CHAPTER III

THE CENTRAL PHILOSOPHY OF THE ŚRĪMĀLĀ SŪTRA

Among the numerous sūtras or sacred texts of Māhāyāna Buddhism, some, such as Saddharmapuṇḍarīka sūtra, Vimalakīrti sūtra, Avataṃsaka sūtra, Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, the Śrīmālā sūtra is one of the most famous and influential works of the Māhāyāna Buddhist canons. The Śrīmālā sūtra is outstanding for the eloquent and orderly manner in which it expounds the basic tenets of Māhāyāna. The philosophy of the Śrīmālā sūtra is important to understand Buddhism, as Alex Wayman writes in the foreword of ‘The Lion’s roar of Queen Śrīmālā’ as follows:

“The scripture is initially noteworthy for its forceful and eloquent portrayal of “Embrace of the Illustrious Doctrine”. And later particularly for its exposition of the Tathāgatagarbha theory (the potentiality of Buddhahood in sentient beings), for which it is the chief scripture. It is an important source for the “One Vehicle” (Ekayāna) doctrine, and probably unparalleled in its teaching of the lay Bodhisattva path. Among the important tenets of this scripture is its manner of differentiating the Arhats and Pratyekabuddhas from the Tathāgatas by asserting that those first two have still not eliminated the nescience entrenchment (avidyā-vāsa-bhūmi) even though having temporarily stopped flux (āsrava). The scripture announces the remarkable doctrine that the Arhats, Pratyekabuddhas and Bodhisattvas who have attained power to be on the last three Bodhisattva stages, have respectively three ‘bodies made of mind’ (manomaya-kāya) by which, and by the nescience entrenchment, they are eventually reborn.

There is the striking feature of having a queen named Śrīmālā as the interlocutor, contrasting with other Mahāyāna scriptures where either well-
known disciples such as Śāriputra, or bodhisattva such as Mañjuśrī, are employed as interlocutor." Thus, the Śrīmālā sūtra is the most important text that contains the essence of Mahāyāna thought and spirituality. The sūtra has significantly contributed to Buddhist study on basic doctrines such as Ekayāna, Tathāgatagarbha, Dharmakāya, the Noble truths and Sūnyatā. These doctrines will be taken up for discussion in the present chapter.

3.1. The Theory of ‘One Vehicle’ (Ekayāna):

3.1.1. Principle and the meaning of the “One Vehicle”:

The theory of “One Vehicle” is so important in Śrīmālā that in the original text prior to the imposition of chapter divisions fully half of the entire scripture, namely, “Clarifying the Final Meaning”, can be considered as the development of “One Vehicle” theory. The One Vehicle ‘Ekayāna’ embraces all the other paths on account of it being the most authentic. It is a path for all, and not only for the select few, as is the case with Hinayāna. According to the Śrīmālā, the ‘One Vehicle’ is the Great Vehicle which incorporates all vehicles. In order to point out the universal character of Ekayāna, the Queen Śrīmālā said that:

“Lord, when one is based on the Vehicle and embraces the Great Vehicle, he also has recourse to and embraces all the Vehicles of Disciples and of the Self-Enlightened and all the mundane and supramundane virtuous natures.”

The Queen Śrīmālā stated that the teaching of the Lord Buddha is set up in six categories:

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48 Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr), Op. Cit., foreword, pp. vii-viii
49 Op. Cit, 79
“Lord, you explained six basic topics: preservation of the Illustrious Doctrine, decline of the Illustrious Doctrine, the Prātimokṣa, the Vinaya, the going forth to the Religious life, and Monk ordination; besides, these six topics stem from the purport of the Great vehicle.”

The view of the Queen Śrīmālā means that Lord Buddha’s teaching can be practiced by all people and at all ages. At the time of Buddha, the social distribution level was limited but the point of view of the Queen Śrīmālā was unlimited. That is why the Buddha’s teachings are preached to the whole world. Because of the Lord Buddha’s teachings for social ethics, the disciples of the Buddha are pioneers of practicing these social ethics in the social community. They go forth to the religious life and receive full ordination, reside with the laws of Prātimokṣa and Vinaya and then cultivate the foundation of preservation of the “Illustrious Doctrine” and decline of the “Illustrious Doctrine”.

