CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

In the history of thought there is nothing altogether new. No system of thought issues forth in all its fullness from the head of any particular man. There must have existed philosophical ideas and doctrines affording the necessary material for the founder to work upon. It is sometimes said that Nāgārjuna (C.150-250A.D.) appeared at the right moment and at the right place in Buddhist history to provide necessary corrective measures to Buddhist philosophical analysis of man's nature and there initiated a new movement with the Mahāyāna tradition. First of all, however, it must be remembered that he did not appear out of a vacuum but rather he came after a long period of Buddhist activity in India proper. At least six or seven centuries had passed between the historical Buddha (6th century B.C.) and Nāgārjuna (circa 2nd - 3rd century A.D.), a time in which Buddhist activity explored, criticised and propagated the Buddhist truth.

Indeed, insofar as Mahāyāna Buddhism is concerned, Nāgārjuna stands out as the giant among giants who laid the foundation of religious and philosophical quests. His supreme position has stood firm for centuries in all the countries blessed with the Mahāyāna form of Buddhism that always occupied the second position in the lineage of Buddhist patriarchs inspite of various sectarian developments of those lands - Tibet, China and Japan. He was, in
short, considered to be the Second Buddha. On the other hand, his veneration at times reached such ridiculous heights that his name was sanctified and stamped everywhere with reckless abandon even for purposes of feigning scriptural authority. Despite the excesses spirit displayed in different forms, we very much acknowledge the fact that such religious veneration becomes an important vehicle for the propagation as well as continuity of Buddhism as such.

Nāgārjuna was very frank, to be sure, in admitting that he expounded nothing new and that he was only elaborating on the teachings of the historical Buddha. Thus, the task is not simple and it is important to seek a sense of direction and temporal dimension in the analysis. Though he did not establish a school or a system of thought as such, he did attract such overwhelming interest from masses through his unique writings that a tradition of a sort soon arose during the life time and a large following developed as a consequence. The age prior to Nāgārjuna is an almost "no man's" land as far as extant literature is concerned, because firstly, the texts are rather scanty and secondly, authors of the texts are not accurately known. The whole mass of Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra, which began to appear some time in the 1st Century B.C. and which continued to be composed as well as to exert influence until the very end of Buddhism in

1. Ch.-III, deals with this issue in details.
2. Yadi kacana pratijna syanme tata esa me bhaved dosa/ nasti ca mama pratijna tasman naivasti me dosah //
VV, Verse-29.
India in the 12th Century A.D., is a good example of the type of early or founding texts which express the highest and most profound understanding of the Mahāyāna; but such understanding could scarcely be attributed to a single man or handful individuals. Nāgārjuna then appeared at the opportune moment to present a concise and systematic view of the thought crystallized over the five or six centuries since the Buddha. It is to be noted that Moggaliputta Tissa, the chairman of Third Buddhist council, held under the patronage of the Great emperor Aśoka in the Third Century B.C, also was author of voluminous Abhidhamma treatise called kathāvatthu - Pakaraṇa, containing the ideas of at least five hundred different sectarian views in the Buddhist fold. But, truly speaking, from the time of Nāgārjuna, concise and systematic view of thoughts were beginning to crystallize. Indian philosophy has its interest in the haunts of men, and not in supra-lunar solitudes. It takes its origin in life and enters back into life after passing through the schools. The founders of philosophy strive for a socio-spiritual reformation of the country. The common characteristic of Indian philosophies is that it is essentially spiritual. It is the intense spirituality of India, and not any great political structure or social organisation it has developed, that has enabled it to resist the ravages of time and accidents of history. It is

3. Besides the bulky Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, some of the pre-Nāgārjuna works, are the Saddharmapuṇḍarika Sūtra, Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra, Avalokiteśvara, Śūtras, etc. But authors are not clearly known. It is also dealt in the following pages in chapter relating to the Buddhist Philosophical schools and Background of Mādhyamikas.

