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The journal covers doctrinal and philosophical studies; socio-cultural and historical studies; linguistic and philological studies; and interreligious and intrareligious studies, with a focus on Buddhist traditions worldwide, including Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna.

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We warmly welcome original research papers related to the above-mentioned fields.

Editor In-chief
Department of Buddhist Studies,
University of Colombo, Colombo 3, Sri Lanka.
cjbs@bs.cmb.ac.lk

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Continuity and Change of Human Personality and the World: A View from Theravada Buddhism

Asanga Tilakaratne

Professor (Emeritus), Department of Buddhust Studies, University of Colombo, Colombo.
tasanga8@gmail.com

Abstract

In this paper, continuity and change are discussed from a Buddhist point of view at two levels, individual and cosmic or inner and outer. In the first part of this discussion, continuity and change will be discussed as a characteristic of what is called 'constructed phenomena' which include reality in an all-encompassing sense, i.e., the world and human and non-human beings that inhabit it. The focus of this part of the discussion is cosmological or outer. Continuity and change at the individual level will be discussed next. Although the individual is included in the broad category of the constructed phenomena, in this discussion, it is treated separately for the significance attributed to it in Buddhist thought, in particular, in Buddhist soteriology. The discussion concludes that whereas continuity and change at the cosmological level is an endless process, at the level of individual human beings, there can be a point at which the process of change will not continue anymore or the process of continuity and change will no longer be applicable.

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The early discourses of the Buddha found in the Pali canon (tipiṭaka/tripiṭaka) and the later Abhidhamma literature which represents a systematic and philosophical analysis of the universe and the human being, will serve as the primary sources of this study.

Keywords: *Continuity, change, human personality, world, Buddhism*

Introduction

Considering a key characteristic in Buddhist thought, namely, that of not indulging in abstract thinking which is without reference to any experienced, or potentially experienced reality, it is understood that continuity and change too need to be discussed with reference to human experience. Keeping this broad perspective in focus, continuity and change may be discussed from a Buddhist point of view at two levels, individual and cosmic or inner and outer. In the first part of this discussion, continuity and change will be discussed as a characteristic of what is called 'constructed phenomena' which include reality in an all-encompassing sense, i.e. the world and human and non-human beings that inhabit it. The focus of this part of the discussion is cosmological or outer. Continuity and change at individual level will be discussed next. Although the individual is included in the broad category of the constructed phenomena, in this discussion it is treated separately for the significance attributed to it in Buddhist thought, in particular, in Buddhist soteriology. The conclusion of the discussion is that whereas the continuity and change at cosmological level is an endless process, at the level of individual human being there can be a point at which the process of change will not continue any more or the process of continuity and change will no longer be applicable. The early discourses of the Buddha found in the Pali

canon *(tipiṭaka/tripiṭaka)* and the later Abhidhamma (systematic and philosophical) analysis of the universe and the human being will serve as the primary sources of this study.

The Constructed Phenomena: That which continues and changes

When we reflect on the sphere in which continuity and change is understood in Buddhist philosophy, two terms emerge, *saṅkhāra* and *saṅkhata*, both originating from the same etymological root, saṅ+kṛ meaning, to form, to construct or to modify, the first, in noun form and the second, in past participle form, both variously rendered as formations, karmic formations, constructions, constructed phenomena, conditioned, or conditioned phenomena in the literature. Of the two, *saṅkhārā* is a key term in Buddhist thought occurring in several different contexts which, in a closer scrutiny, will prove to be connected. One such prominent use of the term is to refer to one among the five aspects that come together to make human personality, which are referred to as 'five aggregates' *(pañca-khandha),* namely, material form *(rūpa),* feelings *(vedanā),* perceptions *(saññā)*, formations *(saṅkhāra)* and consciousness *(viññāṇa)*. In this context, *saṅkhārā* is understood to refer to physical, verbal and mental formations. The following explanation occurring in the Majjhima-nikāya (the Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha), one of the early Buddhist collections, appear to be relevant to formations as an aspect of human personality which covers the sphere of human activity: "In-breathing and out-breathing…are the bodily formation; applied thought and sustained thought are the verbal formation; perception and feeling are the mental formation" (Bodhi, 2001 p. 399; Majjhima-nikāya I, 2002, p. 301). Another context where *'saṅkhārā'* occurs prominently is the doctrine

of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*/Pali or *pratītya-samutpāda*/Sanskrit) which is meant to explain the causally conditioned existence of beings, mainly, that of human being. According to this teaching, one's ignorance *(avijjā)* conditions one's *saṅkhāras* or volitional actions which, in turn, condition one's consciousness *(viññāṇa)* and the process altogether with twelve factors goes on to produce suffering as its end. The two contexts are connected and inseparable. The five aggregate analysis is meant to highlight the composite character of human personality without any abiding reality popularly known as soul. What human personality, in this analysis, is a combination of the acts of feeling, perceiving, constructing and cognizing centred on a particular physical form. The dependent origination analysis is meant to capture the inner process of how suffering arises (and ceases) in the course of one's response to the sensory stimuli. Formations, in this context, are understood to refer to the activities of body, speech or mind, which are open to be evaluated as wholesome, unwholesome or neutral (Nyanatiloka, 1987, p. 162). The third context where formations occur, broadest of the three, as referred to earlier, is the world including everything that constitutes it. "It occurs … in the sense of anything formed *(saṅkhata)* and conditioned, and includes all things whatever in the world" (Nyanatiloka, 1987, p. 163). In order to illustrate this, point we may refer to a discourse occurring among the gradual discourses of the Buddha in which he narrates a story of how this world with its huge mountains and oceans will be reduced to ashes when gradually Suns will be multiplied to seven.[1] The fact that the Buddha concluded his statement with the following words: "so impermanent are conditioned

1. For the complete discourse, see (Bodhi, 2012, pp. 1071-1075; Aṅguttara-nikāya IV, 1999, pp. 100-106).

phenomena, so unstable, so unreliable…" (Bodhi, 2012, p. 1073) gives us an idea of the vast context covered by the concept of *saṅkhārā* –constructed phenomena. This, we may call, the cosmological dimension of *saṅkhārā* and will discuss in some detail now.

'All Constructed Phenomena' or the Totality of Saṅkhāra: Cosmological Dimension

That all constructed phenomena are impermanent is universally referred to in the discourses of the Buddha. Although often such a statement has reference to one's inner experience, the external reality or the world without which one's inner experience will have no content is included in this category. All these forms of inner and outer phenomena, or the experience and its content, are included under constructed phenomena because, they are defined as 'things that have come to be owing to causes and conditions'. In the Buddhist understanding, everything in the world, excepting *nirvāṇa*, the only unconstructed phenomenon, is made of causes and conditions and hence constructed and dependent.

One way to refer to everything in the world is to refer to its material form *(rūpa)* or to matter with which it is made of. In the five-aggregate analysis, where *rūpa* occurs prominently, it refers to the physical aspect of the human being or human personality which is described in the discourses as "the four great elements and the form derived from the four great elements" (Bodhi, 2000, p. 895) and further characterized as "past, future or present, internal or external, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near" (Bodhi, 2000, p. 916). In the Abhidhamma we find a more comprehensive analysis of the material aspect of the human

personality, the four great elements and, in particular, "the form derived from the four great elements" analyzed into twenty-four all of which are associated with human being.

Matter or material form, however, has a much larger reference, namely, the external world that comes to our sensory perception or that lie beyond our immediate field of sensory perception. This expansion of the concept of materiality may be justified with reference to the above-mentioned characterization of aggregate of matter, in particular, as internal and external and far or near which seem to make a distinction between what is subjective and what is objective. As Karunadasa has shown (2015, pp. 14-15), however, these pairs of characteristics are understood as referring to the individual's experience of matter and not to matter directly. We have to look for other arguments. The fact that the objectivity of material form, or its existence independently of one who perceives it, is a basic assumption in the Buddhist path which provides a stronger justification for treating materiality as existing independently of human being and extending beyond its immediate reference in human personality, namely, the five aggregates[2].

The frequent references found in the discourses to the world, *loka*, has to be understood as indicative of the matter in this objective sense existing independent of human being. According to the Buddhist understanding, there are innumerable

2. Refer to Karunadasa (2015 pp. 165-166) on how matter is not in itself a fetter but it is one that productive of fetter which affirms the existence of matter independently of one who perceives it. The following canonical statement provides further support:
They are not sense pleasures, the world's pretty things:
Man's sensuality is the intention of lust.
The pretty things remain as they are in the world.
But the wise remove the desire for them (Bodhi, 2000. p. 111)

systems of world, referred to as *loka-dhātu*. The duration of these worlds or the systems of worlds is calculated in eons *(kappa)*, the longest duration of time mentioned in the Buddhist literature. They evolve through four stages, dissolving and remaining in the state of dissolved, and evolving and remaining in the state of evolution. Each phase of this evolution persists for so many eons. The Buddha describes the innumerability of eons and the process of evolution of the world that takes place within such a long duration in the following words:

> Bhikkhus, there are these incalculable divisions of an eon. What four? The time during which an eon evolves, which cannot easily be calculated as 'so many years' or 'so many hundreds of years' or 'so many thousands of years' or 'so many hundreds thousands of years.'
>
> The time during which an eon remains in a state of dissolution, which cannot easily be calculated as … hundreds thousands of years.
>
> The time during which an eon evolves, which cannot easily be calculated as … hundreds of thousands of years.
>
> The time during which an eon remains in a state of evolution, which cannot easily be calculated as … hundreds of thousands of years.' (Bodhi, 2012. pp. 521-522; Aṅguttara-nikāya II, 1995, p. 142.)

The length of these countless eons are equally beyond imagination. The Buddha described the enormity of the length of the time of an eon by using the following similes:

> Suppose, …, there was a great stone mountain a yojana long, a yojana wide, and a yojana high, without holes or crevices, one solid mass of rock. At the end of every

> hundred years a man would stroke it once with a piece of Kasian cloth. That great stone mountain might by this effort be worn away and eliminated but the aeon would still not have come to an end. So long is an aeon.
>
> Suppose, …, there was a city with iron walls yojana long, a yojana wide, and a yojana high, filled with mustard seeds as dense as a topknot. At the end of every hundred years a man would remove one mustard seed from there. The great heap of mustard seeds might by this effort be depleted and eliminated but the aeon would still not have come to an end. (Bodhi, 2000, p. 654; Saṃyutta-nikāya II, 2000, pp. 181-821).

On how many eons have elapsed and gone by, another way of highlighting the vast length of an eon, the Buddha says that it is not easy to count them as hundreds, or thousands or hundreds of thousands. He gives two similes to clarify his assertion. One is the simile of four disciples with the life span of one hundred years, living one hundred years and recollecting hundred thousand eons in each day, they would die after one hundred years with eons not recollected still remaining. The other is the simile of the grains of the sands of the entire Gangā river from its point of origin to the point at which it enters the see: as it is not easy to count the number of grains of sands, so is the number of eons (Bodhi, 2000, pp. 655-656).

Once one cycle consisting the four phases mentioned above is over, another would begin without any pause. The process will go on endlessly, thus making any concept of the end or termination of the world system meaningless. This process is described as natural, and does not need any creator (or a destroyer), divine or otherwise. The point is that all constructed

phenomena are impermanent and change and come to an end. But it is really not the end for from that point onwards, a new cycle of constructed phenomena starts evolving. In the well-known 'Discourse on Knowing the Origin' the endless process of continuity and change has been described in the following manner:

> There comes a time, … when, sooner or later after a long period, this world contracts [dissolves]. At a time of contraction [dissolution], beings are mostly born in the Ābhassara Brahma world. And there they dwell, mind-made, feeding on delight, self-luminous, moving through the air, glorious – and they stay like that for a very long time. But sooner or later, after a very long period, this world begins to expand [evolve] again. At a time of expansion [evolution], the beings from the Ābhassara Brahma world, having passed away from there, are mostly reborn in this world. Here they dwell, mind-made, feeding on delight, self-luminous, moving through the air, glorious – and they stay like that for a very long time.
>
> At that period, … there was just one mass of water, and all was darkness, blinding darkness. Neither moon nor sun appeared, no constellations or stars appeared, night and day were not distinguished, nor months, and fortnights, no years, or seasons, and no male and female, beings being reckoned just as beings. And sooner or later, after a very long period of time, savoury earth spread itself over the waters where those beings were. … [and the process goes on] (Walshe, 2012. pp. 409-410; Dīgha-nikāya III, 1976, pp. 80-98).

This account, in the form of a myth, is meant to highlight the non-static dynamic character of the world, a manifestation of matter, which is none other than a *saṅkhārā*.

This ever-changing character of the constructed phenomena, world in this context, is referred to in the teaching of the Buddha as 'impermanence' *('anicca')*. When in the discourses the conditioned reality is described as being manifested in three characteristics, namely, arising, ceasing and the change of what exists[3] they refer to impermanence which is tantamount to change. The term *'vipariṇāma'* which refers to change but etymologically means evolution and occurring in stock phrases that describe the nature of constructed reality and as one of the three modes of suffering (*vipariṇāma-dukkha* - suffering caused by change) (Walshe, 2012. p. 484; Saṅgīti-sutta, Dīgha-nikāya III, 2006, p. 216). captures the changing aspect even better. The world or the constructed phenomena as cosmological manifestation, continues and evolves in this manner without absolute termination.

Continuity and Change of the Individual within Saṃsāra

Although the individual and his/her *saṃsāra* may clearly be treated under the constructed phenomena the reason for a separate discussion is the utmost significance attributed to the release from suffering in the teaching of the Buddha. The following statement of the Buddha reiterates this position: "Bhikkhus, both formerly and now what I teach is suffering and the cessation of suffering"

3. Bhikkhus, there are these three characteristics that define the conditioned. What three? An arising is seen, a vanishing is seen, and its alteration while it persists is seen. These are the three characteristics that define the conditioned. (Bodhi, 2012, p. 246).
   These three should not be confused with the well-known teaching, three characteristics reality *(ti-lakkhaṇa)*, impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and no-self, all three applying to all constructed phenomena and only the last applying to the unconstructed phenomena, namely, *nirvāṇa.*

(Bodhi, 2001, p. 234; Majjhima-nikāya I, 2002, p. 140). As the Buddhist hermeneutical tradition has amply demonstrated[4] any aspect of the teaching of the Buddha ultimately has relevance to the understanding of and making an end to human suffering. Hence the need to discuss this aspect of constructed phenomena on its own.

Suffering refers to that of the individual, and an unenlightened ordinary human being experiences suffering by undergoing the repeated cycle of being born, getting old and finally dying, the process which popularly called *saṃsāra.* Although *saṃsāra* is spoken of as if it is an abstract concept, it is defined with reference to the individual who is caught up in it. In the well-known Visuddhimagga (Paññābhūmi-niddesa), Buddhaghosa defines *saṃsāra* in the following manner: "The endless chain of aggregates – of elements, of bases too; that carries on unbrokenly – Is what is called 'the round of births' (Ñānamoli, 1956. p. 626). This analysis highlights the fact that *saṃsāra* is understood with reference to a particular assemblage of aggregates, elements and bases, namely, the individual in Buddhist understanding. In laying emphasis on the unbrokenness of the process this statement seems to capture the idea of continuity.

The following account given by a modern authority takes later Abhidhamma characterization too into consideration:

> 'Round of rebirth', literally 'perpetual wandering', is a name by which is designated the sea of life ever restlessly heaving up and down, the symbol of this continuous

4. The two texts, Nettippakaraṇa and Peṭakopadesa, treated in the Burmese tradition as belonging to the tipiṭaka itself, and the entire Pali commentarial tradition based on the principles developed in these two texts bear evidence to this.

> process of ever again and again being born, growing old, suffering and dying. More precisely put, *Saṃsāra* is the unbroken chain of fivefold *Khandha*-combinations, which, constantly changing from moment to moment follow continuously one upon the other through inconceivable periods of time. Of this *saṃsāra*, a single lifetime constitutes only a tiny and fleeting fraction;… (Nyānatiloka, 1987, p. 160).

Saṃsāra is usually characterized as very long. The well-known statement articulating this character is the following: "This *saṃsāra* is without discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and wandering on hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving" (Bodhi, 2000, p. 651). In addition to asserting that the beginning of the *saṃsāra* cannot be discerned, discourses go into great details to highlight its inconceivable length. In fact, the instances we referred to above on the length of an eon occur in this context in order to describe the enormous length of *saṃsāra.* Unlike eons and worlds or world systems which are countless, *saṃsāra* is always referred to in singular form indicating that ultimately *saṃsāra* is each individual's *saṃsāra.* Discourses go into even further details to drive this point home. The following points are elaborated in the discourses: (i) Pile of bones one would leave behind in the course of the *saṃsāra* will be as large as the mount Vepulla. (ii) The stream of blood one would have shed when one was beheaded in the course of *saṃsāra* is more than the water in the four great oceans. The stream of blood one would have shed when one was beheaded as a cow, as a buffalo, as a sheep, as a goat, as chickens and as a pig, as a deer, as a burglar, as a highwayman, and an adulterer is more than the water in the four great oceans. (iii) It is not easy to find a being who in this long

course has not previously been one's mother, father, brother, sister, son or daughter (Bodhi, 2000, pp. 651-657).

A superficial reading of these discourses would cause the impression that *saṃsāra* is something that exists independently of particular individuals or beings. Perhaps the discourses refer to *saṃsāra* in this manner taking into consideration that the samsaric existence is shared by all living beings. Accordingly, although the abstract concept of *saṃsāra* may seem justifiable there cannot be a *saṃsāra* independently of those beings who roam in it. Therefore, the *saṃsāra* is always one's particular cycle of *saṃsāra,* and hence the reference to *saṃsāra* in the singular form, as mentioned above.

As we saw in the above discussion (Visuddhimagga definition of *saṃsāra*) an individual is an intermixture of physical and mental factors classified variously as aggregates, elements and bases, three ways of characterizing existence of beings in early discourses. According to the aggregate-analysis a (human) being is made of five aggregates, namely, the material form, feeling, perception, (karmic) formations, and consciousness. In the analyses by way of elements and bases, this same constitution is given with somewhat different emphasis. In the analysis by way of elements, a human being is made of eighteen elements, namely, the elements of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind (the six internal sensory faculties); elements of visual form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mental phenomena (their objects); and consciousness associated with the six faculties mentioned above (the element of eye consciousness etc.). In the analysis by way of bases, a human being is composed of the six bases of inner faculties, namely, the base of eye etc. and the corresponding

external objects such as the base of visual form etc. The main purpose of these three ways of analyzing human existence is to show that there is nothing over and above these phenomena all of which are inseparably interconnected , in particular, to show that there is nothing to be identified as enduring soul or self *(ātma)* in any being including human beings. As far as the discussion of continuity and change is concerned, these analyses highlight that the distinction, popular in philosophical discussions, between unchanging substance and changing qualities is not accepted in Buddhist thought.

These aggregates, elements and bases with which human being is made of themselves are impermanent and changing. In the doctrine of dependent origination, the human personality is referred to by the term *'nāma-rūpa'* (name and form, mind-matter or mentality-materiality) which is understood as referring to psychological and physical aspects human being. The discourses define this combination in the following words:

> And what, bhikkhus, is name and form? Feeling, perception, volition, contact, attention: this is called name. The four great elements and the form derived from the four great elements: this is called form. Thus, this name and this form are together called name-and-form (Bodhi, 2000, p. 535; Saṃyutta-nikāya II, 2000, pp. 3-4).

In the five aggregates analysis, feeling, perception, karma formations and consciousness come under mentality and physical form comes under materiality. The analyses in terms of elements and bases too have to be in this manner.

The human personality that comes within the broader concept of 'constructed phenomena' is subject to the three

characteristics common to all such phenomena, namely, arising, destruction and 'alteration while it exists' (change) (Bodhi, 2012, p. 246. See note 6 above.). These three characteristics featured in the discourses have been greatly elaborated in the later Abhidhamma works by making use of the concept of moment *(khaṇa)* which was newly developed to measure the existence of mind and matter in relation to each other. According to this view, i.e. theory of moments, the duration of the existence of mind and matter is measured by moments. Following the characterization given in the discourses, the mental and material phenomena were understood as undergoing this process without an end. There is, however, a difference between the length of the existence of mental and physical phenomena: mind is extremely fast whereas matter is less so.