When the Buddha declared his teachings in his time, he had built a community of monks with their Prātimokṣa. This is the Sāṅgha dwelling under the precepts issued by the Buddha, and they lived with principles of Vinaya. By the time of the Buddha, the level of the social situation was still simple, the monks alone lived in the forest and received the full precepts (Chinese: 具足戒), meaning thereby abandoning the society and people, seclusion in the forest to pursue their religious life. Nowadays, the social situation is high, the person cannot live alone leaving society, therefore, the life of going forth to the religious life and monk-ordination must be understood, meaning to abandon the individual’s life and devoting a general career in the society. In another way of thinking, there is no personal

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50Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr) Op. Cit: 79.
attainment of the individual, rather, there is attainment of all human beings; personal happiness depends on the social happiness.

From this viewpoint one can see that Prātimokṣa precepts are not simply a means of personal success; and Vinaya is also not for personal activity, but for social community and strictly related with all the people in the world. The Queen Śrīmālā says: “The two Dharmas called Prātimokṣa and Vinaya\(^1\) differ as words but have the same meaning. What is called ‘Vinaya’ is the instruction for persons in the Great Vehicle. The reason is that it is for Tathāgatahood and for the going forth to the religious life and monk ordination”\(^2\).

The Great Vehicle’s disciplinary is Bodhisattva’s disciplinary, called ‘Three accumulative pure precepts’ (Chinese: 三聚淨戒)\(^3\) with the ‘Three accumulative pure precepts’, the Bodhisattva takes true refuge, embraces the doctrine and practices the Bodhisattva’s career.

Preservation of the Illustrious Doctrine means practicing the Great Vehicle Doctrine or the way of Bodhisattva. In this way, there is no personal gain; there is no happiness without the happiness of the social community. Living in the ‘Illustrious Doctrine’ and practicing the ‘Great Vehicle’ brings about the cessation of suffering and is for the benefit of mankind. The Great Vehicle carries human beings to a safe, peaceful and happy place or nirvāṇa. Nowadays, those who live in modern life, a modern society, modern technology; should think how to help the people who are living in underdeveloped countries and in complicated environments. The world will

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\(^1\) The Pratimoksa and Vinaya are the chief words of the disciplinary codes of Buddhism. The Vinaya is the most general term, and stand for the whole body of literature and practices of discipline for all the order of laity ward monks. The Pratimoksa contains the list of prohibitions and those offenses for which confession must be made by monk.

\(^2\) A. Wayman, Op. Cit., p. 80

\(^3\) Three accumulative pure precepts: a. the formal; b. whatever works for goodness; c. whatever works for the welfare or salvation of living, sentient beings. (A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms, p 79)
be destroyed if people live in hatred, and selfish ambition. The Buddha said: "There is no fire like passion; there is no blemish like hatred; there is no suffering like physical existence (the five aggregates or skandhas) and there is no bliss equal to the calm (of nirvana)."  

The Buddha’s teachings can relate with all ages and give light to people to take refuge in and to live in happiness. This is the aim of One Vehicle. Therefore, in all periods of history, and all social situations, if all human beings endeavour to practice this dharma cautiously and rightly, they will settle happily in the world without terrorism, war and suffering.

3.1.2. **Historical development of One Vehicle:**

After the demise of the Buddha, Buddhism developed progressively and widely in India, along with the neighboring countries. Buddhist schools flourished and divided into many branches. The spread of Buddhism in neighboring countries was revealed to Emperor Aśoka. After the success of the Third Council, the King dispatched one group of monks to neighboring countries as missionaries, especially to Sri Lanka, with his son and daughter as monk and nun. It is said that during the 3rd Century of Buddhism, the community of Order was split into seventeen schools including the original body. Of the schools or sects, all of them claimed to represent the original Teachings of the Buddha. The distinction between these schools was basically with regard to various interpretations of the Teachings of the Buddha. Over a period of time, these schools gradually merged into two main schools: Theravāda and Mahāyāna. Today, a majority of the followers of Buddhism are divided into these two schools.  

Furthermore, there are several lists of these schools in existence which we have from Sanskrit sources, but they vary.

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54 Dhammapada, C XV, Verse 202
so much that it is impossible to form a chronological scheme of the growth of the divisions. They were drawn up long after the schools originated, and represented the attempts of the scholasts to construct a history. Names, such as the names of places, suggest the development of schools in special localities, and some are stemmed from the peculiar doctrine of the school.