4. Moggaliputattissa, Third Buddhist Council, Aśoka and Kathāvatthu - Pakaraṇa are discussed in details in the same chapter.
singly strange that while the social life of an individual is bound by the
rigours of castes he can roam freely in the realm of thinking. He is free to
reason, question and criticize the creeds into which men are born. That is why
the heretic, the sceptic, the unbeliever, the rationalist and the free thinker, the
materialist and the hedonist all flourish in the soil of India. Thus in one day,
Buddha (6th century B.C.) made his appearance as a 'Saviour' against
Brāhmanical exploitation, deprivation and arbitrariness. Buddha had the zeal
and courage to attack popular religion, superstition, ceremonial and priest craft,
and all the vested interests that clung to them. His emphasis was on ethics and
his method was on psychological analysis, a psychology without a soul. He did
not attack caste directly, yet in his Sāṃgha he did not recognise it, and there is
no doubt that his whole attitude, and activity weakened the caste-system.
Based on his preaching an unconscious opinion against age-old Brāhmical
tradition was gaining ground. In order to comprehend the importance of
Nāgārjuna's contribution to Indian belief and thought as a notable successor of
Buddha it is necessary to have a bird's-eye view of the Buddha's dedication to
the eradication of suffering of mankind.

The Dhammacakkappavattana - Sutta, traditionally known as the first

5. Radhakrishnan, S. Indian Philosophy, Vol-I, pp. 71ff. Dutt, N. Early Monastic
Buddhism, pp. 1-62; Chaudhuri, S. Gautam Buddhher Dharma O Darśan (in Bengali)
Avataranikā, pp 1ff. Bhattacharya, Bela, Factes of early Buddhism, Introduction,
pp. 46-47.
discourse' of Bhagavān Buddha, Contains the fundamentals of Buddha's teachings, the so-called Majjhima patipadā (Middle Path) and the enunciation of the Cattari-ariya-saccāni (Four Noble Truths). Ethically, the Middle Path cannotes the moderate life of a recluse, i.e., the monastic system, prescribed in the Vinaya Pitaka. Philosophically, the middle path is explained as the doctrine which keeps clear of the two extreme views about the world viz., Sāsvata (eternalism) and Uccheda (annihilation). He experimented with the trodden paths for attaining perfection but found then to be inefficacious for attaining the goal. "He could not totally shake off the age-old Indian beliefs and traditions, and so we find some of them incorporated in his teachings. He accepted only those which appeared to him reasonable and fitted in with his line of thinking. From his spiritual experience, Buddha became convinced of the four noble truths, that there is - i) Dukkha (Suffering); ii) Dukkha - Samudaya (cause of Suffering); iii) Dukkha - Nirodha (Cessation of Suffering) and iv) Dukkha - Nirodhagāminī - Patipadā (Paths leading to the cessation suffering). According to Buddha, there is only one problem in this world, that is suffering. Infact, "World is founded on suffering" issuing from the created cycle of existence. Let us now explain the suffering.

8. Various interpretations on the two heretical doctrines as depicted in Brahmajāla and refutation by Nāgārjuna in his kārikā have been presented by N. Dutt. Ibid. pp. 38ff specially pp. 58-60.
9. Ibid. p. 133.
In the very beginning, Buddha points out that every person is living in the world of problems and sufferings. Sufferings signify the day to day problems of each and every family, the problems of each and every community, the problems of each and every nation, of country which are the conglomeration of sufferings of each of them. But what is suffering? Buddha identifies it as follows: “Birth is suffering, ageing is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow, lamentation, pain-despair is suffering, association with un wanted is suffering, separation from the wanted is suffering, not to get what one wishes that also is suffering, in brief, five aggregates (as objects of attachment) are suffering”\(^\text{11}\). “Origin of suffering lies in the selfish desire or craving. Craving is of three kinds - craving for sense pleasures, (kāmataṅhā) craving for becoming, (Bhavataṅhā), craving for non-becoming (Vibhava-taṅhā). Craving causes rebirth. Craving is found accompanied with passionate lust and strong desire for getting this or that. For example craving for sense - pleasure leads to craving for becoming, what however is worth while is craving for non - becoming.”\(^\text{12}\) This vibhava-taṅhā (craving for non becoming) produces more conflict. It produces a sharper contrast between the delusive opposites of self and others. Thus it is clear that craving


\(^{12}\) “Yayaṃ taṅhā ponobahikā nandiraga sahagatā tatratatābhihinandirī, seyyathīdham - kāmataṅhā, bhavataṅhā, vibhavataṅhā.” - Ibid.
is the cause and effect of suffering. We notice here seed and fruit, action and reaction. It makes and remakes the world as thirst for becoming. Life depends on the desires of life. All forms of appetite are included in craving. Greed, thirst, affection desire, house-hold love denote craving.