This idea of the relative difference of the duration of the existence between mind and matter is supported by the early discourses. In discussing the nature of mind and matter the Buddha said the following: "Bhikkhus, I do not see even one other thing that changes so quickly as the mind. It is not easy to give a simile for how quickly the mind changes" (Bodhi, 2012. p. 97; Aṅguttara-nikāya I, 1999, p. 10). Relative to the mind, matter was considered lasting longer. This characterization that was described in general terms in the discourses was given a more precise articulation later by means of theory of moments according to which mind exists for a moment, called 'thought moment *(citta-khaṇa)*, which is made of three sub-moments, those of arising *(uppāda)*, persistence *(ṭhiti)* and dissolution *(bhaṅga)* which are "said in the commentaries to be of inconceivably short duration and to last no longer than the billionth part of the time occupied by a flash of lightening" (Nyanaponika, 1970,

p. 41). These thought moments do not arise in isolation; they arise in a series which is called 'thought process' *(citta-vīthi)*. A perceptual process, for example, lasts seventeen of such moments. It happens in the following manner. When it is not experiencing any object, mind is in a state called 'life continuum (or the continuity of consciousness) *(bhavaṅga)*, understood as "the foundation or condition of existence, as the sine qua non of life, having the nature of a process" (Nyanatiloka, 1970, p. 33). When an object comes to the mind through the sensory doors, the *bhavaṅga* process gets disturbed and the process of perceiving starts to take place. It goes through seventeen thought moments identified as: (i) continuity of consciousness *(bhavṅga)* (ii) excitation of *bhavaṅga (bhavaṅga-calana)* (iii) sense-door consciousness *(pañcadvāra-āvajjana*), (iv) eye-consciousness *(cakkhu-viññāṇa)*, (v) acceptance of the object *(sampaṭicchana)*, (vi) investigation of the object *(santīraṇa),* (vii) determining the object *(votthapana),* (viii) – (xv) seven series of impulsion *(javana),* (xvi-xvii) and the registering consciousness *(tadārammaṇa)*. At the completion of the process, the mind returns to *bhavaṅga* from where it arises again and would keep this process going in that manner as long as external or internal objects keep coming.

The matter, the other aspect of human personality, too is characterized as existing through three moments of arising, persistence and dissolution. The difference, however, is that one such moment of material existence is equal to seventeen thought moments referred to above. In other words, when matter passes one moment with three sub-moments mind has passed seventeen moments with each having three sub-moments (Bodhi, 1993, pp. 156-157). According to the Abhidhamma analysis, there

are twenty-eight types of matter, four out of which are called primary *(mahābhūta rūpa)* and the remaining twenty-four as dependent or secondary *(upādāya rūpa)*. Within this twenty-four are included four phases of matter, namely, the production of matter *(upacaya)*, its continuity *(santati)*, its decay *(jaratā)* and its impermanence *(aniccatā)*. These four phases are basically nothing other than the three characteristics of formations or constructed phenomena *(saṅkhārā)* mentioned above, namely, (to repeat), arising, dissolution and change (of what exists) manifested in ordinary human (or any other form of) life as birth, ageing, disease and death *(jāti, jarā, vyādhi, maraṇa)*.

This analysis of human personality highlights that an individual is nothing but a psycho-physical process that continues depending on conditions and that there is nothing in the form of an imperishable soul that persists through *saṃsāra*. This is continuity and change at a very subtle level which cannot be one's everyday experience. Nevertheless, it appears that the later Abhidhamma scholars carried their analysis to this extreme state for a soteriological purpose because, according to the Buddha, it is the belief in an enduring essence *(atta/ ātma)* in early Buddhist and Indian parlance that serves as the basis for one's attachment to the world, the main cause of suffering.

Notwithstanding that the individual does not have an enduring metaphysical entity or soul, he roams in the *saṃsāra* passing from one form of existence to another without stop till he attains *nirvāṇa*. How does this happen? In particular, in the absence of any enduring agent how does the process of rebirth take place, or who is it that is reborn? What ultimately matters here in the Buddhist understanding of reality is not a denial of

human being or his moral responsibility but how Buddhism understands the human being. The Buddhist teaching of no-self plays a key role here[5]. The fact that there is no soul in human beings has not been a problem for Buddhists to talk about moral agents and their continued existence through the long *saṃsāra*. If there is a perplexity about this way of treating the subject in the discourses, it is a result of not making a clear distinction between two ways of teaching (or using language) by the Buddha.

Accordingly, the discourses of the Buddha or his utterances have been classified as those whose meaning is explicit (or direct) *(nītattha)* and those whose meaning requires interpretation (or indirect) *(neyyattha)* discourses (Bodhi, 2012, p. 151; Aṅguttara-nikāya I, p. 60). Having referred to this distinction the Buddha further says that those who confuse these two modes of discourses misrepresent him. The direct discourses are the utterances of the Buddha in which he directly denies the existence of any metaphysical soul. The indirect discourses are those in which the Buddha refers to individuals and agents as if they truly exist. Such discourses need to be understood or interpreted as not referring to any enduring soul but as referring to individuals and agents as understood in a non-substantial sense. This distinction has been greatly elaborated in later Buddhist philosophy including Abhidhamma as conventional *(sammuti/ samvṛti)* and absolute *(paramattha/paramārtha)* corresponding respectively to indirect and direct modes of teaching[6]. What is implied is that, when the Buddha refers to people as if they are

5. For a comprehensive discussion on the Buddhist concept of no-self, refer to (Karunadasa, 2013, Chapter 4).
6. See Nāgarjuna's Mūlamadhyamakārikā, Chapter 24 (2001, p.150) on the crucial role of this distinction in interpreting the teaching of the Buddha.

moral agents or doers of various deeds, he does not mean an enduring and permanent entity but complex processes made of causes and condition which in themselves are processes dependently originated and hence subject to change[7].

The discourses explain this process of repeated birth and death in broad outlines whereas the Abhidhamma goes into minute details referring to moments of consciousness, referred to above. According to the discourses beings are repeatedly born in the *saṃsāra* determined by their good and bad (*puñña* and *pāpa*) or skillful and unskillful (*kusala* and *akusala*) actions[8]. On being asked as to why human beings are seen to be inferior and superior, short-lived and long-lived, etc. the Buddha lays emphasis on the crucial role of karma in the process by following words: "Beings are owners of their actions, heirs of their actions, they originate from their actions, are bound to their actions, have their actions as their refuge. It is action that distinguishes beings as inferior and superior" (Bodhi, 2001, p. 1053). The Buddha further explains this with reference one's good or bad (moral or immoral) actions: those who kill, wound or harm living beings, consequently, are born after their death 'in a state of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, even in hell.' Those who adopt the opposite behavior by abandoning killing living beings and by living gently, kindly and compassionately toward all living beings will, after their death, be born in a happy destination, in the

7. See (Jayatilleke, 1963, p. 362) for a discussion on these two types of discourses from a philosophical point of view.
8. Both these categories basically refer to physical, verbal or mental actions performed either with the states of mind defiled by desire, anger and delusion *(lobha, dosa, moha)*, in which case they are bad or unskillful, or not defile by them and consequently good or skillful.

heavenly world[9]. This basic belief associated with the continuity of human existence is assumed in all Buddhist traditions and teachings. The very first two stanzas of the Dhammapada, one of the most well-known collections of the sayings of the Buddha, articulate this view in the following words:

> Mind is the forerunner of (all evil) states. Mind is chief; mind-made are they. If one speaks or acts with wicked mind, because of that, suffering follows one, even as the wheel follows the hoof of the draught-ox. Mind is the forerunner of (all good) states. …If one speaks or acts with pure mind, because of that, happiness follows one, even as one's shadow that never leaves (Narada, 1993, p. 1-5).

The doctrine of dependent origination *(paṭicca samuppāda)*, referred to above, is understood as a more 'technical' explanation of this *samsāric* process of the being. Traditionally this explanation is understood as involving past, present and future forms of existence of beings who roam in the *saṃsāra*. Accordingly, Buddhaghosa, the great commentator of the Pali canon, groups the twelve aspects of the dependent origination theory into past causes and present results, present causes and future results (Ñaṇamoli, 1956, p. 669). In this theory, constructions *(saṅkhārā)*, as we have seen already, refer to physical, verbal and mental karma formations which are good, bad or neutral and condition the consciousness of the being who is ready to be reborn after his present death.

The discourses do not mention much on how rebirth takes place except for affirming the belief that all beings who have not

9. See (Bodhi, 2001, pp. 1053-1057) for the complete exposition (The Shorter Exposition of Action). For the original Pāli version, refer to Cullakammavibhaṅga-sutta, Majjhima-nikāya III, 1994, pp. 202-206.

realized *nirvāṇa* are liable to be reborn. One rare occurrence, though, is found in the collection of the middle length discourses[10] according to which, in order for the embryo to descend, three factors have to come together, namely, the union of the mother and the father, mother's being in season and the presence of a "being driven on by the mechanism of *kamma*" (Bodhi, 2001, p. 1234). This account suggests that the birth of a particular being to particular parents takes place according to that person's good or bad karma or behavior. The Abhidhamma goes into further details by making use of the idea of *bhavaṅga* or the life-continuum which serves as the connecting point of the dead person's last thought moment, 'departing consciousness' *(cuti-citta)* with the first thought moment of the person being born, the relinking consciousness *(paṭisandhi-citta)*. The *bhavaṅga* process thus started with the new person is conditioned by the *bhavaṅga* process of that person's previous existence. It is said that the *bhavaṅga* between the death and the birth has as its object the good and bad actions committed by the person which determine his new life. The new life characterized by the birth of a new *bhavaṅga* process thus determined by *karma* can be in one of the six modes of existence at celestial, demi-gods', human, animal or hellish spheres or at the sphere of hungry ghosts[11]. It is held that the *bhavaṅga* process begun at birth persists through one's entire life only to be changed, negatively or positively, at the next birth.

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10. The greater discourse on the destruction of craving (Mahātaṇhāsaṅkhaya-sutta, Majjhima-nikāya I, 2002, pp. 256-271; Bodhi, 2001, pp. 349-361)
11. Karma being a vast field in Buddhist thought covering such details as what is karma, how does it function, how does it produce effects, where and when does it produce effects etc. cannot be dealt with adequately in this context. For details, refer to entries on *kamma* by D.J. Kalupahana and Asanga Tilakaratne in Encyclopaedia of Buddhism (Vol.VI, 1996, pp.108-121) published by the Government of Sri Lanka.

According to this analysis the continuity of a being in his or her cycle of existence, i.e. *saṃsāra,* is not totally negative or positive in nature. Beings 'obstructed by ignorance, shackled by craving' roam in various pleasurable or woeful states and spheres depending on their good or bad physical, verbal and psychological behavior. The life span of celestial and hellish spheres is said to be too long in extreme pleasure or in extreme woe that one cannot expect for much improvement. From that perspective, to be born as a human being, whose life span is neither too short nor too long, allows for opportunities for further improvement. Accordingly, it is held that only a human being is capable of making an end to suffering by realizing *nirvāṇa*, making thereby an end to continuity and change.

Nirvāṇa: the unconditioned *(asaṅkhata)*

From what is conditioned or the conditioned phenomena we move on to *nirvāṇa*, the ultimate goal of Buddhist way of life, which is unconditioned and has characteristics opposite to those of *saṃsāra*. As we saw in the earlier discussion, continuity and change were considered to be the characteristics of the constructed phenomena. The unconditioned *(asaṅkhata)* has been defined in the following words: "Bhikkhus, there are these three characteristics that define the unconditioned. What three? No arising is seen, no vanishing is seen, and no alteration while it persists is seen. These are the three characteristics that define the unconditioned" (Bodhi, 2012, p. 246). In another instance we find an answer given by the Buddha for a question raised, apparently, having the unconditioned reality in mind:

Question:
From where do the streams turn back?
Where does the round no longer revolve?
Where does name and form cease,
Stop without remainder?

Answer:
Where water, earth, fire and air,
Do not gain a footing:
It is from here that the streams turn back.
Here that the round no longer revolves;
Here name-and-form ceases,
Stops without remainder. (Bodhi, 2000, p. 103)

The expression 'round no longer revolves' seems to have direct reference to the phenomenon of continuity in *saṃsāra* which is called 'round' or 'circle' (*vaṭṭa*) in the sense that beings caught up in it roam endlessly. This statement refers to *nirvāṇa*, the final goal, [though it is not mentioned by name] and is contrasted with the existence in the material world made of the four great elements, earth, water, heat and air, which are liable to arise, to dissolve and to perish. This character of *nirvāṇa* is further emphasized in a dialogue the Buddha had with a celestial being named Rohitassa. He queries:

> Is it possible, venerable sir, by traveling to know or see or to reach the end of the world, where one is not born, does not age, does not die, does not pass away, and is not reborn?
>
> The Buddha answers:
> As to that end of the world, friend, where one is not born, does not age, does not die, does not pass away, and is not reborn – I say that it cannot be known, seen, or reached by traveling. (Bodhi, 2000, p. 157)

The soteriological character of the ultimate Buddhist answer, how the Buddha would bring back the whole 'cosmological' problem to the sphere of the individual, becomes clear in what the Buddha asserts as the summing up of his response to Rohitassa's query:

> Friend, I say that without having reached the end of the world there is no making an end to suffering. It is, friend, in just this fathom-high carcass endowed with perception, and mind that I make known the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world, and the way leading to the cessation of the world.
>
> The world's end can never be reached – By means of traveling [through the world]
>
> Yet without reaching the world's end – There is no release from suffering. (Bodhi, 2000, p. 158)

In this context, the term 'world' has been used in two different senses, the physical world which does not have an end that human beings can reach by traveling, indicating thereby a limitation of being human or even being celestial, and the experienced world which is within one's reach and which alone, in the Buddhist way of thinking, has meaning to human beings.

Another way to understand how *nirvāṇa* marks the end of the continuity and change is to understand how *karma* functions within one's life. We discussed earlier how beings roam in the *saṃsara* enjoying or suffering results *(vipāka)* as determined by the good and bad nature of those actions. Actions become bad *(pāpa)* when they are caused by the three unwholesome roots, namely, desire *(lobha)*, anger *(dosa)* and delusion *(moha)*. Actions become good *(puñña)* when they are motivated by the

three wholesome roots, absence of desire *(alobha)*, absence of anger *(adosa)* and absence of delusion *(amoha)*. These actions have the capacity to produce results by way of causing re-birth in blissful or woeful states and subsequent series of results to those beings who are thus re-born. So long as one keeps on performing such actions (or, in traditional parlance, 'accumulates good and bad actions') one's *samsāric* existence continues.

The *samsāric* existence, characterized by suffering, is discontinued at *nirvāṇa*, and that too is associated with one's actions characterized by the three wholesome roots referred to above. In order to solve the apparent puzzle posed by the twin role of wholesome roots in causing re-birth in blissful states in samsara and causing the discontinuation of *saṃsāra* we have to note a distinction between good *(puñña)* and wholesome *(kusala)* actions. The former, though based on wholesome roots, are motivated by the desire for blissful continuation in the *saṃsāra.* Consequently, those who perform such actions are repeatedly born into blissful states, nevertheless, within *saṃsāra.* An example for such an action is to make a donation *(dāna),* the most popular mode of performing 'meritorious deeds' in Buddhist societies, with the hope of securing a blissful rebirth which, in the ideal sense, is nothing other than the *samsāric* existence. The latter, the wholesome roots (*kusala*), on the contrary, when performed in their pure state become conducive to eliminate defilements including the desire which is identified as the key factor in *samsāric* existence and hence *samsāric* suffering. This distinction is not applicable in the same manner to bad *(pāpa)* and unwholesome *(akusala)* actions for both are caused by unwholesome roots. Accordingly, when one realizes nirvāna, one does not perform either bad or unwholesome actions; nor does one perform good actions in the sense of rebirth-producing

actions, and performs only wholesome actions which do not cause rebirth, even blissful rebirth. Consequently, an arahant, the person who has attained the nirvanic goal, is described as "one who has transcended both good and evil" (Narada, 1993. p. 41), and such person's life has been described as 'possessing [all] wholesome states' (adapted from Bodhi, 2001. p. 725; Majjhima-nikāya II, 2004, p.116). It goes without saying that, when one reaches this level of abandoning both types of actions that lead to re-birth, such persons, arahants, do not have a rebirth. In Abhidhamma terminology, it is possible to say that arahants do not have a relinking consciousness after their last departing thought moment. For this reason, their passing away is not referred to as 'death' *(maraṇa)* which is used with regard to ordinary people, but as 'complete extinguishment' *(parinibbāna)*, 'like the extinguishment of a lamp' (Sutta-nipāta, 1965, pp. 41-42). And it is here that 'the round no longer revolves.'

Conclusion

The foregoing should have shown that continuity and change are not treated as abstract concepts in Buddhism, and that there is much in it, in particular, in its theories of reality and liberation (ontology and soteriology), that involve continuity and change. The soteriological emphasis of the discussion of impermanence in Buddhism can be discerned in recurring statements in which it is tied with the other two characteristics of reality. "It is from the fact of impermanence that, in most texts, the other two characteristics, suffering *(dukkha)* and not-self *(anatta)* are derived" (Nyānatiloka, 1970, p. 14). The quasi-logical presentation of this matter[12] ultimately leads to a practical

12. *Yadaniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ; yaṃ dukkhaṃ tadanattā* (Saṃyutta-nikāya III, 2001, p. 22) What is impermanent is suffering. What is suffering is nonself (Bodhi, 2000, p. 869)

soteriological conclusion as illustrated in the following dialogue of the Buddha with his disciples in the Alagaddūpama-sutta:

> Bhikkhus, what do you think? Is material form [applies to other four aggregates too] permanent or impermanent? - Impermanent venerable sir. Is what is impermanent suffering or happiness? – Suffering, venerable sir. – Is what is impermanent, suffering and subject to change, fit to be regarded thus: 'This is mine, this I am, this is my self? No, venerable sir. (Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi 2001, p. 232; Majjhima-nikāya I, 2002, p. 138)

Upon arriving at this conclusion, the Buddha's advice to his disciples is to give up that which does not belong to them (*yaṃ na tumhākaṃ taṃ pajahatha*, ibid, p. 140).

Since this discussion is based on the Pali canonical and post-canonical literature, what was said on continuity and change are basically what we can gather from those sources. The general picture developed here, however, in particular about *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, is shared by all Buddhist traditions, namely, Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions alike. A possible exception to this general picture might be certain East Asian Buddhist traditions which promote as the final destination the concept of a blissful Pure Land (Sukhāvatī) where the Buddha with immeasurable span of life *(amita+āyush)* and immeasurable illumination *(amita+ābha)* resides.

Such differences aside, there is an overarching moral significance of continuity and change shared by all Buddhist traditions. That is the idea of changeability, an extension of the idea of change, of human being for better or for worse. Both the ideas of change and changeability are predicated on the

unique Buddhist idea of *anātma* or the absence of enduring and unchanging soul. It is this fundamental idea in Buddhism that makes a moral universe possible. In all probability this is what the great Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna wished to establish by his concept of emptiness *(śūnyatā)*. But that is another theme to be discussed.

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The Two Genres of Mahayana Literature: The Prajñā-pāramitā and the Tathāgata-garbha Texts

C. D. Sebastian

Professor of Philosophy, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, Mumbai.
sebastian@iitb.ac.in

Abstract

Canonical and classical Mahayana Buddhist literature falls into two classifications, namely, the Prajñā-pāramitā and the Tathāgata-garbha genres. The Prajñā-pāramitā ("Perfection of Wisdom") literature is the body of sūtras and their commentaries that represents the oldest major forms of Mahayana Buddhism. The primary purpose of the Prajñā-pāramitā ("Perfection of Wisdom") is to teach the (ultimate) truth of *śūnyatā*. On the other hand, the Tathāgata-garbha literature deals with the doctrine of the existence of the "*Tathāgata-garbha*" (Buddha-Matrix, Buddha-Embryo, Buddha-Essence, Buddha-Nature) in all sentient beings. The Prajñāpāramitā class of texts emphasizes the highest wisdom *(prajñā)* while the Tathāgatagarbha text unravels the significance of compassion or empathy *(karuṇā)* in its existential and practical world.

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In this paper a brief exposition of these two classes of Mahayana literature is presented with a submission that these two genres are complementary, and not opposed.