The real value of the list of schools is in giving us an approximate view about various periods and the distinct communities. From this point of view, the list in the Mahāvyutpatti is one of the most important. It is also of special interest in giving one of the few references in Sanskrit Buddhism to the school of Ceylon. It is a Sarvāstivādin list, and may have been developed in the fifth or sixth century A.D., but it evidently contains older elements. The list of Sarvāstivādin is as follows:


2. Sammatīyas: Kaurukullakas, Āvantakas, Vātsīputrīyas.


4. Sthāviras: Mahāvīhāravāsins, Jetavanīyas, Abhayagirivāsins.\(^{56}\)

This is Vīṇītadeva’s information and classification, and it evidently pointed to a later or subsequent date. He includes the later schools in his lists and omits some schools from his time, e.g., the Ekaryavahārika, Gokulika, Dharmottariya, and Bhadrayānika. Particularly noticeable is his inclusion of the Ceylonese sects like Jetavanīya consisting of Sāgalika of the Mahāvaṃsa,

\(^{56}\) E.J. Thomas, the History of Buddhist Thought, New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharial: 2004: 38.
and the Mahāvihāravāsin. The Jetavanaṇīya came into existence in the reign of Mahāsena (5th century A. D.)

There were many schools appearing by the time in which the Sarvāstivāda was a school. These new schools were contributing to the rise of the Mahāyāna School. A scholar from India: “The Sarvāstivādins had two kāya conceptions, viz., rūpakāya and dharmakāya. But these did not bear any Mahāyānic sense, though their conception of dharmakāya helped the Yogācarins in the formulation of their conception of the same. The Sarvāstivādins were also responsible for the addition of the fourth term, sūnya to the usual trio, viz., duḥkha, anitya, and anātma, though the word conveyed no Mahāyānic meaning as it connoted no other sense than anātma”.

The Mahāsāṅghikas may have been the forerunners of Mahāyāna, but it is clear that the Sarvāstivādins contributed much to the growth of Mahāyāna in one way or another. As a sign of contrast, it may further be pointed out that Subhūti, a prominent figure in the Sarvāstivāda traditions, played an important role in the Prajñāpāramitā. It is unusual to find a Hīnayāna monk explaining the Śūnyatā doctrine, which goes directly against his own; so the prajñāpāramitā offers us an explanation of the anomaly by saying that whatever was preached by Subhūti was not according to his own beliefs but rather according to the inspiration of Buddhas. We learn from Chinese translators that the Lalitavistara was a biography of Buddha of the Savāstivāda School. Mahāyānism in all probability came into being in the south, where the offshoots of the Mahāsāṅghika had their centers of activity, but the place where it appeared more developed was somewhere in the

eastern part of India where the Sarvāstivādins were predominant. After that, Mahāyāna was the most successful in Nalanda.

It has been determined from historical facts that Buddhist history has been stated briefly by the Scholar Dutt:

1. Buddhism is no longer one. It is divided into three principal sections, viz., Theravāda, Sarvāstivāda, and Mahāsaṅghika. The Theravādins remained in the central belt of India, making their position stronger in Avanti where Mahākaccāyana had laid the foundation of Buddhism and from which place Mahendra was dispatched to Ceylon to propagate Theravāda Buddhism there. The Sarvāstivādins were also in the central belt of India with their centres of activity in Mathura and Kashmir, the former having been founded by Upagupta and maintained by Madhyāntika. They spread it widely all over Northern India including Tukhāra on the north-west, Mālava on the west and Oḍivīśa (Orissa) and Kāmarūpa on the east. The Mahāsaṅghikas established themselves at Vaisāli and had followers sprinkled all over Northern India, but they became most popular in the south. In short, Buddhism during this period spread all over Northern India and parts of Southern India.

2. Emperor Aśoka took great interest in Buddhism but did not help any particular sect. The dharma preached in his edicts is mainly ethical and lacks the specific colouring of any school of Buddhism. He encouraged leading a righteous household life rather than the life of a monk or an ascetic. He, however, respected and supported the monks and recluses. The interest taken by rulers, like Mināra and Imhasa, helped greatly the propagation of Buddhism outside India.

3. The relation of the laity to the Buddhist Saṅgha was not materially altered as compared with the previous conditions. A greater interest was
created for the laity by popularizing Buddhism through the Jātakas and Avadānas and by holding up the Pāramītā practices before them as ideal.

4. Much stress was laid on the composition of the Jātakas and Avadānas and great religious merit was attached to reading, writing, painting, and carving them. This caught the fancy of the laity as a means of earning religious merit, and resulted in many sculptures, some of which are preserved at Sanchi and Bharaut. The credit of popularizing the religion through the Jātakas and Avadānas goes initially to the Sarvāstivādins and later to the Theravādins.

