka tradition of Buddhism where much emphasis given on the śūnyatā or emptiness of all phenomena in the world. The śūnyatā philosophy has weighted influence not only in the oriental world but also in the occidental spheres as the Mahayana

traditions were spreading via different means particularly through the Jesuit priests who explored the place like India, Tibet and China (Ruegg, 1981). Currently, the philosophy of Nāgārjuna has become an indispensable part of philosophical inquiries pertaining to metaphysics both in the East and the West.

Nāgārjuna's magnum opus is the Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way or Mūlamadhyamakakārikā and is considered to be the central text of the Madhyamaka tradition. It consists of 450 stanzas and expounds the entire compass of Nāgārjunian thought (Kalupahana, 1991). . The Sixty Stanzas on Reasoning or Yuktiṣāṣṭikā has also been identified as one of major works of Nāgārjuna and through that work as well he explicates his śūnyatā philosophy while giving emphasis on the notions of emptiness and the idea of dependent origination or pratityasamutpāda. The Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness or Śūnyatāsaptati is also bagged to the account of Nāgārjuna by many scholars and the short treatise is basically on the questions of agency and the two truths connected with the śūnyatā philosophy. The Dispeller of Disputes or Vighrahavyāvartanī authored by Nāgārjuna is considered as an autocommentary to his central philosophy and can be counted as a work as a further explication of the ideas in Mūlamadhyamakakārikā. Nāgārjuna, in this prose style work, makes a great attempt to respond to his philosophical rivals and refute certain substantial ideas that denounced philosophical arguments pertaining to śūnyatā. In this treaty, Nāgārjuna addresses both the Buddhist and non-Buddhist opponents.

Lindtner (1982) identifies the corpus of work that can definitely be attributed to Nāgārjuna:

- *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā* (Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way, MMK), available in three Sanskrit manuscripts and numerous translations.
- *Śūnyatāsaptati* (Seventy Verses on Emptiness), accompanied by a prose commentary ascribed to Nagarjuna himself.
- *Vighrahavyāvartanī* (The End of Disputes).
- *Vaidalyaprakarāṇa* (Pulverizing the Categories), a prose work critiquing the categories used by Indian Nyaya philosophy.
- *Vyavahārasiddhi* (Proof of Convention).
- *Yuktiṣāṣṭika* (Sixty Verses on Reasoning).

- *Catuḥstava* (Four Hymns): *Lokāṭīta-stava* (Hymn to transcendence), *Nirāupāmya-stava* (to the Peerless), *Acintya-stava* (to the Inconceivable), and *Paramārtha-stava* (to Ultimate Truth).
- *Ratnāvalī* (Precious Garland), subtitled (rajaparikatha), a discourse addressed to an Indian king (possibly a *Satavahana* monarch).
- *Pratīyasamutpādahṛdayakārika* (Verses on the heart of Dependent Arising), along with a short commentary (Vyākhyāna).
- *Sūtrasamuccaya*, an anthology of various sutra passages.
- *Bodhicittavivaraṇa* (Exposition of the awakening mind).
- *Suḥṛllekha* (Letter to a Good Friend).
- *Bodhisambhārasāstra* (Requisites of awakening), a work the path of the Bodhisattva and paramitas, it is quoted by *Candrakīrti* in his commentary on Aryadeva's four hundred.

There are also some other works attributed to Nāgārjuna, but scholarly debates are there on the authorship of them. For instance, some see texts like *Mahāyānavimsika*, *Bodhicittotpādaśāstra*, *Dvadasakāranayastotra*, *Bhavasamkrānti*, *Sālistambakārikā*, *Stutyitastava*, *Cittavajrastava*, *Mulasarvāstivadiśrāmanerakārikā* are attributed to Nāgārjuna.

The Mādhyamaka School rejected the existence of an eternal self and inherently existent phenomena and therefore it was also called *nissvabhava-vada*. The name *nissvabhava-vada* has been accorded for the doctrine due to its proclamation on interdependent origination (*pratīyasamutpada*) or all-conditionality. The Mādhyamaka School believes that everything is empty of self-nature; thus the ego (*puḍgala*), is 'no more than a transitory and changeable empirical personality put together from the five aggregates (*skandhas*)' (Kalupahana, 1976). Various causes and conditions produce phenomena and they all are empty of any inherent existence; everything is related. Nāgārjuna claims that emptiness itself is empty. The ultimate truth, Nirvāṇa is something that has no abandonment, no attainment, no annihilation, no eternality, no cessation, no arising: that transcends dualistic language and conceptual thought. The liberating experience of meditation or therapeutic endeavor uncovers ultimate truth and destroys all attachment to spurious conceptions of the self and the world. It is argued in this paper that Mādhyamaka philosophy operates through denegations and it affirms a super-being hyperousious. Hyperousiology affirms hyperessence and the unsaying or the ineffable is safeguarded (Caputo, 1999). Nirvāṇa as depicted by Nāgārjuna accepts limits of language and makes an attempt to overcome the boundaries of comprehension and translatability through its therapeutic *atakkavacara* doctrine (Della Santina, 1986). Hence, it

embodies a hyper-movement and becomes apophatic that is self-sufficient (Caputo, 1997). This doctrine of absence is a higher apophasis that overcomes both affirmation and negation.

II. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed in this paper is Hermeneutics. Particularly, Gadamerian hermeneutics is used in this study and reading in an open and inclusive character is protected. The understanding is taken as historical and a fusion of past and present horizons. When reading Śūnyatā philosophy of Nāgārjuna the notions of tradition and prejudice have also been considered in a Gadamerian sense. Hermeneutics used here to interpret the purpose or meaning of existence and ultimate reality.

III. RESULTS/DISCUSSIONS

Nāgārjuna offering a severe criticism over substantialist claims of reality both by Brahminical and Buddhist philosophy, put forward a theory of knowledge, and a new approach to understand ultimate reality of the world with the strategy of *reductio ad absurdum*, that seeks to establish a contention by gleaming an absurdity from its denial, as T.V.R. Murti claims a game of "Jujutsu" (Murti, 2013). Accordingly, the existence of stable substances, the linear and one-directional movement of causation, the atomic individuality of the being, the fixed identity and ego, and dichotomized moral claims like good and evil, etc. are denounced and refuted by the Mādhyamaka philosophy. But in nihilism a kind of characteristics can be identified that are identical to the Śūnyatā philosophy of Madhayamaka tradition as most of nihilist philosophers popularly claim "everything is meaningless" But when it comes to Madhayaka teaching values and meanings to be placed on people, objects, and life will never be compromised to the early tradition of Buddhism and that oral life is negatively affirmed through ultimate negation (Ruegg, 1981).

Hence, the insight of emptiness does not mean "non-existence" or "nihility" and ontologically the ultimate reality of Nirvāṇa is affirmed to safeguard to the moral grounding (Westerhoff, 2009). Rather, Nāgārjuna's mission is to philosophically depict the lack of autonomous existence. Śūnyatā philosophy's entire voyage is to confirm the ultimate reality of Nirvāṇa, that is independently realized, peaceful, un-obsessed by obsessions, without discriminations and a variety of meanings ("*apara pratyayam santam prapancair aprapaeitam nirvikalpam ananartham etat tatt vasya laksanam*") is beyond all the categories (Kalupahana, 1991). Hence, the final teleological destination of Mādhyamaka is beyond all the divisions of real and unreal, being and non-being.

Nāgārjuna refutes intrinsic nature of the world by claiming, *yadi sarvadharmāṇāṃ svabhāva na bhavet tatra nishsvabhāva bhavet* and then, nominal effect of claiming the absence as well refuted to prevent absence claim another ontological ground as he says *nishsvabhāva* would not be another metaphysical claim (*tatra nishsvabhāva ity evam namani na bhavet*) (Murti, 2013). Though Nāgārjuna defends his skepticism by insisting that he affirms no proposition paradoxicality arises can only be quelled by affirming therapeutic attainment of Nirvāṇa. By doing so Nāgārjuna would protect his doctrine from the fallacy of absolute relativism and the truth of Śūnyatā is safeguarded through the Mādhyamaka sorteriology itself.

Hence, Mādhyamaka doctrine can be understood as a discourse of presence. It promises union with Nirvāṇa, a teleological fulfilment of presence that becomes ontological in an apophatic approach (Marion, 2002). Nirvāṇa that disqualifies all concepts and intentions exceeds knowledge and precedes being; resulting in a super being.

IV. CONCLUSION

Nagajuna's Mādhyamaka philosophy makes an attempt to secure some "superessentiality" by adhering his relativist approach to reality to Nirvāṇa and moral philosophy of early Buddhism. Hence, Mādhyamaka mission is an inquiry into the highest or most excellent being or purest being; super-being, a realm of hyperousiology. Nirvāṇa would be the Other as *tout autre*, absence. This can also be identified as *causa sui* within the horizon of beings and remain as a 'beyond' being, a nonbeing (non-thing). Nāgārjuna's Nirvāṇa cannot be hypostasized, but it is affirmed as hyperousious. This teleological fulfillment is more ontological with some superessentiality than just apophatic. The hyperphoton of Nirvāṇa leads to grasping of essence beyond the conceptualization, where intellect will go to silence completely, since it will finally be at one with "something" which is indescribable or ineffable. Hyperousious of the Nagarjunian philosophy goes beyond affirmation and negation and transcends all sorts of reason, philosophy and metaphysics. The layman will have to engage in the destitution of hyperousious and Nirvāṇa will be a therapeutic experience that can be reached in the horizon of presence, a super-being, a hyper-discourse.

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