Keywords: *Buddha-Nature, Mahayana, Perfection of Wisdom, Prajñā-pāramitā, Tathāgatagarbha*

Introduction

The canonical and classical Mahayana Buddhist literature falls into two classes: the Prajñā-pāramitā texts and the Tathāgata-garbha texts. "This distinction is essentially rooted in the doctrine of the Two Truths admitted in the Mahayana, viz., *Paramārtha* and *Samvṛti*. *Paramārtha* or ultimate truth is that of *śūnyatā*, and it is with this that the Prajñā-pāramitā literature is general concerned" (Chatterjee, 2005, p. vii). *Samvṛti* is empirical truth. The phenomenal world, including human beings, cannot simply be dismissed as void or *śūnya,* as it constitutes the existential predicament. In this phenomenal world the Tathāgata comes to the fore, accessible to human beings since they are essentially one with the Tathāgata (they are *tathāgata-garbha*). "This (existential) predicament and how it is to be resolved is dealt with in the other class of canonical literature, viz., *the Tathāgatagarbha* class" (Chatterjee, 2005, p. vii).

The Prajñā-pāramitā ("Perfection of Wisdom") literature is the body of *sūtra*s and their commentaries that represents the oldest major forms of Mahayana Buddhism. The primary purpose of the Prajñā-pāramitā ("Perfection of Wisdom") is to teach the ultimate truth of *śūnyatā*. The Tathāgata-garbha literature deals with the doctrine of the existence of the "*Tathāgata-garbha*" (Buddha-Matrix, Buddha-Embryo, Buddha-Essence, Buddha-Nature) in all sentient beings. In this study, a brief exposition

of these two classes of Mahayana literature is presented. Subsequently, in conclusion, it is submitted that these two genres are complementary rather than opposed.

The Prajñā-pāramitā Literature

The Mahayana tradition arose and developed in the beginning of the present era. The Prajñā-pāramitās are known as the first treatise of the Mahayana Buddhism (Shastri, 1989, pp. 8-9). The composition of Prajñā-pāramitā texts extended over 1000 years from 100 BC to 1200 AD (Conze, 2017). The Prajñā-pāramitā brings an entirely new phase in Buddhism in general, and Mahayana in particular. "A severe type of absolutism established by the dialectic, by the negation *(śūnyatā)* of empirical notions and speculative theories, replaces the pluralism and dogmatism of earlier Buddhism" (Murti, 1998, p. 83).

The *Prajñā-pāramitā*s, by the basic concept of *śūnyatā*, really revolutionized the entire Buddhism, in all its aspects of philosophy, religion and discipline. The fourteen *avyākṛta* ('inexpressibles' or unanswerable set of questions that the Buddha refused to answer) of the Buddha receive their significant interpretation in these texts. The dialectic that is suggested by the Buddha is the principal theme in these texts (Murti, 1977, p. x). The Prajñā-pāramitā tradition emphasized the development of the Bodhisattva Ideal. A Bodhisattva was a person who did not concentrate solely on his or her own enlightenment and the ensuing *nirvāṇa*, but was also very much concerned with bringing all sentient beings to enlightenment and *nirvāṇa* by cultivating compassion and the understanding of *śūnyatā*. This was elaborated in the Buddhist literature known as the Prajñā-pāramitā. The oldest and the basic Prajñā-pāramitā text is the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra.

The Meaning of *Prajñā-pāramitā*

The term '*prajñā-pāramitā'* is a central concept in Mahayana Buddhism. In Buddhism the term 'emancipation' means 'to get the *Bodhi* (the Wisdom of Buddha)' or 'to be perfectly enlightened' or in other words, it means, 'having obtained *prajñā.' Prajñā* is to be regarded as consisting of the 'intuition' or *nirvikalpa-jñāna* (the non-discriminating wisdom) and *nirvikalpa-pṛṣṭhalabdha-jñāna* (the wisdom obtained just after the non-discriminating wisdom). *Bodhi* (the Buddha's Wisdom and Enlightenment) is equal to *Prajñā,* that is, the wisdom which enables one to have unerring judgements and conducts in this world. Thus, the term *prajñā* implies wisdom, insight, and understanding, free from error.

The term *pāramitā* is not to be found in the early Buddhist canons, but appears in later Mahayana literature. Har Dayal had explained, on textual basis, that the term "*Pāramitā* is really derived from *parama* as the *Bodhisattva-bhūmi* clearly explains" (Dayal, 1978, p. 166) and *parama* means 'most distant,' 'last', 'highest,' 'most excellent,' 'greatest,' or 'superior.' "The *pāramitās* are so called because they are acquired during a long period of time (*parameṅa kālena samudāgatāh*) and are supremely pure in their nature *(paramayā svabhāva-viśuddhyā viśuddhāḥ*)" (Dayal, 1978, p. 166). The term *pāramitā*, occurring in the later writings of Buddhism, means 'the highest-ness' or 'the excellent-ness'. *Pāramitā* is used in the sense of a *'Bodhisattva-caryā'*, in the manner of 'the conduct by which one has reached to the other side' (here the 'other side' could be put as '*parama*', the ideal state of the living beings or the Buddha-hood). *Pāramitā*, as *Bodhisattva-caryā*, has been used with reference to six *pāramitā*s, namely*, dāna, śīla, kṣānti*,

vīrya, *dhyāna and prajñā* (Hitaka, 1983, pp. ix – xii). Thus, the meaning of the term '*prajñā-pāramitā'* is the 'highest wisdom' or 'perfection wisdom' (or even 'the perfection of wisdom').

The Origin, Development and Main Ideas of the Prajñā-pāramitā Literature

The place of origin of the Prajñā-pāramitā literature is a matter of debate. Edward Conze argued that it is of South Indian origin (Conze, 2017), whereas E. Lamotte argued that it was of north-western or Central Asian origin (Lamotte, 1954). A. L. Basham was of the strong view that the conception of transcendental nature of the Bodhisattvas came from the Central Asian background of Buddhism, whereas the philosophical content of Mahayana tradition most likely originated in the South Indian setting (Basham, 1981, p. 37). Paul Williams is of the opinion that "it is not possible at the present stage of our knowledge to make very many certain statements concerning either the origin or the development of the Prajñā-pāramitā literature" (Williams, 2009, p. 47).

As stated above, sometime in the first century BC a novel literature, namely, the Prajñā-pāramitā or the Perfection Wisdom started to emerge in Buddhism (Conze, 1978) which claimed to be the real *Buddha-vacana* (word of the Buddha). There are some 40 Prajñā-pāramitā texts, some very long and some short, which mainly explore the key conceptions of Mahayana Buddhism, like *śūnyatā* (a position against discursive thought, as *prajñā* is not discursive analysis), the Bodhisattva ideal, *mahākaruṇā* (compassion) together with *prajñā* (wisdom). This new literature paved way for a movement and interpretation in the direction of Mahayana. Let us remind ourselves that later on

the Prajñā-pāramitā literature became the basis for the classical study of Mahayana. The new literature was "not the product of some organized or unitary movement, and appears to have been produced by well within the existing Buddhist traditions" (Williams, 2009, p. 43). The Mahayana sūtras became some sort of object of worship, among them the perfection wisdom *sūtra*s (Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtras) are greater significance for the progress of Mahayana tradition.

The nucleus of enlightenment is *prajñā*, and there can be no *pāramitā* without *prajñā*. There came up a series of *sūtra*s, which lay special emphasis on *Prajñā-pāramitā*, holding that the *prajñā-pāramitā* is superior to the other five *pāramitā*s. The other five are taken as *pāramitā*s only when this particular *pāramitā* called *prajñā-pāramitā* is practiced. The *sūtra*s, thus, emphasizing this thesis is named the Prajñā-pāramitā-sūtras. The Prajñā-pāramitā texts are many, and the largest one might be the *Śa*tasāhasrikā with 100,000 ślokas, and the smallest is the Prajñā-pāramitā-hṛdaya with fewer than 14 *ślokas*. The other important Prajñā-pāramitā sūtras are the Aṣṭasāhasrikā, the Abhisamayālaṃkāranusareṇa saṃśodhita-Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā, the Saptaśatikā, the Vajracchedikā and the Suvikrāntavikrāmi-paripṛccha.

The large collection of Prajñā-pāramitā literature was concerned with the inherent *śūnyatā* of self and phenomena, and of the 'two truths' of the ultimate and conventional reality (Johnson, 2001, p. ix). In the *Prajñā-pāramitā*, the basic idea reiterated is that there is no change, no origination, no cessation, no coming in nor going out. The real is neither one nor many and neither *ātman* nor *anātman*. Origination and decay all

are imagined, that is, they are speculations. The real is *śūnya*, utterly devoid of conceptual constructions. It is transcendental to thought and can be realized only through no-dual knowledge, *prajñā*, the highest wisdom. *Prajñā-pāramitā*s are known as the first treatise of the Mahayana.

The Tathāgata-garbha Literature

Along with the Prajñā-pāramitā literature, there developed the Tathāgata-garbha literature, which was concerned with the existence of the Buddha-essence or Buddha-potential in all sentient beings. This Buddha-nature is very important, because, if all the sentient beings did not possess it, then the path of the Bodhisattva who tries to help all beings reach enlightenment would be useless. "The question of the *Tathāgata* is in fact about the ultimate ground of both the soul and objects - about the unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*) in general. The *Tathāgata* as the Perfect Man (*uttama puriso paraṃ puriso*) is the ultimate essence of the universe" (Murti, 1977, p. xiv). *Tathāgata* is not merely human, but also a cosmic principle.

The *Tathāgata-garbha* Doctrine

According to the *Tathāgata-garbha* doctrine, all beings have Buddha-nature, or the essence of the Buddha-hood, and all are potential Buddhas. This Buddha-nature is being covered with adventitious defilement (*āgantuka-kleśa*). When the adventitious defilement has been removed, the true nature becomes apparent, and this is called *aśraya-parāvṛtti*. All living beings live and exist in the world of the absolute called *Tathatā* or *Śūnyatā*. Just as the birds fly in the air so freely, so also all sentient beings breathe in the Buddha nature. Just as birds fly freely in the air, so too do

sentient beings breathe within Buddha-nature. Just as all things are permeated by air, so are all things permeated by Buddha-nature. It is because all living beings harbor this Buddha-nature within themselves that they are regarded as the germ (*dhātu*) that brings forth the Buddha-hood. Hence, every living being is said to be a *tathāgata-garbha* (or matrix of *tathāgata*) (Nagao, 1992, pp. 115-122). The meaning of the term *tathāgata-garbha* is that, it is the womb (*garbha*) where the *Tathāgata*s are conceived and matured; and we all are potential *tathāgata*s (Suzuki, 1981, p. 177).

In China and Japan, the most common synonym of *tathāgata-garbha* is the "Buddha-nature" (Chinese *fo- hsing*; and Japanese *bussho*). The Sanskrit terms, which correspond to *fo-hsing*, according to the *Ratna-gotra-vibhāgo-mahāyānottara-tantra* (or called simply as the Uttara-tantra) are *buddha-dhātu* and *buddha-gotra,* of which the former appears in the Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra, and the term *tathāgata-garbha* is found in the colophon of the Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra. The Laṃkāvatāra-sūtra uses the term *tathāgata-garbhavāda*. It should be noted that the term *buddha-dhātu* is not found in either the *Śrīmālasūtra* or the Laṃkāvatāra-sūtra (Sebastian, 2005, pp. 16-19).

The Tathāgata-garbha-sūtra is one of the most important sources for the *tathāgata-garbha* doctrine in the Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra and the Ratna-gotra-vibhāgo-mahāyānottara-tantra. The fundamental idea of the Tathāgata-garbha-sūtra is expressed in the formula, "*sarva-sattvās-tathāgata-garbhāḥ*" which could be translated as "all beings possess the *tathāgata-garbha*" (De Jong, 1979, p. 585). The Ratna-gotra-vibhāgo-mahāyānottara-tantra śāstra is the foremost example of this Tathāgata-garbha

literature. This text was originally written in Sanskrit and is known as the *Ratna-gotra-vibhāga*. "The book, *Ratna-gotra-vibhāga*, seems almost the only treatise extant that as attempted a systematization of the theory of *tathāgata-garbha*" (Nagao, 1992, p. 118).

The Tathāgata-garbha Sūtra

The Tathāgata-garbha Sūtra might have been the first of the tathāgata-garbha texts, which introduced the idea that all sentient beings possess the *tathāgata-garbha*, the Buddha-nature. This text gives the classical illustrations of how the *tathāgata-garbha* is veiled by the defilements. The text consists of nine examples, which represent the relationship between the *tathāgata-garbha* and the adventitious defilements (*kleśas*) that conceal it. The nine examples illustrated in this text are: the Buddha in an ugly lotus flower, honey concealed by a swarm of bees, a kernel of fruit in the bark, gold buried in impurities, a treasure in the ground, a sprout in a small seed, the image of the lord covered by a tattered garment, the Universal Monarch in the womb of a miserable woman, and a precious statue covered with dust. They are the examples illustrating the Essence of Buddha-hood (*tathāgata-garbha*) in the living beings. These same examples could be repeated in the Ratna-gotra-vibhāgo- mahāyanottara-tantra as well.

The Śrīmālādevī-siṃhanāda Sūtra

The Śrīmālādevī-siṃhanāda Sūtra is a text in which a character named Queen Śrīmālā instructs the assembly, speaking in both a devotional and philosophical manner about the *tathāgata-garbha* in positive terms. This text is, in a way**,** highly critical

of the negative interpretation of *śūnyatā*. It is one of the earliest Mahayana Buddhist scriptures dedicated specifically to the exposition of the *tathāgata-garbha* concept.The *garbha* is described as possessing the four *guṇa-pāramitās* as permanence, bliss, self, and purity qualities also found in the Ratnagotravibhāga-Mahāyānottaratantra. In this sūtra, the *garbha* is ultimately identified with the *Dharmakāya* of the *Tathāgata*. The text presents an elevation and adoration of the Buddha and his attributes, which may serve as a significant foundation for Mahayana devotionalism. It is regarded as the primary scriptural authority for the Ratnagotravibhāga-Mahāyānottaratantra, the most comprehensive *śāstric* treatment of the *tathāgata-garbha* in Mahayana Buddhism. The Śrīmālādevī-siṃhanāda Sūtra was considered the chief scriptural source in India for the doctrine of the universal potentiality for Buddhahood **(***tathāgata-garbha***)**, and its importance undoubtedly contributed to its historical popularity as a subject of commentary by Buddhist scholars in China and Japan. Scholars have identified it as a third-century product of the Mahāsaṃghika sect of South India (Wayman & Wayman, 2007, p. 5).

The Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa Sūtra

The Anūnatvāpūrṇatva-nirdeśa Sūtra is a short text that is extant only in the sixth-century Chinese translation by Bodhiruci. There is no surviving Sanskrit or Tibetan version of the complete text. However, fragments of the text in Sanskrit survive as quotations in the Ratnagotravibhāga-Mahāyānottaratantra and other related texts. Hence, scholars agree that the text originally existed in Sanskrit. The current Sanskrit title is a scholarly reconstruction based on the Chinese version.

In this sūtra, there is a complete identification of *tathāgata-garbha*, *sattva-dhātu*, and *dharmakāya* (or *dharma-dhātu*) (King, 1992, pp. 13-16).

The Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra

The Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra is a Mahayana alternative to the Mahāpari-nibbāna-suttanta of the early Buddhism. This text is extant only in Chinese and Tibetan, however Sanskrit fragments have been recovered. "The most important innovation of the text in the context of the development of *tathāgata-garbha* or Buddha-nature thought is its linking of the term *buddha-dhātu* or *tathāgata-dhātu*, which appears to be used for the first time in this text, with *tathāgata-garbha*" (King, 1992, p. 14). This text is a positively faith-promoting and spiritually affirmative manifestation of Buddhism which recognizes the hidden reality of the unconditioned, egoless Buddha-nature in all sentient beings (Yamamoto, 2013).

The Ratna-gotra-vibhāga Mahāyānottara-tantra-śāstra

These above-mentioned four most important *tathāgata-garbha sūtra*s and the *tathāgata-garbha* tradition are summarized and epitomized in the important *śāstra* called the Ratna-gotra-vibhāgo-mahāyānottara-tantra-śāstram or simply called the Uttaratantra (Uttaratantra, 1950). The Tibetan tradition attributes this text to Maitreya, as one of his five works. It is a fifth century text. Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese versions of the text are existing and available. A detailed analytical study of this text, interpreting every verse, is available to us today (Sebastian, 2005).

Other Important Texts

There are several other important tathāgata-garbha texts composed after the Śrīmālā-devi-siṃhanāda Sūtra, which though not treating the *tathāgata-garbha* doctrine exclusively or even intentionally, yet contained elements complementary to a final systematic presentation of the *tathāgata-garbha* theory. According to B. E. Brown, those texts which contain elements of *tathāgata-garbha* doctrine are the Dhāranīśvara-rāja Sūtra, the Ratnadārika S*ūtra*, the Jñānālokālamkāra Sūtra, the Sāgaramati-paripṛcchā, the Gagana-ganja-bodhisattva-paripṛccha, the Ratnacūḍa S*ūtra,* the Mahāyāna-abhidharma Sūtra, the Mahayana-sūtrālankāra, the Vajjracchedikā, the Aṣṭasāhasrikā, the *Dṛdhādhyāśaya-parivarta*, the *Tathāgata-guṇa-jñāna*-cintya-viṣayāvatāra-nirdeśa, the Kāṣyapa-parivarta, and the *Ṣaḍ*āyatana *S*ūtra (Brown, 1991, p. 43).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I submit that the two classes of Mahayana literature, namely, the Prajñā-pāramitā and the Tathāgata-garbha texts are complementary to each other in the large corpus of Mahayana Buddhism. J. Takasaki had opined that the Ratna-gotra-vibhāgo-mahāyānottara-tantra-śāstram aims at the criticism of the *Prajñā-pāramitā* (Takasaki, 1966, pp. 54-60). Takasaki's view could be challenged as *Śūnyatā* theory is complementary to the *Tathāgata-garbha* theory. Without the former, it is not possible to establish the latter (Prasad, 1997, p. 6). Even in the Ratna-gotra-vibhāgo-mahāyānottara-tantra-śāstra, a considerable part is devoted to establish the relationship between *tathāgata-garbha* and *śūnyatā*. It is said in the Ratna-gotra-vibhāgo-mahāyānottara-tantra-śāstra:

"*Tathāgata-garbha-jñāna-meva tathāgatānām śūnyatā-jñānam*" (the knowledge of the *tathāgatagarbha* is the knowledge of the emptiness of the Tathāgatas).[1]

In the Prajñā-pāramitā literature also we find the concept of *tathāgata-garbha* highlighted. The *Adhyardhaśatikā*, a Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra, evidently for the first time mentions the doctrine that all sentient beings are *tathāgata-garbha* (Ruegg, 1977, p. 285). Abhayākaragupta,[2] in his the *Munimatālaṃkāra*, refers to the verse 9:37 of the Mahayana-sūtrālaṃkāra quoted in the Commentary on the Ratna-gotra-vibhāgo-mahāyānottara-tantra-śāstra 1:148. It is a passage that deals with the universal presence of *Tathatā* in all sentient beings, saying that by his use of *'tathāgata*' the author accepts the *dharma-dhātu*, which has *pudgala-nairātmya* and *dharma-nairātmya* as its characteristics (Ruegg, 1977, p. 287). D. Seyfort Ruegg argues that in the Aṣṭasāharikā-prajñā-pāramitā: 3, there is a mention of *dhātu,* in the expression of *tathāgata-dhātu*, refers to a relic contained in a *stūpa*. By quoting the original source he goes on, "in as much as this notion of the *stūpa* as *tathāgata-dhātu-garbha* is thus found in the Prajñā-pāramitā literature, it could indeed be supposed

1. The *Ratna-gotra-vibhāgo-mahāyānottara-tantra-śāstra* 1: 154-156. In the commentary of 1:155 it is mentioned *Tathāgata-garbha-jñāna-meva tathāgatānām śūunyatā-jñānam.* It is translated by E. Obermiller in this manner: "The transcendental wisdom cognising the Essence of the Buddha is the knowledge about the Relativity of the Buddhas" (Obermiller, 1931, p. 236).
2. Abhayākaragupta (11th century AD) was a Buddhist monk, scholar and tantric master (*vajrācārya*) and the abbot of Vikramaśila. He was born in the city of Gaur, West Bengal, and is thought to have flourished in the late 11th-early 12th century AD, and died in 1125. Abhayākaragupta's *magmum opus*, the *Vajravāli*, is a "grand synthesis of tantric practice and rituals" which developed a single harmonized tantric ritual system which could be applied to all Tantric Buddhist mandalas.

that at least one of forerunner of the classical *tathāgatagarbha* theory is attested in this body of texts" (Ruegg, 1977, p. 288).