5. The old division of Navāṅga was increased to Dvādaśāṅga by the addition of Nidāna, Avadāna, and Upadeśa. Though the Jatakas formed one of the divisions of the Navāṅga, they did not exist as a separate literature, but were embodied in the discourses purporting to have been delivered by Buddha and his disciples.

6. The account of the Life of Buddha commenced not from the time of Siddhartha’s retirement but from the first resolution (pranidhāna) made by Sumedha Brāhmaṇa, and the prophecy (veyyākarana) made by Dīpankara Buddha.

7. The essential doctrines remain the same as in the first period with slight changes, e.g., the addition of sūnya to the usual antiya, duḥkha, and anātman, and of the six pāramitās to the thirty-seven Bodhipakṣika dharmas.

8. Some radical changes were effected in the tenets of the schools which developed during this period, e.g. the Sarvāstivādins started their doctrine of realism and of the existence of past, present, and future while the Mahāsanghikas conceived Buddha domestically and introduced the Bodhisattva conception.
9. The goal of life remained Arhathood and Pratyekabuddhahood with the Theravādins, while the Sarvāstivādins added to them the goal of Samyaksambuddhahood.

10. The conception of Nirvāṇa as sukhā and śānta did not change much. The Sarvāstivādins and the Mahāsāṅghikas agree mainly with the Theravādins. But the doctrine of realism of the Sarvāstivādins has led Prof. Stcherbatsky to interpret their Nirvāṇa as an ultimate lifeless state.

11. The growth of the Abhidharma literature took place during this period. As the principal schools located their centre of activity in different places, the development of the literature of each school was independent of one another. This accounts for the wide divergence between the Abhidharma literature of the Theravādins and that of the Sarvāstivādins.

12. The concept of Bodhisattva, Pāramitā practices and the goal of Buddhahood are the only Mahāyānic traces that appeared in the doctrines of the Mahāsāṅghikas and Sarvāstivādins and their offshoots.\(^{58}\)

The concepts of Mahāyāna are as mentioned above by Dr. Dutt. At that time, the conflict between Hinayāna and Mahāyāna happened when the systematization of the Mahāyāna doctrines occurred. This is the cause of the production of the texts of Mahāyāna such as Prajñāpāramitās, Saddharma-puṇḍarīka, Lankāvatāra, Dasabhūmikasūtra, and Gaṇḍavyūha. The Prajñāpāramitās are full of Mahāyānic technical expressions and phraseology, in order to show how the position of the Hinayānists is untenable, how they are diluted by the superficialities of the religion, and how insignificant is their knowledge in comparison with that of a Bodhisattva practicing the prajñāpāramitā. The Saddharma-puṇḍarīka sets itself to the task of proving

that the Hīnayānists are of poor intellect, but yet they can make progress in religious matters, ultimately turning to Mahāyāna and comprehending the truth. The Gaṇḍavyūha essays depict the great Bodhisattva-struggles which are beyond the capacity of the Hīnayānists in order to know the Samantabhadra-Bodhisattva. Sudhana, one of the Bodhisattva, visits many Bodhisattvas, Bhikkhus, Bhikkhuṇīs, Upāsakas and Upāsikas. These visits are versed in certain portions of the Čaryā and acquire the same from them. The Dasabhūmikasūtra, as the title indicates, is related to the practices connected with the bhūmis, the gradual stages of a bodhisattva’s sanctification. It also never misses an opportunity to attack the Hīnayānists and to express how the last four bhūmis of the Bodhisattvas are wholly beyond the capacity of the Śrāvakas. The Laṃkāvatāra (one of the latest books of this group which is translated into Chinese) maintains an exposition of the early Yogācāra system and criticizes throughout on the theme, viz., how the Hīnayānists are concerned only with Svasāmānyalaksana (particular and generic characteristics of objects) and are ignorant of the non-existence of all objects.

The Mahāyāna texts that immediately follow are those of Nāgārjuna, Asanga, Āryadeva, Vasubandhu, etc. Though the main object of Nāgārjuna’s Kankhā is to establish the thesis that things are relatively existent, and that the truth is one and realizable only within one’s own-self, he takes up the dogma of the Hīnayānic schools and tries to prove its hollowness from the new standpoint set up by him. Asanga, though of a much later date, does not allow the Hīnayānic doctrines to pass unnoticed. He shows in his Lamkara sūtra the inferiority of the Hīnayānist in mental caliber and their unfitness to comprehend the truth. Vasubandhu likewise in his Vījñaptimātratāsiddhi pointedly indicates how the Hīnayānists labour under misconceptions, complete eradication of which is the aim of the Mahāyānist. Thus it is seen
that though most of the works mentioned above belong to a time later than the appearance of Mahāyāna, they present materials illustrative of the conflict for ascendancy that was going on between the Hīnayānists and the Mahāyānists.