These are the causes of suffering. Avoiding the two extremes Buddha resorted to the Majjhima-Patipadā. This truth is extended by the twelve-linked formula which is known as the law of Dependent origination - Paticca-Samuppāda.\(^\text{13}\) Ignorance (Avidyā) is the root cause of suffering. Beings are attached to existence through his ignorance, craving and clinging. They continue their lives round the "Wheel of Existence". Created world is an endless chain of suffering. But suffering is not also lasting, because it too is subject to change. Because in this world nothing could be remained unchanged.\(^\text{14}\) Thus suffering is discussed here from three perspectives: suffering in its ordinary form\(^\text{15}\), suffering of conditioned states\(^\text{16}\) as well as suffering caused by change.\(^\text{17}\).

Birth, ageing ..... etc are the ordinary suffering which are called dukkha -

\(^\text{13}\) Paticcasamuppāda, Bhattacharya, Bela, Ibid. Vh-III, pp. 91-92. In the following pages, ch. - V, Mūlamadhyamaakārikā - Nāgārjunā's Major contribution.
\(^\text{14}\) 'Yam kiriñci samudayadhhammam sabbam tam nirodha - dhamman ti // - Saṁyutta - Nikāya, P.T.S., Vol. - VI, 2.5. at pp. 157-158.
\(^\text{15}\) Dukkha - dukkhata.
\(^\text{16}\) Sañkhā - dukkhatā.
\(^\text{17}\) Vipariñāma - dukkhatā.
dukkhatā. The word saṃkhārā¹⁸ (conditioned states) means the thing which is subject to cause and effect. Thus Pañcātipadānakhandhā¹⁹ (group of five aggregates) are suffering. Finally vipariṇāma dukkha comes through unsatisfactoriness due to impermanence. Pleasant things are not permanent to a man who can experience them for a moment and they disappear. Things which are transient are suffering. Whatever is impermanent is suffering²⁰.

Radhakrishnan observes - 'insistence on suffering is not peculiar to Buddhism, though Buddha emphasised it overmuch. In the whole history of thought no one has painted the misery of human existence in blacker colours and with more feeling than Buddha. The melancholy foreshadowed in the Upaniṣads occupies the central place here. Possibly by ascetic ideals of an unreasoned exaltation of poverty, glorification of self-sacrifice, and an obsession of renunciation cast a hypnotic spell over Buddha's mind. To make people long for escape from this world, its blackness is a little overdrawn. We may try all we can to spread comfort and happiness and suppress all social injustice, yet man

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18. Saṃkhārā, Ch.-II, in the following chapters, Upanishadic Soul Theory and Buddhist Theory of Soulessness.

19. Pañcātipadāna - khandhā, Ibid.

20. Sabbe saṃkhārā anicca ti yadā paññāya passati /
    atha nibbanti dukkhe esa maggo visuddhiyā //
    Sabbe saṃkhārā dukkha ........... /
    Sabbhe dhamma anattā ............ /

    Dhammapada, Verses - 277-279.

will not have satisfaction. Buddha concludes, existence is pain, the struggle to maintain individuality is painful, and fluctuations of fortune are frightful.\textsuperscript{21}

Finally, suffering refers to the status of man in the empirically bound sense. That is to say, he is bundle of suffering by virtue of the ontologically objectified attachments he maintains both on the "physical" and "mental" levels. Until or unless he can relinquish himself from these objectified attachments (Upādāna according to the Hinayana concept and avarana depicted by the Mahayana), his perfected ontological status will not be fulfilled. The desires or cravings (Trṣṇā/Taṅhā) refer specifically to the unwarranted "longings" for the phantasmagorically objectified or permanentized elements of life process. Once more, in this sense, suffering is a negatively expressed condition of man who can convert himself into something positively pure. The cessation of Buddhist suffering (Dukkha - nirodha) constitutes at once enlightenment - Bodhi.\textsuperscript{22} The middle path might then be termed the ontological inclusiveness, excellence, purity or supremeness of being. Nāgārjuna captured and continued this fundamental message on the nature of man's highest state and gave his own "systematic" treatment of it by way of the kārikā. He gave direction ot man for his ontological quest in the mundane world. Though man is initially bound by defilements ultimately he is capable of channelling his life to richer, fuller and purer realms. Understood in this sense this study on Nāgārjuna would be much meaningful and significant.

\textsuperscript{21} Indian Philosophy, Vol-I, pp. 362-363.
\textsuperscript{22} Equivalent to Hinayāna - Nibbāna. Bhattacharya, Bela, Ibid. ch-VI, pp. 151-164. It has been further discussed in the following pages, (Ch.-V, relating to Mūlamadhyamakakārikā - Major contribution of Nāgārjuna).