It must be correct to submit that the Prajñā-pāramitā literature always intends to take our attention to the *paramārtha* level, while the Tathāgata-garbha literature should be considered in the *samvṛti* level. One of the important features of Mahayana Buddhism is the practice of *prajñā-pāramitā*. *Prajñā* is supra-rational. It is the highest wisdom and insight. *Prajñā* unravels the reality as it is (*Prajñā yathābhūtam artham prajānati*). The object of *prajñā-pāramitā* is *tathatā*, *dharma-dhātu*, *bhūta-koṭi*, which are words used for the ultimate (*paramārtha*) in the Mādhyamika.[3] *Tathatā* is the truth, but it is impersonal. In order to reveal itself, it needs a medium. *Tathāgata* is that medium. *Tathāgata* is the reality personified or personalized. It has got both the aspects of the ultimate and the phenomena in it. He is identical with *tathatā*, but embodied in a human form. That is why *tathatā* is also called *Tathāgata-garbha* (Stcherbatsky, 1977, p. 55). *Śūnyatā* and *Karuṇ*ā are the essential characteristics of *Tathāgata*. *Śūnyatā* means *prajñā* (highest wisdom or insight). Having *śūnyatā* or *prajñā,* the *Tathāgata* is identical with *Tathatā* or *Śūnyatā*. Having *Karuṇ*ā, he is the saviour of all sentient beings. Thus, *Prajñā* stands for the *paramārtha* and *Karuṇ*ā for the *samvṛti* levels of the Reality (Stcherbatsky, 1977, p. 56).

3. Candrakirti writes, "*Ya sa dharmānām dharmatā nāma saiva tatsvarūpam*", which means "That which is the essential being of all elements of existence is the nature of reality." It is *tathatā*, it is reality such as it is. Again, Candrakirti says, *'tathābhāvo'vikāritvam sadaiva sthāyitā*", meaning " The thatness of reality consists in its invariability, in its remaining for ever as it is". This is as quoted by Th. Stcherbatsky. (1977, p. 55).

Hence, I submit that as there is the Prajñā-pāramitā literature, so also there is a separate (yet related to the *Prajñā-pāramitā*) class of texts known as the Tathāgata-garbha literature. The main theme of Tathāgata-garbha literature is the idea that 'all sentient beings possess the *tathāgata-garbha*.' The realization of the Buddha-nature, or *tathagata-garbha*, is possible only when one attains the highest wisdom (*prajñā*). Thus, these two classes of the texts are complementary in the Mahayana Buddhist corpus.

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The Bodhi Tree Legacy: Environmental and Psychological Significance of Bodhi-Pūjā

Ven. Nabirittankadawara Gnanaratana

Senior Professor (Chair), Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies, University of Kelaniya, Kelaniya.
gnanaratana@kln.ac.lk

Abstract

For millennia, Eastern cultures have venerated nature, with Buddhists particularly revering the Bodhi tree (Ficus religiosa) as a symbol of enlightenment and ecological harmony. Despite Western critiques dismissing such practices as unscientific or primitive, the Bodhi tree—requiring minimal resources while offering maximal oxygen—exemplifies its environmental significance. This paper examines Bodhipūjā, a Buddhist ritual honouring the Bodhi tree, arguing that it embodies a sustainable model for ecological and psychological well-being. The weeklong gaze *(animisa locana pūjā)* of the Buddha at the Bodhi tree after enlightenment symbolized gratitude to nature, fostering a legacy of tree preservation in Sri Lanka, where over 20,000 Bodhi trees are protected today. The study focuses on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their relevance to Buddhist teachings, with a particular emphasis on Bodhipūjā. In addition, Bodhipūjā serves as a psychotherapeutic tool, decreasing stress and fostering social harmony.

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Some critics reduced the role of ecological trusteeship and the mental health of the ritual. By integrating qualitative methodology and textual analysis, ethnographic insights methods, this paper argues that Buddhist environmental ethics—rooted in non-exploitation and gratitude—offer a transformative framework for addressing contemporary crises, such as climate change and psychological distress.

Keywords: *Bodhi tree, Bodhipūjā, Buddhist environmentalism, psychological well-being, sustainability*

Introduction

For thousands of years, Eastern nations have been paying homage to trees, mountains, rivers, forces of nature, and the earth. Meanwhile, Buddhists continue paying homage to the tree, which is called Bodhi.[1] Probably for the psychophysical well-being of sentient beings and the sustainability of the material world in which they are living. This act of veneration of the Bodhi tree by Buddhists was not pleasing to so-called developed nations, who looked at Eastern people as primitive, tribal, uncivilized, and perhaps as stupid communities. Looking through their own religious, economic, and cultural viewpoint, some people think this kind of practice is not scientific and logical, and some others hold the opinion that these are traditional beliefs and have no modern value at all in this digital era (Marasinha, 2016).

It should be mentioned that the above-mentioned are not only Europeans and Americans; even certain Asians who were born and raised amidst such practices also, after migrating to the above countries, criticize these practices and compare them with secular musical shows which aim to entertain educated

1. Bodhi tree, Bo tree, peepul tree, pipal tree; Botanical name, Ficus religiosa.

but unemployed youths in Sri Lanka. This is evident from the article 'Bodhipūjā; Collective Representation of Sri Lanka Youth' written by H. L. Seneviratne and Swarna Wickrameratne (1980). This article, no doubt, fulfils the requirement of the foreign organisation's objective that provided the funds to or understand? Not clear Buddhist practices, but doesn't signify the fundamental objectives and historical evolution of Bodhipūjā. Today, interestingly, the environment insists that every human being, irrespective of the country they hold citizenship to, revisit the accuracy and impartiality of their criticism towards the faith and devotion of Buddhists towards the environment and the meaning of their religious practices.

Since the beginning of 2020, the Coronavirus outbreak has become the most alarming threat to human life worldwide. This kind of pandemic will be stopped at one point, perhaps with the invention of a vaccine for the virus. Nevertheless, throughout the last two decades, the focal point of many global forums has been the fast degradation of the environment and the subsequent impacts and challenges that the world encounters. Therefore, I was tempted to take this issue for examination and put it forward for discussion when I saw recent considerations of world leaders, particularly the development goals of the United Nations Organization, which had been declared over the last 20 years. Accordingly, surpassing issues like civil wars and many other human hardships, world leaders, international organizations, and intellectuals have started to talk about nature-related issues such as climate change, sea-level rise, and global warming. This is evident from the recently declared goals of the UN, as the biggest international organization of countries.

In the past, the UN had paid attention to crises in certain nations, communities, and geographical regions. However, since the beginning of the present millennium, the UN has started to address global issues rather than regional issues. This shows the recently declared two sets of goals of the UN: (i) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and (ii) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). United Nations Millennium Declaration, signed in September 2000, commits world leaders to combat (i) poverty, (ii) hunger, (iii) disease, (iv) illiteracy, (v) environmental degradation, and (vi) discrimination against women. According to published reports, the UN aimed to achieve the above goals by 2015.

After 17 years, in 2017, replacing the above goals, the UN Organization introduced a new set of goals which is called Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which contains the issues such as (i) poverty, (ii) hunger, (iii) health, (iv) education, (v) gender equality, (vi) water and sanitation, (vii) clean energy, (viii) economic growth, (ix) infrastructure, (x) human settlements, (xi) climate change, (xii) marine resources, (xiii) echo-system, (xiv) justice for all, and (xv) global partnership.

It is clear that under the above development scheme, the UN seems to have focused considerable attention on environment-related problems, considering that nature can cause much more harm to the world than poverty, hunger, and diseases, among other issues. Recently, the heat of the bushfires in the Amazon and Australia, the melting of glaciers in the Andes and Greenland, record CO2 emissions, and numerous other global calamities have compelled developed nations to prioritize finding solutions to the alarming issue of climate change in almost all global forums.

Until the recent past, the word sustainable was limited to dictionaries. Development, industrialization, political stability, and economic growth were the targeted goals of so-called developed countries. Issues such as deforestation, overfishing, overuse of natural and mineral resources, and greenhouse gas emissions were either neglected or deliberately suppressed, given the pursuit of financial and economic benefits. Perhaps, developed nations might have thought they could keep their own countries clean, healthy, and cool, as well as free of natural disasters that people in other parts of the globe already encounter. But today, environmental disasters are alarming the entire world, irrespective of their social, political, and economic status.

The Ecological and Spiritual Significance of Trees

Today, the world has identified planting more and more trees as one of the most effective and indispensable solutions to protect the environment and the earth and slow down the forthcoming inevitable natural disasters. As we know, besides producing oxygen and reducing carbon dioxide, trees provide remarkable socio-economic and environmental benefits. Trees are usually seen as the lungs of the planet Earth. Trees can extend the life of the planet and the beings living on it. Trees absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and produce carbohydrates, which are useful for the growth of the planet (Luley & Nowak, 2004). Trees keep the world alive by producing food for all beings. Therefore, we cannot think of a world without trees and plants.

In the world, people grow plants and trees, most probably considering their commercial or aesthetic value, and cut them down whenever they are overgrown or reach the expected level. However, the Bodhi tree, because of its religious value and lack

of commercial value, has been able to survive in the world until its natural destruction. Among many other trees in the world, the Bodhi tree inherits the ability to grow and sustain itself in many parts of the world (Whistler, 2000). It is also a kind of tree that does not require human intervention for its growth and diffusion. Botanically, it is identified as an environmental or naturaised weed that can sustain and diffuse easily. The Bodhi tree has also been identified as a tree that consumes a minimum amount of groundwater for its existence. In Sri Lanka, there are two famous Bodhi trees subject to veneration for centuries, one in Isurumuniya and the other in Tantirimale, which live on granite rocks without connecting with the soil on the ground. Nevertheless, botanically, this tree has been identified as one of the few trees that can generate the maximum amount of oxygen that is necessary for the prevalence of life on Earth.

Considering the vital necessity of vegetation, in the recent past, there were several mega-scale successful tree-planting projects in different countries of the world. Interestingly, many of them have been initiated by individual volunteers who have compassionate thoughts toward the animate and inanimate world. Government or organizational-level tree-planting projects probably require a huge sum of funds but produce fewer results. It is said in UN reports that to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, annual investment requirements across all sectors have been estimated at around $5-7 trillion.[2] It is also reported that though the UN provides a lot of money to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the result is not satisfactory. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019 states, “Notwithstanding that progress, this report identifies many areas

2. https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/.

that need urgent collective attention. The natural environment is deteriorating at an alarming rate: sea levels are rising; ocean acidification is accelerating; the past four years have been the warmest on record; one million plant and animal species are at risk of extinction, and land degradation continues unchecked" (United Nations, 2019).[3]

As evidenced in the past decades, most successful environmental campaigns have not originated from the government level and are not merely based on financial investments. Few such successful projects are heard from China. "In the late 1980s and early 1990s, environmental awareness in China grew rapidly. The first flush of environmentalism crystallized in the form of environmental NGOs. The founding of Friends of Nature in 1993 was a groundbreaking event in this regard" (Sun, 2016, p. X).

Buddhist Teachings and Environmental Conservation

Here, it is not intended to seriously examine the gravity of environmental disasters or the causes behind them. By this, it is expected to examine a particular Buddhist offering called Bodhipūjā and its ecological and psychological (would be better) significance, which has a direct bearing on the environment and the life of sentient beings. As it is confirmed through textual and archaeological evidence, the Bodhisattva appeared around 2600 years ago in the North-Eastern region of India and became the enlightened one who is also called the Buddha. The objective of the Buddha was to realize the truth of the world, specifically

3. https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2019.

the cause of the suffering of beings. According to his words recorded in the Pali canonical texts, he had been searching for an innumerable period of many eons, the root cause that creates almost all human-related sufferings. In his last birth, as the son of King Suddhodana, he abandoned all the luxuries of royal life and decided to renounce and practice as an ascetic. His journey leading to enlightenment ended with the realization of truth under the Bodhi Tree, which, even after 2600 years, is still venerated by Buddhists as a sacred monument of worship.

The essence of the Buddha's understanding, which he gained under the Bodhi Tree, is called the Four Noble Truths that speak of (i) the suffering of sentient beings, (ii) the cause of suffering, (iii) the cessation of suffering, and (iv) the path leading to the cessation of suffering. To achieve this objective, the Buddha showed the importance of following the middle path, which lies between the two extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification that had been practiced even by the Buddha during the period of his training as a Boddhisattva before enlightenment. It is useful to reexamine how he revealed his knowledge of enlightenment at the time of his first sermon. He says, "O monks, in me, regarding things unheard before, there arose vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light"[4]. According to this statement, the Buddha gained holistic knowledge of worldly as well as transcendental matters. On this basis, we can understand why he paid homage to the Bodhi Tree. In this regard, on the one hand, he proclaimed his philosophical knowledge verbally, and on the other hand, by paying reverence

4. *pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhuṃ udapādi, gñāṇaṃ udapādi, paññā udapādi, vijjā udapādi, āloko udapādi.* Vinaya Pitakaṃ, vol - I 1997, p 10.

to the Bodhi Tree, he displayed how to deal with worldly matters, especially with the environment.

The Buddha, under the Bodhi tree, realized that suffering, or unsatisfactoriness, was the main problem, and craving was the root cause of the problem. So, he expounded on the necessity of eradicating three main causes: greed, hatred, and delusion, to overcome suffering. However, while explaining his groundbreaking wisdom verbally, the Buddha also used nonverbal methods to show that his achievement would be impossible without the support of the environment. Therefore, it seems that taking the Bodhi tree as the immediate and most substantial representation of nature available to him, he paid profound gratitude to nature by looking with non-blinking eyes at the Bodhi tree for seven consecutive days. This doesn't mean that the Buddha was grateful to the Bodhi-tree alone just because of the shade it provided him, rather his act of looking at the unconscious bodhi-tree can be taken into a grant as a token of gratitude towards the whole environment which is indirectly conducive in providing the world fresh air, clean water, and many more environmental rewards and benefits.

Perhaps the Buddha might have thought of the historical tradition of India, which was already paying the utmost respect to nature. The eco-friendly attitude of Indian culture started even before the advent of the Aryan community in India, probably during the pre-Vedic era. Vedic literature reports how primitive or so-called tribal communities were grateful to nature and its functions. Unlike today, at that time, people understood that their entire life system depended on and was governed by nature. So, they personified the sun, moon, rain, wind, and other forces of

nature as gods. Vaishnavites believe even God Vishnu was born beneath the shade of the Bodhi tree, which is also called the Pipal tree, and therefore, they hope this tree can make human life safer and happier. As a result of their faith and respect for the environment, both the environment and the lives of the people were secured and benefited for centuries.

There are other stories as well in Buddhist literature that say trees are the dwellings of tree spirits. Many trees are inhabited or occupied by non-human beings, so cutting down trees was considered an act of displacing tree spirits, and the Buddha discouraged such deeds as unwholesome (Horner, 1969, p. 226). This attitude of the Buddha also contributed to the preservation of trees and forests.

It has been heard that tree worship has been practiced even before in pre-Buddhist Sri Lanka. However, after the introduction of Buddhism, a sapling of the Mahabodhi tree was brought from India and planted in the sacred city of Anuradhapura in 249 BC, which was during the reign of King Devānampiyatissa. Since then, the kingship of Sri Lanka has been bound with the Bodhi tree, and successive kings paid utmost respect, considering this ecological monument a heritage of Sri Lankan kings as well as a symbol of kingship. From then on, plants of the Bodhi, derived from the main Bodhi tree, were carried and planted in every part of the island. As a result, today, there are over 10000 well-established and registered Buddhist monasteries in Sri Lanka alone, and the Bodhi tree has been an indispensable living sacred object. Besides, there are approximately another 10000 Bodhi trees on roadsides, public places, and in private lands protected and venerated by the people.

Today, we take the incident of Buddha's looking at the Bodhi tree with non-blinking eyes (*animisa locana pūjā*) only as an example to teach people the importance of paying gratitude to those who helped to achieve one's objective. The account found in the Mahāvaggapāli on post-Enlightenment incidents says that Buddha was not so hurried to pay gratitude to the people who supported him. But first of all, he was thankful for nature, and then he searched for human beings who helped him. If the Buddha just wanted to pay gratitude to the people who helped him, he could have immediately gone to meet his relatives, former guides or co-practitioners, namely Āḷārakālāma and Uddakarāma, and the five ascetics who were his former companions. It is also significant to note that in his search for listeners, he gave priority to intellectuals,[5] and when he found those intellectuals whom he aimed to help were already departed, then only he turned to search for five ascetics as his former assistants to help them.[6]

As we know, throughout life, from birth to death, the Buddha treated the environment with enormous respect. He selected tree shades to be born and pass away; he also attained Enlightenment under a tree; often, he spent his time in an open environment and the shadows of trees. During six years of rigorous practice, he considered the environment as his mere supporter, from whichhe obtained almost everything.

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5. *Ko imaṃ dhammaṃ khippameva ājānissatīti? Atha kho bhagavato etadahosi – "ayaṃkho āḷāro kālāmo paṇḍito byatto medhāvī dīgharattaṃ apparajakkhajātiko; yaṃnūnāhaṃ āḷārassa kālāmassa paṭhamaṃ dhammaṃ deseyyaṃ, so imaṃ dhammaṃ khippameva ājānissatī"ti***.** Vinaya Piṭakaṃ, vol – I, 1997, p.7.
6. *bahukārā kho me pañcavaggiyā bhikkhū, ye maṃ padhānapahitattaṃ upaṭṭhahiṃsu; yaṃnūnāhaṃ pañcavaggiyānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ paṭhamaṃ dhammaṃ deseyyanti.* Vinaya Piṭakaṃ, vol - I, 1997, p. 8.

According to Buddhism, donation (dāna) is the basic and most reliable meritorious deed for earning wholesome power, which makes beings happy and healthy. As Buddhism sees it, generosity is nothing but helping others to live without difficulties. Therefore, having realized the significance, the Buddha declared planting trees as one of the great meritorious deeds that generate heavenly bliss. Someone may wonder why the Buddha identified planting trees as one of the most profitable, wholesome deeds. It is because of its viability as a supportive factor to generate fresh air, clean water, shade, fruits, and many other things for living beings. Therefore, planting trees is equal to giving everything to every kind of being. In the Saṃyuttanikāya is said that those who plant trees, make bridges, and provide drinking water and shelter can get their merits increased day and night, and as a result, they will be the most virtuous and righteous people who go to heaven.[7]

Today, some may take Buddha's looking at the Bodhi tree with non-blinking eyes as a fact to humiliate Buddhism. One can think that spending seven days after enlightenment is a waste of time and a meaningless engagement. As we can see, it is a general custom for people to pay gratitude to those who help people with certain achievements, particularly parents, relatives, and friends. This is the nature of beings who are bound by affections and relationships. People do not see the reasons or responsibility for paying gratitude to nature and the environment for their achievements. Suppose that not only this earth, its resources

7. *Ārāmaropa vanaropā, ye janā setukārakā,*
papañca udapānañca, ye dadanti upassayaṃ.
Tesaṃ divā ca ratto ca, sadā puññaṃ pavaḍḍhati,
dhammaṭṭhā sīlasampannā, te janā saggagāminoti. Saṃyutta-Nikāya, vol - I, 1998, p.70.

such as water, air, and other elements, not only achievements, but even living life would be unthinkable. Therefore, we have an obligation to the environment, and we are indebted to it, too. As Buddhism sees it, without such commitment to nature, the well-being of human life cannot be guaranteed.

The Buddha, when he decided to spend time looking at the Bodhi Tree, might have foreseen the long-lasting impact of his compassionate act of paying gratitude to the environment, taking the Bodhi Tree as a sacred object representing the entire system of the environment. Taking this lesson for granted, even after 2600 years, Buddhists pay homage to the Bodhi Tree and are conscious of the significance of the entire ecological system. In this regard, it should be noticed that Buddhism does not confine its concern to this particular tree itself, which is botanically known as Ficus religiosa, but some other trees as well, under which former Buddhas attained enlightenment. In the history of Theravada Buddhism, there are 28 Buddhas mentioned, , who were the predecessors of the Buddha Gautama. All those Buddhas mentioned below attained enlightenment under trees, which are also called Bodhi, and were subjected to veneration.