In such a situation, the Mahāyānists attempt to explain their doctrine. A point is very interesting that the Mahāyānists do not eradicate the doctrine of Hīnayānists but they connect them to Mahāyāna doctrine. That causes the appearance of the term Yāna, such as Hīnayāna, Sravakayāna, Pratyekabuddhayāna, Bodhisattvayāna, Triyāna and Ekayāna.

The meaning of the theory of One Vehicle is already given with special reference to Śrīmālā sūtra.

The theory of “One Vehicle” is very crucial in the Śrīmālā sūtra. This can be considered as the development of the “One Vehicle” theory.

According to the Śrīmālā sūtra, the theory of “One Vehicle” is the Great Vehicle which incorporates all vehicles. The Śrīmālā sūtra agrees with the Lotus sūtra about the concept as the “Great Vehicle” is the Buddha Vehicle. This is the highest vehicle and teaches all Buddhist truth. Another important point with Lotus sūtra is the application of “One Vehicle” to the Nirvāṇa doctrine. The two scriptures agree that there is only one complete Nirvāṇa, which belongs to the Tathāgatas; but that there are also partial Nirvāṇas which are indicated by the Tathāgatas as a means for promoting a person spiritually. The Śrīmālā sūtra takes the theory “embryo of the Tathāgata” (Tathāgatagarbha) as the basis of “One Vehicle”, that “embryo” potentiality is not predestined to various enlightenments; rather all sentient beings arrive at an identical enlightenment or Nirvāṇa, because their “species” (gotra) is precisely the “embryo of the Tathāgata”. Therefore, the theory of ‘One Vehicle’ rivals the Prajñāpāramitā exegesis of radically
different paths and fruits for the Disciples, the Self-Enlightened, and the Bodhisattvas.

3.1.3. The Development of “One Vehicle” theory:

The Śrīmālā sūtra’s section on “One Vehicle” swiftly gets to the heart of the matter with the pivotal phrase, “mundane and supramundane virtuous natures”, and the section itself exemplifies the meaning in distinctive ways. The Śrīmālā contrasts with those who are distinguished according to superior and inferior natures (dharma) (and who do not attain the nirvāṇa realm) with those who experience the single taste of wisdom and liberation (and who do attain the nirvāṇa realm). Once again, the Śrīmālā uses the expression “supramundane knowledge” for the nonprogressive form of the Four Noble Truths, and classifies “mundane knowledge” as the progressive form of the Four Noble Truths understanding the natures as superior, middling, and inferior. In the case of resorts, the Śrīmālā speaks of four mundane resorts which the Lord Buddha taught so as to lead the beginners in the right direction, and contrasts those resorts with the supramundane resorts, the Truth as Cessation of suffering.

The expressions “mundane” (laukika) and “supramundane” (lokuttara) are ancient in their Pāli forms (lokiya and lokuttara). However, their use in the Theravādin Buddhism as well as in Asanga’s Yogācāra system especially based on the Mahīśāsaka School is quite different from what we find in the Śrīmālā sūtra. For instance, in the Sandhinirmocana sūtra, the basic scripture of the Yogācāra, the “Maitreya chapter” contains the passage, “Maitreya” one should understand that all the virtuous natures -mundane and supramundane- of the Disciples, Bodhisattvas, or Tathāgatas, are the fruit of calming
(śamatha) and clear vision (vipaśyanā). In Asaṅga’s exposition, the mundane fruits of “calming” are the meditative attainments of the four Dhyāna levels; the supramundane fruits of “clear vision” are the result of pondering the Four Noble Truths. The disagreement is immediately apparent: Asaṅga considers the contemplation of the Four Noble Truths to be the supramundane path, whereas the Śrīmālā has both a mundane and a supramundane “Four Noble Truths”. Besides, the Śrīmālā maintains that the Disciples and Self-Enlightened ones have not eliminated all the secondary defilements and calming and clear vision; hence, in their case, these two procedures are not completely pure and can not yield the supramundane natures. The Śrīmālā sūtra mentions ‘One Vehicle’ in Chapter 3 as follows:

“Lord, what is called ‘Illustrious Doctrine’ is a term for the Great Vehicle. Why so? Because all the Vehicles of the Disciples, the Self-Enlightened and all the mundane, supramundane virtuous natures are distributed by the Great Vehicle.”

