The Avatamsaka Sūtra (Chinese: 華嚴經; Japanese: Kegon K'yō) in full Mahavaipulya-buddhavatamsaka-sutra (The Great and Vast Buddha Garland Sutra), is one of the longest sutras in the Buddhist Canon and records the highest teaching of Buddha Sakyamuni, immediately after Enlightenment. It is traditionally believed that the Sutra was taught to the Bodhisattvas and other high spiritual beings while the Buddha was in samadhi. The Sutra has been described as “the epitome of Buddhist thought, Buddhist sentiment and Buddhist experience” and is quoted by all schools of Mahayana Buddhism.

The first complete translation of the Avatamsaka Sūtra in Chinese was done by Buddhabhadra (359-429) between 418-421. This translation is in sixty fascicles and has thirty-four chapters. It is also referred to as “Sixty Huayen” or “Old sutra”.

A latter translation of the Sutra under the same title was completed by Śikṣānanda (652-710) in Tang dynasty. This translation is in eighty fascicles and has thirty-nine chapters. It is also referred to as “Eighty Huayen” or “New sutra”.

The third translation of the Sutra was done by Prajñā not too long after the second translation. The origin of this Sanskrit source was from different part of India and the content was similar to the last forty fascicles of the Avatamsaka-sūtra therefore it is called “Forty Hua-yen” or “Last Huayen”.

The first two translations are quite similar, the second being perhaps more literal and somewhat longer because it contains new material not found
in the earlier version. And the last one is a re-translation of the second part of the sutra with minor regional differences.

The Avatamsaka Sūtra doctrine shows the entire cosmos as a single nexus of conditions in which everything simultaneously depends on, and is depended on by, everything else. Seen in this light, then, everything affects and is affected by, more or less immediately or remotely, everything else; just as this is true of every system of relationships, so is it true of the totality of existence.

The ethics of the Avatamsaka Sūtra is based on this fundamental theme of universal interdependence; while the so-called Bodhisattva, the person devoted to enlightenment, constantly nourishes aspiration and will going beyond the world, nevertheless the striving for completion and perfection, the development of ever greater awareness, knowledge, freedom, and capability, is continually reinvested, as it were, in the world, dedicated to the liberation and enlightenment of all beings.

The main subject of this sutra is the description of the Buddha's enlightenment. It provides a detail guide for practitioners to pursuit the Bodhisattva's Path, from the awakening of Bodhicitta to the accomplishment of perfect Buddhahood. The Bodhisattva Path is presented in four sets of ten stages, culminating with the two levels of enlightenment, the final goal of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

So far as the existing studies on the topic are concerned, we do not find much. Apart from few introductory papers, no critical or analytical works have been done so far on this text. However, we do find several exegeses and commentaries done by several Huayan scholars in which
thread ware discussion and explanation have been done on the teachings of the Buddha contained in it.

It is quite apparent from the foregoing discussion that an analytical study of the philosophy of the Avatamsaka Sūtra is still a desideratum and the present attempt by the researcher will definitely add some new dimension to the existing study on the topic. The entire work has been divided into five chapters:

Chapter 1: The Avatamsaka Sūtra: An Introduction
Chapter 2: The Special Feature of the Avatamsaka School
Chapter 3: The Conceptions of the Ten Stages of the Bodhisattva
Chapter 4: The Conceptions of the Universe in the Avatamsaka Sūtra
Chapter 5: Conclusion

The Avatamsaka Sūtra is a voluminous Mahāyāna Buddhist text. Some consider it as the most sublime revelation of the Gautama Buddha's teachings. Scholars value the text for its revelations about the evolution of thought from primitive Buddhism to fully developed Mahāyāna.

The researcher, therefore, proposes to discuss the philosophy of the text which has made it an object of worship among the followers of the Buddha. However, keeping in mind the vastness and abstruse nature of the text it would not be advisable for the researcher to cover all the concepts discussed in it. Therefore, the emphasis will be given in the proposed thesis only on those chapters of the text which are philosophically more relevant.