As the commentaries report, two Buddhas, namely the Buddha Gautama and the Buddha Koṇḍañña, had attained enlightenment under the same kind of Bodhi tree called Asvattha, Anomadassi under an Ajjuna tree, Paduma and Nārada under Mahāsona tree, Buddha Dīpaṅkara and Kakusanda a Sirīsa tree, Maṅgala, Sumana, Revata and Sobhita Buddhas under a Bodhi tree called Nāga, for Padumuttara a Salala tree, Buddha Sumedha a Nimba tree, for Sujāta a Bamboo tree, for Piyadassi a Kakudha tree, Attadassi a Campaka tree, Dhammadssi a Bimbajāla tree,

Siddhattha a Kanikāra tree, Tissa an Asana tree, Phussa an Amanda tree, Vipassi a Pāṭhali tree, Sikhī a Puṇḍarīka tree, for Vessabhū a Sāla tree, Konāgama an Udumbara tree, for Kassapa a Banyan tree (Buddhavaṃsa Aṭṭhakathā, 1978, p. 297). In addition to this, according to Pali Canonical and commentarial literature, Buddhists have been paying special respect to the other larger trees in the forests, also known as *Vanaspati*.

Thus, the Buddha's single act of looking at the Bodhi tree for one week soon after the enlightenment has made a long-lasting advantageous impact on the environment for thousands of years which led to the preservation and protection of a minimum of 20000 large trees (Bodhi) in Sri Lanka alone directly, and the entire vegetation system at large indirectly.

As mentioned above, there are reports about many tree-planting campaigns taking place throughout the world that are organized by governments, NGOs, and many other social organizations. Though they are spending huge sums of money, it seems to have failed to create sufficient awareness among the people of the value of trees. Nevertheless, the Buddha's endeavour to generate faith in the Bodhi tree and declare the destruction of seeds and plants as a sinful offence has made a long-lasting impact on the minds of at least Buddhists.

Psychological Impact

In the Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā, the commentary to the Dhammapada, there is an account of a monk called Cakkhupāla which also shows how Buddhism gives prominence to the cult of tree worship even in non-Buddhist contexts (Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā, 1970, p. 3). In that story, one

person with no children decides to pay homage to a larger tree in the forest by adorning it to get his wife to conceive a child. By doing so, eventually, his wife had a baby. One may think this is ridiculous. However, this non-Buddhistic story remains in the Buddhist commentarial literature as a fruitful conduct. J. H. Philpot, in her book about the worship of trees, says that the cult of tree worship has a long history, probably emanating from the origin of humankind on the planet (Philpot, 1987). If there were no substantial results from this kind of activity, it could have been abandoned by the people. On the one hand, the uninterrupted continuation of this practice throughout history, disregarding modern and scientific views, shows its impact on human lives. On the other hand, such acts have been conducive to people indirectly protecting the environment. More importantly, this kind of practice seems to have conditioned the human mind to be psychologically optimistic, which eventually led to the generation of physical transformations.

The belief in the potentiality of trees to influence women to conceive children is a common belief in many cultures and religions. This idea has been elaborately discussed in the book titled Primitive Culture by E. B. Taylor, who was the first professor of anthropology at Oxford University. According to him, even in Germany and Sweden, people have been decorating fine trees, expecting the blessings of trees to help them recover from illnesses (Taylor, 2010). In India, this practice has been beyond particular religious limits. A tree called Asoka was believed to be a symbol of fertility, which was worshipped and offered to obtain the gift of children by young childless women (Maity, 1989). Vaishnavites believe that God Vishnu was born beneath the shade of the Bodhi tree, also known as the Pipal tree.

Therefore, they hope that this tree can make human life safer and happier.

Seneviratne and Swarna Wickramaratne, in their research paper, have mentioned the people's objective of Bodhipūjā as "accumulation of merits for the other-worldly purpose of gaining desirable births." And further, they say, "subordinately, the Bodhi has also been worshipped to gain specific ends in this world" (Seneviratne & Wickramaratne, 1980, p. 734). As we know, Canonical or commentarial teachings in Theravada don't mention such results to be obtained through a Bodhipūjā, and people who have even a general understanding of Buddhism neither intend to accumulate merits for the other-worldly purpose of gaining desirable births nor for gaining specific ends in this world, through Bodhipūjā. It seems that this article, with a premeditated plan, attempts to show that present Buddhist monks in Sri Lanka mislead people for non-prescribed objectives.

According to Theravada Buddhist teachings, Bodhipūjā is a kind of offering to the Bodhi tree to gain blessings and probably protection from ill effects. The Bodhipūjā in Sri Lanka has also been a way of confidence-building. In rural areas, farmers and others in the industrial sector, since the commencement of their businesses, go to temples to get blessings through the Bodhipūjā as a means of confidence-building. Recently, the popularity of the Bodhipūjā has been increasing among children who sit for examinations. Women's engagement in the Bodhipūjā since the beginning of pregnancy and obtaining blessings from Paritta chanting is also a common practice throughout Buddhist history in Sri Lanka. It seems that through all these Buddhist ritualistic practices, people do not expect a better status in the next life, but

most probably, ushering blessings and evading the ill effects of the present life is expected.

As we know, the fundamental objective of Buddhism indeed is to gain emancipation from all kinds of suffering, by eradicating craving. Nevertheless, as Buddhism shows, while treading on the path leading to emancipation, followers can experience multifaceted relief from big and small sufferings. For example, when practicing the three major meritorious deeds: generosity *(dāna)*, morality *(sīla)*, and meditation *(bhāvanā)*, one can enjoy enormous physical and mental freedom while gradually stepping towards the final goal, that is nibbāna.

When examined carefully, one cannot say the objectives of Buddhist practices would be materialized only after death or in the lives to come. Chanting Paritta, conducting Bodhipūjā, and practicing mindfulness are some of the prominent Buddhist psychological healing methods in which people have a growing interest and trust as successful rituals for reducing stress, anxiety, depression, and many other mind-based complications. Especially, in Sri Lanka, people have been engaging in the Bodhipūjā for many centuries to overcome or mitigate the challenges in their lives.

As we see, in Western countries and the USA, as well as in some other developed countries, people go to psychological counsellors to get treatments for the above-mentioned mind-related problems, but for that, they have to pay consultation fees. At present, there is a misleading view that these Western methods of counselling conducted by modern professionals are only right, but not the traditional methods, which probably originated from religious teaching and were delivered free

of charge. In Sri Lanka, irrespective of social, economic, or educational status, people have faith in the Bodhipūjā, and it has been much more popular in modern days in both rural and urban communities. Forbes, while reporting about the Jayasirimahabodhi at Anuradhapura, says how tree worship is powerful in recovering from psychological disorders like a post-traumatic situation. Trees play a critical role in food, water, and climate security, but they also play a critical role in our spiritual well-being. Our future depends on them (Forbes, 2017).

Seneviratne and Wickramaratne, in their article on Bodhipūjā, compare this traditional ritual, which was conducted by Panadure Ariyadhamma Thera, sometimes a couple of decades ago, with the 'Sa' musical show of the singer Victor Rathnayake. According to them, Sinhalese Buddhist monks have modernized the Bodhipūjā to be fit and attractive to the youth who have been victims of the social and economic restlessness (*asahanaya* in Sinhala) in modern Sri Lanka. It is true that, like every other thing, the settings of the Bodhipūjā have also been updated utilizing modern technology and facilities. But the fact that they are trying to hide or distort is the Sinhalese monks' genuine and unchanged objective in conducting the Bodhipūjā, as well as the innocent expectations of most Buddhist followers. Except for the rising material cost for this practice, which also depends on the requirements of the devotee, there is no claim of service charge so far by Buddhist monks, compared with non-Buddhist religious services. Following is an excerpt from the article of the above writers who seem to have deliberately disfigured the image of both the Buddhist monk and the Buddhist follower in Sri Lanka:

> Also parallel with Ratnayaka's Sa, the Ariyadhamma performance is an occasion for the youthful male population to meet young women who are attracted in large numbers to both performances by virtue of the personal, charismatic attraction of the two performers.' Performances-religious or secular-are traditionally the only institutionalized means available in the Sinhalese culture for the opposite sexes to meet. The youth especially look upon performances as occasions for romance. Going to a movie for the youth means much more than seeing the movie- hence the elaborate cosmetic efforts and the display of clothing that is conspicuous at movies and other performances. It is of little surprise that youthful devotees have abbreviated the name of the Ariyadhamma performance to dub it "Ariyadhamma's Ba" (Ba for "Bodhipūjā") in an obvious allusion to "Victor Ratnayaka's Sa." The youth find in both Bodhipūjā and the Ratnayaka musical performance a focus for experiencing what Turner (1969:94-2031 calls communitas (Seneviratne & Wickrameratne, 1980, p. 740).

Even in view of these unfair criticisms, it is praiseworthy that Sri Lankan Buddhist monks continue their engagement in the Bodhipūjā ceremony, making it freely available to people who are affected by the current competitive economic, socio-political, and cultural turmoil. Though the Bodhipūjā is conducted in every Buddhist country, the credit must go to Sri Lankan Buddhist monks for transforming its impact through the setting and melody of recitation to be an effective method of psychotherapy, and also not making the Bodhipūjā a commercial business.

As we see, Sri Lankan people have a great love and respect for Buddhism, for they think Buddhism is their traditional heritage. Therefore, except for very few, they do not like to see Buddhist teachings and practices misused. I think the above writers can witness how Buddhist teachings and practices have been commercialized and misused in the so-called developed countries. Today, there are thousands of mindfulness firms and meditation retreats in those countries exclusively devoted to secular gains. For example, the Buddha prescribed breathing exercise *(ānāpānasati)* as a technique for mindfulness *(satipaṭṭhāna)* to achieve a spiritual advancement leading to nibbāna.

Buddhist rituals and practices, including the Bodhipūjā, are exclusively human-friendly and eco-friendly performances. Particularly, in the Bodhipūjā, all prerequisites have to be performed with a serene mind and peaceful physical behaviour. It includes cleaning the ground and surrounding the Bodhi tree, decorating the Bodhi tree with flags and lamps, watering the Bodhi tree, lighting oil lamps, offering flowers, burning joss sticks and other purificatory substances, and finally recitation of verses that make the minds of participants relaxed and peaceful. An event of the Bodhipūjā also provides a much-needed opportunity to express personal or family grievances to the Bodhi tree, by which people can get relief from their unhealthy thoughts. The Bodhipūjā is most probably conducted in the evening when the atmosphere under the Bodhi tree is silent and comfortable. It seems that devotees gain a higher psychological advantage through the Bodhipūjā because it is conducted outside one's own home and under a tree in an open environment.

Conclusion

Buddha's attaining Enlightenment under the Bodhi tree and his gazing at the Bodhi tree continuously for seven days depict Buddha's gratefulness towards the environment, without which sentient beings cannot live, and the planet earth cannot be a better living place. In Buddhism, the Bodhi tree represents the entire ecological system that purifies the air, protects the groundwater, provides shade and food for the world, and balances the temperature. The Buddha made the Bodhi tree sacred by the simple act of gazing at the Bodhi tree, which generated a long-lasting impact in the minds of people, motivating them to respect the environment and declaring the cutting down of trees a sinful deed. Bodhipūjā is one of the most effective psychological methods of treating people who live restless and stressful lives with many expectations and challenges in day-to-day life. Bodhipūjā is also a psychological practice that generates courage and confidence in those who engage faithfully. With the material advancement of the world, the outer setting of the Bodhipūjā ceremony has changed to some extent, but not the fundamental objective and traditional custom.

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Unfolding the Nature of Madhyamaka Śūnyatā

Prama Chakrabarty

Visiting Lecturer, Department of Philosophy, University of Calcutta, Kolkata.
prama.chakrabarty@gmail.com

Abstract

The central theme of Nāgārjuna's philosophy is called emptiness (*śūnyatā*). Nāgārjuna uses this term in no literal sense but in a technical one. To him, as everything in this world is conditional and interdependent (*pratītyasamutpanna*), considered as devoid of essence (*svabhāvaśūnya*) and free from four-fold exclusive categorisation (*catuṣkoṭivinirmukta*). That is why Nāgārjuna only intends to criticise his opponent's (*pūrvapakṣī*) dogmatic position without giving any thesis of his own. This kind of philosophical position of Nāgārjuna is vehemently criticised by his opponents (*pūrvapakṣī*). According to them, this kind of non-assertive philosophical position with reference to the dialectical method (*prasaṅga*) leads ultimately to moral destruction, which affects the equilibrium of society without an intermediary. This position creates a barrier on the way of initiating a comparative study between different kinds of moral values, as there remains no such definite criterion. However, this sort of criticism arises out of misunderstandings as well as misinterpretations of Nāgārjuna's textual exposition. Without a proper understanding regarding the same, it is not possible to undertake a faithful presentation of Nāgārjuna's arguments

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as presented in his philosophical works; there remains ample room for misunderstanding and misinterpretation regarding the same. Therefore, the present paper initiates a humble attempt to examine the criticism of his opponents (*pūrvapakṣī*) and tries to provide a possible answer with reference to basic textual evidence. Hence, emphasis is given on how Nāgārjuna's realisation regarding emptiness (*śūnyatā*) leads to the ultimate meaning (*paramārtha*) by following the middle path (*madhyamā pratipadā*), which contributes a proficient implication towards the ceaseless upliftment of society.

Keywords: *madhyamā pratipadā*, *prasaṅga*, *pratītyasamutpannatā*, *śūnyatā*

Introduction

The word 'empty' (*śūnya*) is used in our daily life to understand the absence of anything. Despite this kind of negative interpretation, we find another sense of emptiness (*śūnya*) in Nāgārjuna's philosophy. In order to understand the basic differences inherent in these two approaches and to go through with the proper implication of this word in Nāgārjuna's philosophy, it proposes to institute an illuminative consideration of Nāgārjuna's arguments as mentioned in his philosophical texts.[1] It is often alleged that the philosophy of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) has no logical basis and makes practical life irrelevant. Hence, it is important to discuss the concept of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) in such a way that gives us the efficacy to understand Nāgārjuna's intention towards the practical world. Nāgārjuna's point of view regarding the philosophy of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) necessitates an importance for understanding of what Nāgārjuna means by free from four-fold

1. The discussion is made with reference to the philosophical texts of Nāgārjuna, such as, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā, Śūnyatāsaptati, Vigrahavyāvartanī, Vaidalyasūtra.*

negation (*catuṣkoṭivinirmukta*) and how he uses the dialectical method known as *prasaṅga* with reference to the textual along with critical analysis.

Understanding *catuṣkoṭivinirmukta* and *prasaṅga*

Nāgārjuna uses the term 'empty' (*śūnya*) in order to understand the conditional and interdependent (*pratītyasamutpanna*) aspect of things. To him, everything in this world conditionally originates (*utpāda*), exists (*sthiti*), and destroys (*bhaṅga*)[2] (Lindtner, 2011, p. 35). It is not possible to include these conditional and interdependent (*pratītyasamutpanna*) things limited within any exclusive category. We can consider no conditional and interdependent (*pratītyasamutpanna*) thing as independently existing. It is possible only in the case of independent things which in no way bound by the principle of conditionally interdependence (*pratītyasamutpannatā*) of things.

In other words, if anything is considered to exist independently, it leads to the belief in the eternal existence (*śāśvatavāda*), which Nāgārjuna wants to avoid. As it makes suffering (*duḥkha*) eternal (*nitya*), the teachings (*deśanā*) of the Buddha purposely become irrelevant. Moreover, Nāgārjuna's denial of eternalism (*śāśvatavāda*) never leads to the advocacy of nihilism (*ucchedavāda*). Nāgārjuna never makes it a point that everything is considered as non-entity (*alīka vastu*) like sky-flower (*ākāśakusuma*), hare's horn (*śaśaśṛṅga*), etc., rather everything exists as conditionally interdependent (*pratītyasamutpanna*). The direct knowledge of object (*sākṣyātpratīti*) along with the

2. In *Śūnyatāsaptati,* Nāgārjuna states that the Buddha uses these words in his teachings (*deśanā*) only to accomplish our daily activities in the sphere of *vyāvahārika satya*. These can never be considered from the point of view of *paramārtha satya*.

causal efficiency (*arthakriyākārītva*) are the signs of conditional and interdependent (*pratītyasamutpanna*) things, which in no way are applicable to non-entities (*alīka vastu*).

Furthermore, the advocacy of nihilism (*ucchedavāda*) in the given context makes the relation between action and its consequence, and therefore, the teachings (*deśanā*) of the Buddha in terms of the four noble truths (*catvārayāryasatyāni*), the noble eight-fold path (*āryāṣṭāṅgikamārga*), the middle path (*madhyamā pratipadā*), become irrelevant. In short, the Buddhist interpretation of self-transcendence based on a righteous (*kuśala*) manner seems impossible with the advocacy of nihilism (*ucchedavāda*). The rejection of these two exclusive extremes makes amply clear that the combination of these stands usually rejected. Because it is not logically possible to accept these two self-contradictory alternatives in an indifferent time (Kalupahana, 2015, p. 386). Nāgārjuna, again, incidentally rejects the fourth alternative also. Nāgārjuna's point of view regarding this denial necessitates an understanding of Nāgārjuna's application of negation (*niṣedha*). Nāgārjuna denies the assertion in relation to the independent existence of anything in terms of simple negation (*prasajya pratiṣedha*), which is different from relational negation (*paryudāsa pratiṣedha*).[3]

Nāgārjuna propounds that the denial of anything never advocates its contradiction (Pandey, 1988, pp. 241-242).[4] The

3. In the case of *paryudāsa pritiṣedha*, the denial of an alternative implies the acceptance of its contradiction. But in the case of *prasajya pratiṣedha*, it shows only the absurdity of the opponent's assertions. That is why, there is no need to accept any contradictory alternative.
4. Nāgārjuna's position can easily be understood with reference to Candrakīrti's account in *Prasannapadā*. According to him, if a person demands something from another person but that one does not have it then the demander does not demand 'the nothing' from that person.

world must not be divided only into two exclusive categories, like white and black rather remains beyond this dichotomy. He always stands against any kind of exclusive categorisation simply because all things are conditional and interdependent (*pratītyasamutpanna*); therefore, they belong to a *fuzzy area*. For example, it is not possible to state everything in terms of either red or non-red, as there remains the possibility of the existence of colourless things also.

That is why Nāgārjuna takes initiative with reference to the dialectical method (*prasaṅga*), to criticise the existing dogmatic thesis (*dṛṣṭivāda*) of his opponents (*pūrvapakṣī*) by illustrating the blemish of self-contraction (*svavacana vyāghāta*) as is inherent in their assertions without advocating a new thesis of his own. This philosophical position is known as 'commitmentless denial' (Matilal, 2016, p. 66). His aim, contextually, intends to show that any other alternative leads towards unavoidable sufferings (*duḥkha*). Nāgārjuna, therefore, emphasises on the importance of going beyond the dichotomy of all exclusive terms through the proper realisation of the philosophy of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) as by the wise one. That is why it is important to understand Nāgārjuna's use of the philosophy of emptiness (*śūnyatā*).

Nāgārjuna on *śūnyatā*

In Nāgārjuna's philosophy, empty (*śūnya*) is understood in two senses—*svabhāvaśūnya* and *prapañcaśūnya*. The former alternative neither means the non-existence of a thing nor the absence of the special nature of anything. Nāgārjuna makes a clear-cut difference between the special nature along with the essence (*svabhāva*) of a thing. To him, hotness, the special nature of fire, can never be considered as the essence (*svabhāva*) of fire, as the existence of fire is always dependent upon certain

conditions. But essence (*svabhāva*) means *svayaṃbhāva,* which is only applicable to independent things, not in the case of conditional and interdependent (*pratītyasamutpanna*) ones. Nāgārjuna, therefore, says that fire, along with all worldly things in spite of having the special nature, remains devoid of essence (*svabhāvaśūnya*). Therefore, there remains ample room for the eradication of unrighteous (*akuśala*) with the help of the righteous (*kuśala*) one. This understanding definitely leads to the state of cessation of sufferings (*nirvāṇa*), which, according to him, is *prapañcaśūnya,* which can only be realised through the right view (*samyak dṛṣṭi*) regarding self-purification, therefore, remains free from any kind of wrong view (*mithyā dṛṣṭi*) in terms of exclusive categorisation.

An example of Nāgārjuna's criticism of exclusive categorisation

This realisation results in showing the hollowness of any kind of dogmatic approach as it simply creates a barrier towards contextual possibilities. That is why Nāgārjuna vehemently criticises the Naiyāyika's knowledge episode, which has a realistic tinge without advancing any new thesis of his own. To Nāgārjuna, it involves the blemish of self-contradiction (*svavacana vyāghāta*) as they state that the instrument of valid cognition (*pramāṇa*) and the object of valid cognition (*prameya*)—the pillars of their knowledge episode, are considered as independent categories (*padārtha*) while they also propound at the same breath that both are worthy of their name with reference to each other.

To him, it is not possible to get rid of the blemish of self-contradiction (*svavacana vyāghāta*) by saying that the instrument of valid cognition (*pramāṇa*) is over and above any

sort of justification.[5] Because it remains inconsistent with their fundamental assertion that the role of the instrument of valid cognition (*pramāṇa*) is to justify the object of valid cognition (*prameya*) as it happens in the case of a weighing instrument (*tulā*).[6] It also involves the unavoidable fallacy of infinite regress (*anavasthā doṣa*),[7] as it is not possible to determine a definite

5. Nāgārjuna argues that if the Naiyāyikas give the privileged position to *pramāṇa* then it seems equally happen to *prameya* also and consequently the role of *pramāṇa* becomes redundant. If not then, they should have given the proper justification of what belongs to the privileged category and what not. But they do not point to any kind of distinction like this. Therefore, their position has no logical basis.
6. The Naiyāyikas refute Nāgārjuna's objection by giving the analogy of weighing instrument (*tulā*). To them, as weighing instrument (*tulā*) is needed to measure something in the same way *pramāṇa* is always needed to measure *prameya*. In fact, the analogy of weighing instrument (*tulā*) can easily be considered as *pramāṇa* and which is to be measured as in the case of a bundle of paper can be taken to account as *prameya*. Side by side, if a weighing instrument (*tulā*) is measured by another weighing instrument (*tulā*) then the object of measurement, for example, the given weighing instrument (*tulā*) is considered as *prameya* and the another weighing instrument (*tulā*) by which it is measured is considered in the follow-up process as *pramāṇa*. There exists only contextual difference between them and nothing else. The measured thing is always considered as *prameya* and the measuring instrument is, therefore, *pramāṇa*. But, to Nāgārjuna, it rejects the demarcation of exclusive categorisation.
7. This context can be explained with reference to the analogy of grammatical use of cases (*kārakas*) as given by Vātsyāyana in his Bhāṣya. For example, the use of the term 'tree' determines its contextual meaning. Such as, 'there is a tree'—here 'tree' is *kartā*, 'one looks at the tree'—here *karma*. If 'one sprinkles water to the tree'—is *sampradāna*, 'leaves fall from the tree' is *apādāna*, 'there are birds in the tree' is *adhikaraṇa* (locus). He simply upholds that the impossibility of forming any strict distinction rather he intends to say that the role of *pramāṇa* and *prameya* should be understood only with their contextual uses. But Nāgārjuna, again, argues that if there is only contextual difference between *pramāṇa* and *premeya* then it is hard to distinguish between these two and become conditional and interdependent (*pratītyasamutpanna*) and empty (*śūnya*).

starting point regarding the same. Their interpretation seems to suggest that the instrument of valid cognition (*pramāṇa*) intends to justify such an object that has already existed as justified by the same. This defective position is known as the blemish of proving what has already been established (*siddhasādhana doṣa*). Nāgārjuna, therefore, makes it a point that there remains no logical ground for accepting the instrument of valid cognition (*pramāṇa*) and the object of valid cognition (*prameya*) as independent categories (*padārtha*) either in the past or present or future (*traikālāsiddhi*).[8] To Nāgārjuna, this kind of dogmatic approach of the Naiyāyikas makes everything independent, unchangeable, and permanent, and consequently leads to sufferings and creates a barrier against transcendence. This barrier can only be removed with reference to the proper realisation of the philosophy of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). That is why Nāgārjuna remains dissatisfied with the Naiyāyikas' dogmatic approach towards their knowledge episode (the *pramāṇa* and *prameya* episode).

Nāgārjuna, again, meets another criticism of his opponents (*pūrvapakṣī*), which is another example of the lack of faithful consideration of his textual evidence. They argue that the rejection of exclusive categorisation along with the non-assertive position simply demolishes the strict criterion of different kinds of moral values, the theory of causation (*karmavāda*), and the

8. Nāgārjuna asserts that *pramāṇa* remains non-existent for three times—past, present and future (*traikālāsiddhi*). As, according to them, if *prameya* exists prior to *pramāṇa* then the role of *pramāṇa* becomes redundant. Again, he propounds that it cannot be said that *pramāṇa* exists temporarily posterior to *prameya* for without justified by *pramāṇa* then nothing can be considered as *prameya*. Moreover, it also cannot be said that *pramāṇa* and *prameya* exists simultaneously. As according to the Naiyāyikas, two different cognitions can never exist simultaneously.

teachings (*deśanā*) of the Buddha one by one. Consequently, facilitates anarchy in society, resulting into sufferings (*duḥkha*) which the Buddha wants to eradicate.[9]

In other words, they differ from Nāgārjuna's philosophical approach, which purposely points to an ambience that contradicts the theory of causality (*karmavāda*) stands exclusively for ascertaining the thesis in terms of a particular effect (*phala*) that is always associated with its inherent respective cause (*karma*). There remains no scope for any other alternative. Sesame oil, as we know, can never come from mustard seeds. Nāgārjuna's critique of the opponent's (*pūrvapakṣī*) exposition of the theory of causation (*karmavāda*) makes worldly affairs, along with any strict criterion of moral values becomes questionable as it demolishes the possibility of trepidation with reference to its respective unrighteous (*akuśala*) action. But the teachings (*deśanā*) of the Buddha incidentally make one aware of restraining the self from adopting unrighteous (*akuśala*) means for attaining an alluring object, and thereby, doing away with the possibility of taking recourse to righteous (*kuśala*) ones. Because there remains always an eternal relation between cause (*karma*) and its associated effect (*phala*) with reference to essence (*svabhāva*) that never entertains any other alternative. Here is no denying the fact that the Buddha himself purposely lays emphasis on the same in terms of the conditional interdependence (*pratītyasamutpannatā*) of the same. Otherwise, he never advocates that the righteous (*kuśala*) way leading to the state of cessation of sufferings (*nirvāṇa*). The

9. Nāgārjuna himself includes this kind of possible objections in his *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (*kārikā* 7-8) and *Śūnyatāsaptati* (*kārikā* 33-37) and replies to his opponents accordingly in *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (*kārikā* 52-56) *Śūnyatāsaptati* (*kārikā* 38-43).

teachings (*deśanā*) of the Buddha blossom the potentiality for adopting the righteous (*kuśala*) means only leading ultimately to transcendence. Hence, to the opponents (*pūrvapakṣī*) of Nāgārjuna, the advocacy of essence (*svabhāva*) makes all of these possible in this mortal world, while the rejection of the same leads to the socially destructive self-centric attitude.

It can be argued contextually that Nāgārjuna is of the opinion that his intended approach of the term 'empty' (*śūnya*) denies solely the dogmatic tendency in terms of exclusive categorisation in relation to worldly things, instead of denying the conditional and interdependent (*pratītyasamutpanna*) existence of the same. To him, conditional contextuality along with exclusive categorisation in no way come within the same boat. As everything belongs to the former alternative, it is possible to explain the practical utility with reference also to exceptional instances. This realisation makes one aware of the irrelevance of all charges usually put forward by Nāgārjuna's opponents (*pūrvapakṣī*).

However, Nāgārjuna's position can easily be defended with reference to the translucent understanding of the textual analysis. It is found contextually that he only criticises the dogmatic approach in relation to worldly objects, which obviously meets with contradiction in the realm of *saṃsāra*. If we take into consideration all the respective objections of his opponents (*pūrvapakṣī*), we find that their viewpoint regarding the strict determination of moral values with reference to essence (*svabhāva*) directly hinders the possibility towards tranquil transcendence through the righteous (*kuśala*) way using religious practices (*dharmācāraṇa*). As there remains no point in denying

the fact that essence (*svabhāva*) makes everything permanent, unconditional, and unchangeable. It, therefore, directly hinders the contextual possibility of transcendence towards the highest meaning (*paramārtha*) of an individual's life. On the contrary, the proper realisation of Nāgārjuna's philosophy of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) implies contextual transcendence tinged with a righteous (*kuśala*) approach, ultimately leading towards the attainment of the state of cessation of sufferings (*nirvāṇa*).

As it has already been stated contextually that the technical meaning of the term 'empty' (*śūnya*) stands for the conditional interdependent (*pratītyasamutpanna*) existence of all things. In spite of denying the exclusive categorisation, it is possible to explain every worldly affair with reference to the causal potentiality (*arthakriyākāritva*) of the respective object only. This interpretation, to Nāgārjuna, leads to every successful activity in the sphere of practical perspective. It also includes all contextual exceptional instances in the related sphere. A teacher, for example, who teaches a pupil, may contextually become the teacher of another pupil in a different spatial and temporal context.

The point remains here that there remain no strict criteria of worldly objects; rather, they are playing just contextual roles. If we keep pace with his opponent's (*pūrvapakṣī*) position, it becomes difficult to provide any sufficient justification regarding exceptional happenings along with changeable contextual affairs. The advocacy of the causal theory (*karmavāda*) with reference to essence (*svabhāva*), namely, righteousness (*kuśalatva*) and unrighteousness (*kuśalatva*), simply eradicate any context of reformation leading towards the highest meaning (*paramārtha*).

But the Buddha lays emphasis on this process of reformation, which ultimately leads to transcendence. Otherwise, he never states that overcoming unrighteousness (*akuśala*) is possible only with reference to righteousness (*kuśalatva*). Nāgārjuna follows the same in terms of accepting the contextual relative existence of everything. He focuses on the causal efficacy (*arthakriyākāritva*) of every conditionally interdependent (*pratītyasamutpanna*) object in this practical world. That is why, taking cue from Nāgārjuna's interpretation, it can easily be explained the fact that the respective cause of a mango tree can never be a papaya seed. It implies that he never denies the practical utility from the given perspective.

Nāgārjuna criticises his opponent's (*pūrvapakṣī*) dogmatic approach because of which they misinterpreted emptiness (*śūnyatā*) as nihilism (*ucchedavāda*). This kind of negative approach undoubtedly makes the moral life and the teachings (*deśanā*) of the Buddha irrelevant. But the lucid interpretation of Nāgārjuna's texts reveals that all charges raised by his opponents (*pūrvapakṣī*) seem baseless. Nāgārjuna argues that the advocacy of essence (*svabhāva*) in any context makes it static. Therefore, any kind of practice of righteous (*kuśala*) activity as distinct from unrighteous (*akuśala*) one that indicates a kind of moral progress that remains impossible without leading a moderate life, especially influenced by the teachings (*deśanā*) of the Buddha. The point remains that as essence (*svabhāva*) simply rejects the conditional and interdependent (*pratītyasamutpanna*) aspect of things and the possibility of transcendence towards the highest meaning (*paramārtha*), therefore, goes against *dharma*. And, to the Buddha, those who do not understand the importance of the conditional interdependence (*pratītyasamutpannatā*) fail to

realise the significance of *dharma*. Without the proper realisation of *dharma*, it is not possible to get rid of sufferings (*duḥkha*). That is why, Nāgārjuna says that if a person does never realise the philosophy of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) properly and considers either its literal meaning or a kind of new thesis, remains in the state of sufferings (*duḥkha*) and fails to attain the highest state similarly like an immature man, who does not know how to deal with any kind of the poisonous creature and faces miserable consequences.

Realisation of *saṃvṛti satya* (*saṃsāra*) and *paramārtha satya* (*nirvāṇa*)

It appears incidentally that Nāgārjuna neither denies the conditional and interdependent (*pratītyasamutpanna*) existence of *saṃsāra* nor the fact that the true realisation regarding *saṃsāra* leads to *nirvāṇa*. He states that both of these truths can never be regarded as two separate truths rather can be made out from different points of view. He admits no ontological difference between *saṃvṛti satya* (*saṃsāra*) and *paramārtha satya* (*nirvāṇa*). Nāgārjuna never states that the realisation of these truths can exist separately. Rather, *paramārtha satya* can be realised only within the sphere of the *saṃvṛti satya* through the continuous righteous (*kuśala*) activities. In other words, when one realises that every conditional and interdependent (*pratītyasamutpanna*) thing is devoid of essence (*svabhāvaśūnya*), then that person realises that everything is impermanent and contextually changeable. This facilitates the possibility of eliminating the root of attachment, which owes to ignorance (*avidyā*) and transcends oneself towards attaining *nirvāṇa*. In other words, the difference between *saṃsāra* and

nirvāṇa, which appears in front of us, is nothing but the result of ignorance (*avidyā*), and that can only be removed through the true realisation of the teachings (*deśanā*) of the Buddha. The same, to Nāgārjuna, initiates an attitudinal change by which one can understand why and how *saṃvṛti satya* is considered as *upāya* and *paramārtha satya* is *upeya*.

Conclusion

On the basis of the above discussion, it can be said that Nāgārjuna's interpretation of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) neither meets with any blemish in either case of the teachings (*deśanā*) of the Buddha or the basic dealings that happen in the context of the practical sphere. As Nāgārjuna believes in the conditional interdependence (*pratītyasamutpannatā*) of everything, there remains no room to deny the fact that he accepts the role-playing feature tinged with causal efficacy (*arthakriyākāritva*) of every cause (*karma*) and its associated effect (*phala*) respectively. So, the objection of the opponents (*pūrvapakṣī*) with reference to his denying the relation between any cause (*karma*) and its associated effect (*phala*) can never be justified purposely in this practical sphere.

Moreover, conditional contextuality never makes morality irrelevant. Rather, it makes the teachings (*deśanā*) of the Buddha possible in the ambience of this respective world. With reference to the sagacity relating to the same, the personal upliftment in a righteous (*kuśala*) context leads ultimately to tranquility, the highest meaning (*paramārtha*) of an individual. Nāgārjuna argues that it remains somehow or other impossible in the context of prevailing essence (*svabhāva*). As it consequently makes the context of moral dilemmas being with all exceptional instances,

irrelevant. Relevance is explicit in the Mahābhārata where Kauśika, a sage, takes a vow to tell only the truth in order to attain the heavenly abode. But in a given unfavourable situation, he adheres to the principle of telling the truth rather than saving an individual's life. Consequently, he fails to attain the desirable end. Hence, it is clear that no strict criteria can be applied with reference to any kind of contextual dilemma.

Besides, an indifferent thing often leads to different consequences. For example, a person may opt for an eggplant that can be allergic to someone else. These instances point to the inapplicability of the advocacy of essence (*svabhāva*) in almost all aspects of our lives. On the contrary, the proper realisation of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) makes one aware of the importance of transcendence with reference to certain righteous (*kuśala*) restrictions in a way similar to the utility of bitter medicine for curing a specific kind of illness. Additionally, in another context, it can be revealed that a certain cause of one's illness is only because of an unsuccessful surgery done by a surgeon. Hence, there remains no indifferent solution to any so-called similar situation, for example, illness in general. Rather purposely implies different solutions as per their spatial along with temporal context. This kind of adoption is only possible with reference to the proper realisation of Nāgārjuna's interpretation of emptiness (*śūnyatā*).

In other words, it is the uniqueness of Nāgārjuna's philosophy of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) that intends to create a moral sphere based on purified, proficient thinking. Under the umbrella of dogmatism, any attitudinal change leading towards self-transcendence is eradicated. Whereby, the proper realisation

of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) results into a profound attitudinal change which implies a balanced position implicating all-round progress for society. A keen perusal of Nāgārjuna's view on emptiness (*śūnyatā*) makes it clear that he lays emphasis on the relative outlook towards this respective practical sphere, leading towards the highest meaning (*paramārtha*) purposely by following the middle path (*madhymā pratipadā*). It helps one to transcend towards a tranquil state where one remains unaffected by any kind of self-centric feeling relating to worldly objects and possesses nothing but *anukampā* (Nayak, 2001, p. 56).

Incidentally, the transcendent one always thinks and helps for the well-being of others and guides them to uplift themselves from any kind of undesirable situation. In other words, the right view (*samyakdṛṣṭi*) of the wise one implies that everything is conditional as well as interdependent (*pratītyasamutpanna*), therefore, considered as devoid of essence (*svabhāvaśūnya*), and consequently, overcomes the present impermanent undesirable situation only by following the middle path (*madhyamā pratipadā*) leading towards the state of cessation of sufferings (*nirvāṇa*). Contextually, this realisation helps the wise one to be free from any ambiguous semantic expressions with reference to this phenomenal world (*saṃsāra*). It gives emphasis on the endeavour for understanding the technical meaning of the same rather than the literal one, therefore, repudiates all the irrelevant criticism of his opponents (*pūrvapakṣī*) based on the latter one. In short, the proper realisation of Nāgārjuna's intention regarding emptiness (*śūnyatā*) unfolds the plausibility of transcendental change when the wise one realises that the conditional interdependence (*pratītyasamutpannatā*), the middle path (*madhyamā pratipadā*), the philosophy of emptiness (*śūnyatā*),

and the state of cessation of sufferings (*nirvāṇa*) are equal and synonymous. This realisation of oneness (*advayatatva*) simply indicates the ubiquitous fact that without the proper realisation of the same, nothing can be considered as pertinent. That is why, Nāgārjuna states that— "*sarvaṃ ca yujyate tasya śūnyatā yasya yujyate//sarvaṃ na yujyate tasya śūnyaṃ yasya na yujyate*."

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Dignāga's Three-Membered Inference vs. Aristotle's Syllogism: A Comparative Study of Their Differences

Lin Guanrong

Independent Researcher
monicalamchina@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines fundamental differences between Dignāga's three-membered inference and Aristotle's syllogistic logic through analysis of their logical structures, reasoning processes, and validity criteria. Rather than viewing these systems as formally equivalent or treating one as a variant of the other, this study reveals how they represent distinct approaches to logical reasoning. Through a detailed comparison, it becomes clear that Dignāga's system emphasizes empirical validation and causal relationships, whereas Aristotle's system operates through formal categorical relationships. These differences reflect deeper philosophical orientations: Dignāga's logic functions as an open system requiring continuous empirical verification, while Aristotle constructs a self-contained formal system. The study concludes that each system developed sophisticated methods of establishing valid inference, shaped by its unique intellectual tradition.

Keywords: *Aristotle; Dignāga; logical reasoning; syllogism; three-membered inference*

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Introduction

Logical thinking has evolved significantly within various philosophical traditions. Two systems particularly stand out for their systematic treatment of reasoning: Aristotle's syllogistic logic and the three-membered inference developed by the Buddhist logician Dignāga (circa 480-540 CE). Their profound analysis of inference and lasting influence make them key to understanding how different cultures approached logical reasoning (Matilal, 1998).

Chinese scholarly discussions (Wu, 1993) center on two interpretations. The 'Identity View' suggests that modern logical analysis reveals their formal equivalence, while the 'Partial Overlap View' regards the three-membered inference as a variant or subset of Aristotelian logic. These views, however, miss fundamental differences in reasoning mechanisms and epistemological foundations by focusing too much on surface similarities.

In Prior Analytics (I.1-4), Aristotle established a system of deductive reasoning that derives necessary conclusions through strict syllogistic form. Dignāga, by contrast, constructed his system through thesis, reason, and example, emphasizing the close connection between inference and empirical verification (Hayes, 1988). This difference appears not only in surface structure but also in how reasoning operates and how validity is established.

This study examines the differences between these systems at three levels: their logical structures, reasoning processes, and validity criteria. Through a systematic comparison, it reveals how these two systems of inference reflect distinct understandings of logical thinking shaped by different intellectual traditions.

Structure of Dignāga's Three-Membered Inference

According to Dignāga's Nyāyamukha (English: The Entrance to Logic, Chinese pinyin: 'Yinming zhenglimen lun; Taishō 1628', 1629), his inference consists of three explicit components: thesis (*pakṣa*), reason (*hetu*), and example (*dṛṣṭānta*). This streamlined structure represents a significant refinement of the traditional five-membered inference of the Nyāya school, which included proposition, reason, example, application, and conclusion (Mukherjea, 1976). Dignāga eliminated the application and conclusion as redundant, arguing that they could be derived from the first three members.

This structure is best illustrated by the two canonical examples below:

Component	Sound Example	Fire Example
Thesis	The sound is impermanent.	There is fire on the mountain.
Reason	Because it is produced.	Because there is smoke on the mountain.
Example	Whatever is produced is impermanent, like a pot.	Wherever there is smoke, there is fire; for example, in a kitchen.

Each component serves distinct logical and epistemological functions. First, the **thesis** (*pakṣa*) presents the proposition requiring proof, identifying both the subject (*pakṣa*) and the property to be proven (*sādhya*). The thesis must be clearly stated and mutually intelligible to all parties in a debate (Matilal, 1998). In the sound example, 'sound is impermanent' represents a proposition requiring justification. Next, **reason** (*hetu*) provides

the logical ground for the thesis. In the sound example, 'because it is produced' serves as the *hetu*, establishing the logical connection to impermanence. The final component e**xample** (*dṛṣṭānta*) shows the universal connection between the reason and the property being inferred. The example substantiates the general rule (*vyāpti*) underlying the inference. In the sound example, 'like a pot' illustrates a case where both the reason (being produced) and the property (impermanence) are present.

This three-membered structure emphasizes the essential components of inference, particularly focusing on the universal relation (*vyāpti*) between reason and thesis. The validity of this relation determines the soundness of the inference—a fundamental concept in Dignāga's logical theory that will be examined in the following section.

Validity in Dignāga's Inference: The Role of Vyāpti

Understanding *Vyāpti:* In Dignāga's logical theory, the mere presence of a complete three-membered structure does not guarantee the validity of an inference. The crucial determinant of validity lies in *vyāpti* (遍充 bian chōng), which can be translated as pervasion or invariable concomitance (Katsura, 1983). This concept establishes a universal, exceptionless connection between the reason (*hetu*) and the property to be proven (*sādhya*) (Hayes, 1988).

The necessity of *vyāpti* can be demonstrated through two classical examples:

Sound Example:

> The inference "Sound is impermanent because it is produced" is valid due to the universal rule that

everything produced is invariably impermanent. The *vyāpti* relationship here establishes that the property of 'being produced' (*hetu*) invariably accompanies the property of 'being impermanent' (*sādhya*) without exception (Matilal, 1998).

Fire Example:

The inference 'There is fire on the mountain because there is smoke' demonstrates *vyāpti* through both positive and negative correlations:

Positive correlation (*anvaya*): Smoke is invariably accompanied by fire (as observed in kitchens, hearths, etc.)

Negative correlation (*vyatireka*): Where there is no fire, there is never smoke (as in a clear lake)

This dual observation establishes the pervasion (*vyāpti*) of smoke by fire, demonstrating their invariable concomitance (Stcherbatsky, 1930).

The Three Characteristics of a Valid Reason

The establishment of *vyāpti* (the invariable connection between *hetu* and *sādhya*) requires meeting specific logical conditions. Dignāga systematized these conditions in his Nyāyamukha through the doctrine of *trairūpya* (Mukherjea, 1976) which means three characteristics of a valid reason.

The three characteristics *(trairūpya)* are:

i. Presence in the Subject *(pakṣadharmatā*; Chinese: 宗法性 Zōng fǎ xing): The reason must be present

in the subject of inference. For Example, In 'Sound is impermanent because it is produced,' being 'produced' must be a genuine property of sound. This establishes the initial logical connection.

ii. Presence in Similar Cases *(sapakṣasattva,* Chinese: 同品定有性 tóng pǐn dina yǒu xing): The reason must occur in cases where the property to be proven is known to exist. In the sound example, a pot (similar case) is both produced and impermanent. This confirms a positive correlation through analogous instances.

iii. Absence in Dissimilar Cases *(vipakṣāsattva,* Chinese: 异品遍无性 yi pǐn biàn wú zing): The reason must be absent in cases where the property to be proven is known to be absent. For example, space, rather than sound, serves as a dissimilar case and is neither produced nor impermanent. This establishes a negative correlation and exclusivity.

These three characteristics work together to establish a comprehensive framework for valid inference. Firstly, they provide the logical foundation for establishing valid *vyāpti* by ensuring that the connection between reason and thesis is neither arbitrary nor coincidental but based on systematic observation and verification. As Dignāga argues in the Nyāyamukha (T1628, 1a15-17): "When the three characteristics of the reason are well-established, this is called inference", demonstrating that only when all three conditions are satisfied can we establish a valid inference.

Secondly, these conditions serve as safeguards against fallacious reasoning. By requiring both positive correlation

(through similar cases) and negative correlation (through dissimilar cases), they help identify and eliminate invalid reasons that might appear convincing at first glance. As Katsura (1983, p. 19) notes, this dual verification process significantly reduces the risk of drawing false conclusions from seemingly plausible premises.

Finally, *trairūpya* represents a sophisticated integration of logical necessity with empirical observation. Unlike purely formal logical systems, Dignāga's approach requires that logical relationships be grounded in observable examples and verifiable experiences. Hayes (1988) argues that this integration of logic and empirical knowledge marked a significant advancement in Indian logical thought. This innovation, as Matilal (1998) points out, had a profound influence on subsequent developments in Buddhist epistemology, particularly in Dharmakīrti's works.

Aristotelian Syllogism: Structure and Logical Foundations

Aristotle's logic, particularly his theory of syllogism, has had an unparalleled influence on Western intellectual history. However, modern interpretations often mistake popular everyday expressions for Aristotle's standard model (Patzig, 1968). Here is the commonly cited '*Barbara'* syllogism:

All humans are mortal.
Socrates is human.
Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

While this example is commonly used to illustrate Aristotelian syllogism, we must carefully distinguish between what Aristotle himself proposed in Prior Analytics and what

later logicians added to interpret his work. Tools and terms like *'Barbara,'* though useful for understanding syllogism, were not Aristotle's creations but later additions by medieval scholars like Boethius for teaching purposes (Patzig, 1968).

Definition and Form of Aristotelian Syllogism

In Prior Analytics, Aristotle systematically examined syllogism, defining it as a form of logical reasoning that derives a necessary conclusion from two premises. His definition states: "A syllogism is a discourse in which, certain things being stated, something other than what is stated follows of necessity from their being so"(Aristotle, 1989, 24b pp. 18-20).

The key elements here are "necessity" and "propositions." Syllogistic reasoning doesn't rely on external experience but derives conclusions through inherent logical relationships. This formalization makes syllogism one of the earliest systematic deductive models in logic.

Aristotle then defined the form of syllogism as an 'if-then' logical structure rather than everyday categorical judgments. His typical form is:

If A belongs to all B, and B belongs to all C, then A belongs to all C (Corcoran, 1972)

Instead of concrete nouns like 'Socrates' or 'human,' this expression uses abstract variables A, B, and C to represent logical relationships between concepts. This abstraction and use of variables is a defining feature of Aristotelian syllogism, establishing it as a systematic logical structure.

The Structure of Aristotelian Syllogism

A standard Aristotelian syllogism has three parts: two premises and a conclusion. The major premise is about the information that will be the predicate of the conclusion (Aristotle, trans. 1989, 24b18-20). The minor premise has what will be the subject of the conclusion. When these premises are in the right order, the conclusion naturally follows. The logical structure works through three terms (Aristotle,1989, 25b32-26a2):

(1) A major term that shows up in the major premise and becomes the predicate in the conclusion

(2) A minor term that appears in the minor premise and becomes the subject of the conclusion

(3) A middle term that connects everything by appearing in both premises but not in the conclusion.

Its formal structure can be illustrated in this way:

Components	**Formal Expression**
Major premise	All B is A
Minor premise	All Cs is B
Conclusion	Therefore, all C is A

To understand this structure better, let's look at a common example, though we should note these examples were added by later teachers (Kneale & Kneale, 1962):

Components	**Formal Structure**	**Example**
Major premise	All B is A	All humans are mortal.
Minor premise	All C is B	Socrates is human.
Conclusion	Therefore, all C is A	Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

This way of organizing terms shows how Aristotle built a system where conclusions follow necessarily from their premises. The middle term 'human' connects the major term 'mortal' with the minor term 'Socrates', leading us naturally from what we know (humans are mortal; Socrates is human) to what must be true (Socrates is mortal).

Syllogistic Figures: Patterns of Valid Reasoning

Aristotle classifies syllogisms into three figures, based on the position of the middle term in the premises (Aristotle, 1989, 40b30-41a13). Each figure represents a distinct logical structure, with varying degrees of inferential clarity.

Figure	Position of Middle Term (B)	Pattern
Figure 1	Subject (major premise), Predicate (minor premise)	All B is A. All C is B. So, C is A
Figure 2	Predicate in both premises	All A is B. All C is B. So, C is A
Figure 3	Subject in both premises	All B is A. All B is C. So, C is A

Foundations of Syllogistic Validity

The validity of a syllogism, according to Aristotle, is rooted not in empirical observation or rhetorical plausibility, but in the formal necessity *(ἀνάγκη, anankē)* of the inference (Aristotle, 1989, 25b26-31). A syllogism is valid when the conclusion follows unavoidably from the premises under their internal structure. This emphasis on necessity sets Aristotelian logic

apart from inductive or dialectical reasoning, both of which rely on probability or persuasion rather than formal entailment (Aristotle, 1989, 24a22-b12).

Perfect and Imperfect Syllogisms:

Aristotle distinguishes between perfect and imperfect syllogisms (Aristotle, 1989, 24b22-26). A perfect syllogism is one in which the conclusion follows directly from the premises without additional assumptions. For example:

Perfect Syllogism:

Premise 1: All B are A.
Premise 2: All C are B.
Conclusion: All C are A.

This structure, typical of the first figure, is self-sufficient. The premises, by their arrangement, guarantee the conclusion (Aristotle, 1989, 26b28-33).

In contrast, an imperfect syllogism requires supplementary steps—often involving the conversion of propositions or the addition of implicit assumptions—to reach a valid conclusion. Look at the following:

Imperfect Syllogism:

Premise 1: All B are A.
Premise 2: Some Cs are B.
Conclusion: Some C are A.

Here, the conclusion is not formally guaranteed unless one assumes that the particular statement "some C are B" implies a distributive relationship sufficient to support the inference. Aristotle developed techniques for reducing

such imperfect syllogisms to perfect ones, thereby preserving logical rigor (Aristotle, 1989, 29a30-40).

The Role of the Middle Term:

A central condition for syllogistic validity is the correct use of the middle term (Aristotle, 1989, 29a30-40). The middle term must connect the major and minor terms in such a way that it establishes a necessary relation between them. This typically requires the middle term to be distributed—i.e., to refer to all members of its class—in at least one of the premises (Smith, 1989).

If the middle term is undistributed in both premises, the syllogism may commit the fallacy of the undistributed middle, resulting in an invalid inference. For instance:

Some Bs are A.
Some Cs are B.
Therefore, some Cs are A.

This argument is invalid because the middle term "B" does not conclusively link "C" and "A." The mere overlap among some members of each class does not support a necessary conclusion (Kneale & Kneale, 1962).

Through these foundational elements—structural necessity, the distinction between perfect and imperfect forms, and proper distribution of the middle term—Aristotle establishes a formal system of deductive reasoning that combines logical precision with philosophical depth (Aristotle, trans. Smith, 1989). His insistence on formal necessity and structural validity laid the groundwork for subsequent developments in logical theory, while his analysis of term relationships continues to inform our understanding of deductive inference.

The Differences between Three-Member Inference and Syllogism

Although both Dignāga and Aristotle developed reasoning systems that appear to exhibit a "three-part" structure, their approaches differ fundamentally in the construction of reasoning components, the organization of logical steps, and the functions of each part (Matilal, 1998). To equate Dignāga's three-part inference with Aristotle's syllogism merely based on superficial structural similarity is to fall into a formalist misinterpretation. A true understanding of their divergence requires a deeper analysis of the internal mechanisms of their respective inferential structures.

Differences in the Structural Form

In terms of structural form, Dignāga's model consists of three complete statements: thesis, reason, and example. Rather than focusing on formal logical terms, it emphasizes how language and experience build cognitive connections:

> In Dignāga's model, take the sound example:
> Thesis: Sound is impermanent.
> Reason: Because it is produced.
> Example: Whatever is produced is impermanent, like a pot.

In this structure, the example isn't merely rhetorical but serves as a logical necessity, validating the relationship between reason and thesis. The model builds reasonable inference chains through linguistic expression grounded in experience.

Aristotle's syllogism, by contrast, uses a 'major premise-minor premise-conclusion' structure based on categorical relationships between three terms (Aristotle, 1989, 25b26-31):

Major premise: All humans are mortal.
Minor premise: Socrates is human.
Conclusion: Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

This structure emphasizes formal category relationships, showing a highly abstract and systematic character.

These structural contrasts between Dignāga's three-part inference and Aristotle's syllogism reveal distinct orientations in their understanding of reasoning. Dignāga's inferential strategy, rooted in linguistic articulation and experiential validation, constructs meaning through the interplay of thesis, reason, and example—where the example is not supplemental but logically indispensable.

Differences in Reasoning Processes and Their Philosophical Implications

Building on the structural differences outlined above, we can now examine how reasoning operates within each system.

In Dignāga's logic, reasoning unfolds as a dynamic process of empirical validation (Dignāga, T1628). When applying the three-membered structure:

i. The thesis proposes a relationship to be established.

ii. The reason identifies an observable indicator.

iii. The example validates through concrete experience.

The reasoning process is inherently interactive - each step requires engagement with observable reality. When we reason that 'sound is impermanent because it is produced,' we must actively verify:

i. The production of sound through direct observation.

ii. The connection between production and impermanence through repeated verification.

iii. The analogous cases (like pots) confirm this pattern through empirical examination.

Aristotle's reasoning process, by contrast, operates through pure deduction (Aristotle, 1989, 24a10-15). Once terms are properly categorized and premises established, reasoning proceeds automatically through formal relationships. In the case "Socrates is mortal," the process proceeds as follows:

i. Establishes categorical relationships (human-mortal) through definition.

ii. Identifies specific instances (Socrates-human) through classification.

iii. Derives necessary conclusions through term relationships by logical necessity.

These distinct approaches reveal fundamentally different epistemological commitments. While Dignāga's system emphasizes the continuous interplay between conceptual understanding and empirical validation, Aristotle's system privileges the formal manipulation of categorical relationships. This difference reflects not merely technical variation but deeper philosophical divergences in how each tradition understands the relationship between logic, knowledge, and truth. Where Dignāga sees reasoning as an active process of discovery grounded in experience, Aristotle constructs a self-contained system of necessary truths derived from formal relationships.

Different Criteria for Valid Inference

While both systems aim to establish valid reasoning, they employ fundamentally different standards for determining what makes an inference legitimate (Hayes, 1988). These differences reflect distinct approaches to validation and truth.

As we mentioned previously, in Dignāga's system, validity fundamentally depends on the legitimacy of the reason through three characteristics:

(i) The reason must be present in similar cases (*anvaya*),

(ii) The reason must be absent in dissimilar cases (*vyatireka*), and

(iii) The reason must be present in the subject of inference (*pakṣadharmat*ā).

To illustrate these criteria, consider the inference 'Sound is impermanent because it is produced':

i. 'Being produced' must be present in known impermanent things (like pots), establishing a positive correlation.

ii. 'Being produced' must be absent in permanent things (like space), confirming a negative correlation.

iii. 'Being produced' must be verified in sound itself through direct perception.

These requirements create a dynamic validation process where:

i. Each criterion must be independently verified.

ii. The verification process depends on empirical observation.

iii. The validity remains open to revision based on new evidence.

iv. Counter-examples can invalidate established inferences.

Aristotle's system, by contrast, determines validity through formal criteria that rely on the necessity inherent in syllogistic reasoning (Aristotle, 1989, 26a23-30):

1) Correct structural arrangement of terms, which establishes proper categorical relationships between major, minor, and middle terms in the premises and conclusion.

2) Truth of premises, which provides the foundational claims from which valid inference proceeds.

3) Necessity of the conclusion following from premises through logical form alone, without requiring additional verification.

When these criteria are met, as in the classic syllogism:
'All humans are mortal' (Major premise)
'Socrates is human' (Minor premise).

'Therefore, Socrates is mortal' (Conclusion)
The validity emerges purely from the logical structure itself. Once the premises are accepted as true and properly arranged, the conclusion follows with absolute necessity, independent of any additional empirical verification. This represents a closed system of formal reasoning where validity is guaranteed by the internal relationships between categorical terms.

Conclusion

A careful examination of Dignāga's three-membered inference and Aristotle's syllogism reveals their profound differences in reasoning mechanisms and validation methods. Dignāga developed a system rooted in empirical observation and causal connections, where knowledge claims must be practically verified. In contrast, Aristotle built his logic on categorical relationships, where truth emerges necessarily from the formal structure of deductive reasoning.

Such divergence points to fundamentally different views of logical inquiry. Where Dignāga saw logic as necessarily engaging with experience and remaining open to revision, Aristotle envisioned it as a complete formal system operating independently of empirical concerns. Both approaches, however, deserve recognition as sophisticated achievements within their respective traditions of thought.

The comparison of these systems enriches our understanding of how human reasoning can take different yet equally valid forms. Instead of forcing one tradition into the framework of another, we might better appreciate how distinct philosophical cultures have crafted their paths to logical rigor. This insight not only facilitates meaningful dialogue between traditions but also illuminates the diverse ways societies have grappled with questions of knowledge and truth.

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Understanding the Basis of Buddhist Morality: A Hermeneutical Examination of Śāntideva's Śikṣā-samuccaya

Sunaina Mishra

PhD (Philosophy) Researcher, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, Mumbai.
23N0502@iitb.ac.in

Abstract

This study seeks to investigate the foundations of Buddhist morality through an analysis of Śāntideva's Śikṣā-samuccaya. In this exploration, Śāntideva's teachings are shown to transcend traditional Western ethical frameworks by centering on a compassionate, embodied approach to moral discipline. This model contrasts with conventional rationalist perspectives, offering an ethical path that prioritizes collective well-being over individual salvation. The text as a whole emphasizes virtues such as humility, self-discipline, and mindful renunciation of harmful behaviors, advocating for an ethics grounded in character development and self-reflection, though not without its limitations. Through the ideal of the Bodhisattva, Śāntideva's work presents a framework for moral discipline that integrates the mind and body, viewing morality as both a mental and physical endeavor. The aim of this study is to highlight specific practices Śāntideva outlines for cultivating virtues aligned with Buddhist ethical goals,

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such as compassion, equanimity, and non-attachment, guiding practitioners toward enlightenment. This holistic approach develops virtues through lived experience, embodying compassion as a central principle. The central argument of this study is that Buddhist ethics, particularly as expressed via its articulation in the Śikṣā-samuccaya, challenges dominant ethical paradigms by offering a distinctively embodied approach to morality. The research methodology used is that of critical analysis of the existing interpretive frameworks in this regard, with the objective of demonstrating how, by emphasizing compassion over abstraction, Śāntideva provides an alternative moral framework that speaks to contemporary issues of ethical inclusivity and collective responsibility. Ultimately, this paper suggests that Śikṣā-samuccaya offers insights into how virtue and compassion can shape ethical behavior and that Śāntideva's virtue-based approach remains relevant for rethinking moral development in a global context increasingly focused on shared human welfare.

Keywords: *Bodhisattva ideal, Buddhist ethics, compassion, moral discipline, Śikṣā-samuccaya*

Introduction

The Śikṣā-samuccaya (SS) [1]—also known as the 'Training Anthology' (Goodman, 2016) or 'A Compendium of Buddhist Doctrine' (Śikṣā Samuccaya, 1971), with the more accurate translation being 'A Compendium of Ethical Training'—was written by Śāntideva, a monk from North India. His other work, the Bodhicaryāvatāra [2]—also translated as 'Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life [3]—is the primary reason for his fame. A Mādhyamika philosopher from the early eighth century CE, Śāntideva expands on the school's central concept of *śūnyatā* (emptiness) in the SS to show how it has applications in everyday life.

By establishing discipline for monks, nuns, and laypeople to aid them in their journey of the attainment of Bodhisattva-hood, Śāntideva sheds light on an individual's journey from imperfection to the realization of *prajñā-pāramitā* (the perfection of wisdom) through his depiction of the figure of the Bodhisattva in this treatise. In terms of behaviour, wisdom—which is philosophically defined as the cessation of all erroneous conceptions of reality—is upheld as an ethical ideal that is marked by compassion and selflessness. In addition to focusing on this ideal, in this treatise Śāntideva also examines the several stages of accomplishment that a novice Bodhisattva must go through in order to realize wisdom (Bastien, 1982, p. iii).

The Śikṣā-samuccaya thus entails a compilation or collection of the Buddha's teachings, or doctrine. This text is a beautiful verse summary of the spiritual path of the Mahayana form of Buddhism, along with its unique doctrines and many of its most potent meditation techniques. The treatise is divided into three sections: firstly, the twenty-seven memorial or root verses that make up the *kārikās*, which together form the text; secondly, a commentary that explains the text of the *kārikās*, which is divided into nineteen chapters (called *parichhedas*); and thirdly, the authoritative sources from the Buddhist sutras. Almost the entire book is covered by the volume of citations from Buddhist sutras. These excerpts are from a little more than a hundred different works (Vaidya, 1961, p. vii). Among the six widely accepted *pāramitās*, the first four are dealt with in the SS (forming distinct chapters of their own).

A general hermeneutical examination of the text is the subject matter of the present study due to two reasons. Firstly,

there seems to be a dearth of Indian philosophical scholarship engaging with this text in particular. Secondly, even a preliminary study of Buddhist ethics in general offers what seems to be an interesting alternative, a more embodied and compassion-based paradigm that could help us reshape the existing Western liberal-rational framework of morality that has systematically been excluding the marginalized for ages. And hence the aim at large would be to arrive at conclusions in line with our initial understanding here, hopefully resulting in a relevant ethical theory that serves the need of our times.

It becomes important however, to resolve a contradiction that might arise even before one attempts this study, making a clarification necessary. One could argue that by accepting the Mādhyamika philosophy, which holds that all things are devoid of intrinsic existence, Śāntideva is implying that nothing, not even virtues, can have inherent value. This can be contended by arguing that one can differentiate between intrinsic value—value that is dependent on an object's non-relational qualities—and intrinsic value in the sense of having value 'as an end,' that is, being valuable in and of itself rather than only serving as a tool for a more fundamental kind of value. A Mādhyamika metaphysics of emptiness is clearly at odds with only the first type of intrinsic value. It is however, the second understanding which best captures Śāntideva's view of virtue (Harris, 2024, p. 27), which this paper thus will be adhering to henceforth. The second section of the paper hereafter, serves as an introduction to the text Śikṣā-samuccaya by Śāntideva, also providing some larger context as groundwork for the questions that this essay seeks to raise. The third and final section will bring it all together by attempting a hermeneutical exercise of understanding the

text both in its own context and in terms of its relevance to the discourse around morality and what Buddhist ethics can be in this day and age.

Śāntideva's Śikṣā-samuccaya: Text and context

Śāntideva is widely acknowledged to have existed between 685 and 763 CE; however, it is Embar Krishnamacharya who provides one of the strongest arguments we have for this chronology by noting that Śāntarakśita, another Buddhist philosopher, repeats an entire line from the Bodhicaryāvatāra in his Tattvasiddhi (Goodman, 2016, p. ix).

The majority of the material in the Śikṣā-samuccaya is taken from other Mahayana scriptures, many of which are no longer available in their original Sanskrit. Śāntideva's Compendium thus pulls from over a hundred texts, making this work considerably a lens through which to view the wide range of Mahayana scriptures, or sutras, while also allowing us to acknowledge their diversity. This text in particular explains significant facets of Mahayana ethics, including the nature of moral concepts, the Bodhisattva path's characteristics, and the connection between morality and other Mahayana philosophical viewpoints, through these quotations, the author's commentary, and his twenty-seven verses *(kārikās)*. Consequently, the SS has been referred to as a 'major primary source for Mahayana Buddhist ethics' in addition to being an exceptionally rich source of information on the writings that practitioners of the Mahayana considered canonical in seventh-century India (Clayton, 2006, p. 2).

The portrayal of the Bodhisattva that arises from the teachings of Śāntideva offers a remarkable example of

human greatness that is accessible to people from all cultural backgrounds. The Bodhisattva's compassion knows no bounds; they are calmly introspective and thoughtful, unrelentingly giving and passionate, and they perceive with piercing insight the emptiness of everything. According to Śāntideva, their virtues allow them to respond to difficult situations with skill, are highly beneficial to human development, and are admired by both humans and gods (Harris, 2024, p. 21).

Asking how this ideal Buddhist practitioner, the Bodhisattva, behaves thus sets the stage for the investigation of the Śikṣā-samuccaya. Answering this topic involves following the moral evolution of a Bodhisattva and taking into account the moral weight and status of the perfections *(pāramitās)*, various moral goods or values (such as the *brahmavihāras*), and the relative moral weight of monastic rules or precepts. Following this, it is explained how the Bodhisattva is expected to embody these perfections, rules, and values in their actions; specifically, it highlights the situations where Bodhisattvas are said to have broken moral laws (Clayton, 2006, p. 3).

To establish a clearer distinction before moving further in this regard, one can make use of Jay Garfield's compelling parallel that perhaps provides the greatest explanation of the connection between the two essential works of Śāntideva that have been discussed thus far. In passing, he said that the Śikṣā-samuccaya is similar to a diverse course pack with additional readings, and the Bodhicaryāvatāra is similar to a university course textbook. What's the course topic in terms of this analogy? Obviously, the road that goes from the reactivity and confusion of everyday life to the bliss, clarity, and compassion of Awakening is what

Śāntideva intends to teach. Śāntideva, in fact, thus aims not just to impart to us an academic grasp of the way Buddhism views that spiritual path. In addition, he also wants to provide us with useful practical skills for overcoming roadblocks and spur us on to keep going despite challenges (Goodman, 2016, p. xii).

Importance in the overarching Buddhist ethical paradigm

The idea of *Tathāgata-garbha*, which maintains that every sentient being possesses the essence of Buddha-hood, is the conceptual cornerstone of the Bodhisattva ideal. In this theory, the common metaphysical substance of all creatures, their equal status, their universal good, and their universal Buddha-hood are professed, along with the realization and perception of the Essence of Buddha-hood in all living beings without exception. The Bodhisattva pursues this by achieving realization of *pudgala-nairātmya* (the selflessness of individual souls) and *dharma-nairātmya* (the selflessness of entities). The Bodhisattva likewise approaches *āsrava-kṣaya-jñana* (knowledge of the path of cessation) through their focus on *prajñā-pāramitā* but then chooses to skip the last phase in order to free all beings. Having transcended birth, old age, illness, and death, they thus achieve *śūnyatā* and clarity.

In this context, a Bodhisattva can be likened to a philanthropist who distributes food to others, as opposed to *srāvakās*, who eat it alone. In various Buddhist Sanskrit literary passages, the Bodhisattvas are declared to be immensely superior to the elder *srāvakās*, and the Mahayanists credit this to their altruistic motivations. A Bodhisattva assists all beings in achieving both the more material benefits of happiness and

well-being in the world *(sukha)* as well as the spiritual objective of *nirvāṇa* (the highest state of enlightenment that a person can attain). Thus, in this model, a more compassionate goal replaces the austere unworldliness of the previous ideal.

This explicates why *prajñā* and *mahākaruṇā*, or the Highest Wisdom and Great Compassion, are the dual endowments of a Bodhisattva. Hence, it can be argued that in Mahayana Buddhism overall, compassion and wisdom are both valued equally. Manjusri is invoked in the opening verses of various Mahayana treatises because, in Mahayana literature, he is the embodiment of wisdom. The Mādhyamika school's works are the pinnacle of the exaltation of wisdom, which is seen in this school of thought as being somewhat more significant than compassion. Later Mahayana, however, places more emphasis on compassion, which is symbolized by Avalokiteśvara in Mahayana literature. This shift makes Mahayana more moral than argumentative as a tradition overall.

Interpretations from within normative western ethical frameworks

Even though Śāntideva's explanation of morality differs greatly from Aristotle's explanation of virtue and the good life, it is considered to be a uniquely Buddhist conception of moral virtue in the West. Other interpretations of it include consequentialism (propounded by the likes of Charles Goodman) and Jay Garfield's moral phenomenological perspective. While each of these interpretations captures part of the essence of Śāntideva's method, they are all symptoms of a perilous hermeneutic temptation to fit Buddhist ethics into a Western mold (Garfield, 2010, p. 335). Restricting ourselves to the most

recent work on this text by Stephen Harris, however, it can be said that the two prominent interpretations of Śāntideva's ethics—the consequentialist interpretation of Goodman and the phenomenological interpretation of Garfield—do not conflict with the idea that he was a theorist of virtue. Since virtues benefit their possessor, in part by shielding him from the suffering of disordered emotions, virtue is a key element of Śāntideva's view of well-being. This is supported by the methods Śāntideva employs to develop virtue throughout his SS, chief among them being the use of the perfections as counteragents to eradicate the pathological emotions (Harris, 2024, p. 22).

However, even from these significantly differing interpretations, a way to see the SS on its own merit does emerge, i.e., instead of attempting to fit it into any one western normative ethical framework, when looked at holistically rather, one cannot but agree regarding the uniqueness of Śāntideva's descriptions of many virtuous mental states as well as the virtues that the Bodhisattva acquires as they train to consistently react to the environment in ways that result in the greater good of all (Harris, 2024, p. 24), culminating in *nirvāṇa* for all.

That being said, while the Śikṣā-samuccaya presents viewpoints that religious practitioners and some modern scholars find compelling and hence should attempt to salvage to the best of their abilities, one must also acknowledge that it also presents viewpoints that many of us would find quite troubling, particularly its hierarchical categorization of bodily distinctions. It accepts for males to be superior to women, for example, and for animals to be superior to high castes. An analysis of the SS thus involves a hermeneutics of suspicion as well as recovery, indicating how a sophisticated, brilliant, and often problematic

discourse on bodies can provide intellectual resources to modern practitioners and scholars dedicated to a human-diverse flourishing vision (Mrozik, 2007, p. 8).

Philosophy and the World: An Extra-Diegetic Reading

It would certainly be fair to presume that monastic Bodhisattvas are evidently the target audience of this text; however, we know that they are not the only ones. Monastic practices like abstaining from sensual pleasures—including having sex with one's own spouse—are occasionally encouraged for even householder Bodhisattva aspirants too. Hence, modern common perceptions of Mahayana Buddhism as a tradition geared largely towards laypeople are certainly at odds with the Śikṣā-samuccaya's advocacy for a monastic Bodhisattva lifestyle. A monastic lifestyle, as opposed to a lay one, is promoted by numerous other specimens of South Asian Mahayana literature as well, and hence analyzing the functioning of this institution in and of itself becomes important before advancing any arguments about the same (Mrozik, 2007, p. 5).

Even more overarchingly, during the first millennium, North India, like all societies where the plough is the primary method of agriculture, was a patriarchal society. High-status men controlled the majority of the wealth, power, and opportunities in that culture. Customary law treatises emphasized women's reliance on male protection and urged wives to submit to their husbands in a servile manner. Many Indian religious professionals, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, joined in the upholding of patriarchy, tinged with harsh and strident notes of ascetic misogyny, due to the widespread practice and enormous

emphasis of celibacy *(brahma-cārya)*. Additionally, Buddhist monks tried to employ aversion even when faced with a pious group of laywomen who respected them, due to any kind of sexual contact being forbidden, by using extreme means like that of meditation on foulness *(asubha-bhāvanā)* of female bodies to suppress sexual attraction.

Fortunately, the very progressive beliefs that women have a spiritual potential that is entirely equal to that of men and that the distinction between males and females is only customary and not fundamentally established do help to counterbalance the terrible propensity toward misogyny in this school of thought overall. With their deeper socio-historical roots, these teachings could perhaps help give rise to the feminist and egalitarian Buddhism that is currently attempting to emerge in the modern age as well.

Despite that though, in the larger Indian civilization, patriarchy was by no means the sole kind of unfair hierarchy. The SS regularly mentions the many forms of the old four-caste system *(varṇa)*, which was a ubiquitous social reality (Goodman, 2016, p. xxiii). It seems that being loyal to the Buddhist faith did not shield Indians from harboring disdain for individuals categorized as "untouchables." Conversely, untouchables are frequently mentioned in the SS in a somewhat more positive light, as examples of the humility that Bodhisattvas should strive to cultivate (Goodman, 2016, p. xxv).

All these aspects lead us to the only important philosophical context when looking at this text, that of rejecting monistic and monotheistic intellectual currents. Contrary to common belief, Buddhists in India accepted the existence of many gods

without hesitation, but they largely gave these gods a small and unimpressive place in their religious practices and beliefs. Because of this very minor role that the gods play, hardly any of the basic truth claims of the Buddhist tradition would be brought into doubt if the gods vanished. Even though it was discouraged for Indian Buddhists to worship the gods, it's possible that many of them had aspirations to become gods upon rebirth. This type of rebirth is mentioned several times in the SS as one of the potential outcomes of good deeds.

Furthermore, three cosmogonical categories of god-realms (as also mentioned in the chapter in focus) can be distinguished here: those belonging to the world of desire, realms of form, and formless realms (which, along with mentions of the seven-tiered heaven and hell, could perhaps be seen as informed by commonplace mythological treatises in the South Asian context). The *karmic* outcome of generosity, moral discipline, and the practice of the four *brahmavihāras* is divine rebirth within the world of desire, which is marked by an abundance of sensual pleasures. Thus, in many respects, the SS does reflect the values and beliefs of the surrounding, predominately non-Buddhist community from which it originated, and hence its desire to be applicable to all regardless of them already being a practicing Buddhist or not can certainly be credibly accounted for (Goodman, 2016, p. xxvi).

What sets SS apart from other such moral accounts

Buddhist ethics research more frequently centers on the heart-mind *(citta)*, characterizing ethical development as the cultivation of desired affective and cognitive traits like wisdom

and compassion. Buddhist traditions acknowledge that there is no clear-cut distinction between a living thing's moral and physical aspects; thus, morality and the body are closely intertwined in this schema (Mrozik, 2007, p. 3). Despite these implications, bodies are rarely given considerable attention in studies of Buddhist ethics. This oversight has been made for a number of reasons. Part of the problem probably stems from the more culturally authoritative currents in Western thought's propensity to draw a clear division between the body and the mind. But the ethical rhetoric of Buddhism itself points us toward the heart-mind. It specifically draws our attention to *cetanā*. Translated, it can be seen as referring to intention, motive, volition, or will. This supplements the common knowledge that Buddhist traditions place a high value on considering an individual's intentions or reasons when assessing their acts but do so at the expense of the embodied aspects of such an ethical process (Mrozik, 2007, p. 4).

This is why it becomes important to challenge widespread misconceptions in research on Buddhism and Buddhist ethics that say South Asian Buddhists place minimal significance on their bodies, with the exception of Tantric or Vajrayana practitioners. This line of argumentation can somewhat be supported by original Buddhist writing from South Asia, where bodies are often described as transient, vile, and devoid of any fundamental, everlasting nature. However, because of this, the majority of South Asian Buddhists were also negatively thought to give little thought to their bodies, according to scholarly conclusions—an assumption that can be seen to have two issues.

Firstly, having a negative conversation about bodies does not indicate that one is uninterested in them. Conversely, it

indicates a profound curiosity with bodies. Secondly, Buddhist literature contains a variety of body discourses. We discover a positive narrative that emphasizes the inseparable relationship between body and morality alongside a negative discourse that portrays bodies as transient, vile, and devoid of intrinsic and everlasting essence. This uplifting conversation emphasizes the vital role that bodies play in one's own and others' ethical development. The discourse surrounding bodies that is negative can be hence referred to as 'ascetic discourse,' and the speech surrounding them that is favorable as 'physio-moral discourse.' It is safe to say that within the Śikṣā-samuccaya, both can be found (Mrozik, 2007, p. 6). This is why it can be posited that this text can be a good starting point for perhaps developing an alternative embodied and compassion-based Indian ethical paradigm, in opposition to the more seemingly neutral and abstraction-focused Western mainstream framework, which seeks to hierarchize bodies and effectively exclude all those who don't conform to its unspoken ideals.

Conclusion

To conclude, Śāntideva's presentation of teachings in the Śikṣā-samuccaya does not indicate what exactly marks the purpose of beginning a Bodhisattva lifestyle, which certainly explains the diversity of interpretations that have emerged to account for it. On its own though, the Bodhisattva certainly is, in a strict sense, an ideal being with unwavering resolution whose actions and services originate from the high virtue of *prajñā-pāramitā*, or knowledge of *śūnyatā*. However, it is because *śūnyatā* and wisdom transcend barriers and distinctions that this noble goal is kept from being too distant from the average individual.

Hence, by proving that the ordinary and the ideal are significantly connected, Śāntideva effectively grounds his ideals in the everydayness of ordinary life, making this ethical theory much more accessible than its average classical Western mainstream counterparts. This connection is based on the notion that anybody can make progress toward ultimate collective enlightenment by developing oneself to be able to will it for others as well. The ability to reach into the imperfect world and make an impression there is the test of the ideal, despite the fact that it is extremely sublime and appears to be far away. Overall, the SS thus effectively establishes what it sets out to do, which is proving, as Śāntideva so eloquently demonstrates, that the wisdom of the Bodhisattva is an ethical ideal that must be pursued (Bastien, 1982, p. 101).

The above instantiations lend further credence to the central argument of this paper—that in the model of ethical conduct prescribed in the SS, if there even exists any hierarchization between the mind (reason) and the body (actions) when it comes to which takes precedence, it is definitely the latter (with compassion replacing reason as being the highest ideal instead). This makes it all the more important for us to look for a way to characterize this kind of morality as something that lies beyond the limited liberal-rational frameworks of thought, which seek to only largely abstract and universalize the whole process of moral reasoning.

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Notes on Contributors

Asanga Tilakaratne

Professor (Emeritus) Asanga Tilakaratne is a distinguished scholar of Buddhism, specializing in Theravada Buddhism and served as a Emeritus Professor of the Department of Buddhust Studies at the University of Colombo. He contributed extensively to Buddhist studies through his writings, including Nirvana and Ineffability and Theravada Buddhism: The View of the Elders. A former director of the Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies, University of Kelaniya his work bridges academic rigor and traditional Buddhist thought, influencing scholars worldwide. Currently Tilakaratne serves as the Dean of the Faculty of Postgraduate Studies at Nagananda International Institute of Buddhist Studies, Kelaniya.

C. D. Sebastian

Dr C. D. Sebastian is Professor of Indian Philosophy at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay, Mumbai. He holds his MA (first rank with two gold medals) and PhD degrees in Indian Philosophy from Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi; and he did his Postdoctoral Research at University of Bristol, UK. He is an established scholar and researcher in Buddhism, Indian Philosophy and Comparative Philosophy. For more details- URL: https://www.hss.iitb.ac.in/people/faculty/c-d-sebastian

Ven. Nabirittankadawara Gnanaratana

Ven. Nabirittankadawara Gnanaratana is the Chair Professor and Coordinator of Foreign Academic Programs in the Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies at the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka. He holds an Honours Degree in Pali and Sanskrit from the University of Kelaniya, an MA from the Buddhist and Pali University, and a PhD in Pali and Prakrit from Delhi University. He also earned a Royal Pandith Degree from the Oriental Studies Society of Sri Lanka and a Diploma in Chinese from the Chinese Language and Culture College, Beijing. He served as the Director of Pirivena Education in Sri Lanka and Secretary of the Oriental Studies Society of Sri Lanka (2016-2018).

Prama Chakrabarty

Dr. Prama Chakrabarty is currently serving as a Guest Faculty in the Department of Philosophy (Postgraduate Course) at Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Vivekananda Vidyabhavan Girls' College in Kolkata, West Bengal. She earned her Ph.D. from the Department of Philosophy, University of Calcutta, Kolkata. She was awarded the prestigious Junior Research Fellowship by the Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR-JRF). Her primary areas of academic interest include the Madhyamaka philosophy of Nagarjuna, Prācīna Nyāya, and Advaita Vedanta philosophy.

Lin Guanrong

Lin Guanrong is a teacher and translator at the English Base for Buddhist Exchange in China. She holds a Master's degree in Buddhist Studies from the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka. Her research focuses on Buddhist logic and Madhyamaka philosophy, with particular interest in the historical development of Madhyamaka doctrines and their dialectical methods.

Sunaina Mishra

Sunaina Mishra is a PhD researcher in Philosophy at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Bombay. Her research focuses on embodied virtue ethics in Mahayana Buddhist thought, with particular attention to the intersections of ethics, mind-body discourse, and soteriology. Her broader academic interests include Buddhist philosophy, classical Indian thought, and exploring the interface between moral philosophy and contemplative traditions through a gendered lens.

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