Again, the Śrīmālā affirms that “One Vehicle” is Great Vehicle and the original mother for the distribution of other vehicles. One Vehicle is as the safe island for all human beings to take refuge, is the original stream that irrigates all trees and plants in the wild fields, and is the ocean for all rivers. Here, the Śrīmālā provides an example:

“For instance, the four great streams issue from Lake Anavatapa. In the same way, all the vehicles of the Disciples and the Self-Enlightened and all the mundane and supramundane virtuous natures issue from the Great Vehicle.”

59 Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr) Op. Cit.; p. 38
60 A. Wayman, Analysis of The Śrāvakabūmi manuscript, p. 125 ff
61 Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr) The Lion’s roar of Queen Śrīmālā, p. 78.
One Vehicle is the fertilized field for all seeds to grow, is also a good atmosphere for seeds of mundane and supramundane virtuous natures to grow.

"For example, whatever seeds there are, and plants, shrubs, herbs, trees, all of them, based on the great earth and resting on the great earth, sprout and grow. In the way, whatever vehicles there are of Disciples and of the Self-Enlightened and whatever mundane and supramundane virtuous natures there be, they, based on the Great Vehicle, sprout and grow."\(^{63}\)

The Queen Śrīmālā says that all the mundane and supramundane virtuous natures are the product of the Great Vehicle. It means that wisdom and compassion are the products of One Vehicle. So, for a Bodhisattva who is practicing the Bodhisattva’s career of loving all human beings and makes them happy, it is necessary to embrace and protect the Illustrious Doctrine. In other words, embracing the Illustrious Doctrine means to protect and preserve the world against hatred, anger and terrorism. Therefore, the Queen Śrīmālā concludes that the Great Vehicle is the source of matter of happiness and love and it is also based on the Vehicles of Disciples and Self-Enlightened.

3.2. The Theory of Tathāgatagarbha:

The Tathāgatagarbha School is closely allied in its philosophic orientation to the Yogācāra-vijñānavāda school. It speaks of ultimate reality as tathāgatagarbha, and is said to be the basis of that which is manifest. The manifest world that we experience has its basis in the ultimate reality (buddhadhātu). If so, it means that the transcendents and the relatives are identical, and the difference that we experience is not real. This view of reality would entail that the so called birth and death of beings occur within

\(^{63}\) Op, Cit. : p. 79
the womb (garbha) of reality. Within this womb, thus both the mortal and the immortal coincide. As the source of samsāra, the Tathāgatagarbha is equally the source of the Buddha, of the Dharma, and of the Sangha.

The evolution of the Tathāgatagarbha School seems to have gone through three phases. The first evolutionary phase is characterized by the interaction between the ontological conceptual frameworks: tathāgatagarbha and ālayavijñāna. As the principle of subjective, ālayavijñāna is considered to be the basis of everything phenomenal and nonphenomenal. The Tathāgatagarbha is an objective reality like the Brahman of the Upanishads, and the manifest world is accordingly seen as the expression of the Womb of Tathāgata. It is during this period that such text as, for example, the Tathāgatagarbha sūtra and the Anuttarakāśraya sūtra were produced. The latter, in particular, delineates such important Mahāyāna doctrines as the conception of triple body of the Buddha (trikāya), the five spiritual lineages, and the idea that the sinners are as potentially Buddhas as are the men of good conduct. This assertion would ultimately maintain that both good and evil, in equal measure, are identical with the ultimate reality. Also to this phase of development belong such texts as the Śrīmālādevi-Simhanāda Sūtra, the Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra, and the Aṅgulimālikā sūtra.

3.2.1. Meaning of Tathāgatagarbha:

Tathāgatagarbha is a compound-noun, divided into “tathāgata” and “garbha”, means “womb of the tathāgata”. The “tathāgata” term literally means “Thus-Came”, and is used as an epithet of Buddha. The term “garbha” literally means “womb” or “embryo”. Previous term “tathāgata” refers to the Buddha’s attainment of enlightenment and his establishment.

64 Apte, The Student’s Sanskrit-English Dictionary, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2000. 228b
Siddhatha-Gautama was identified by a number of epithets in various Buddhist literary texts. 65

Tathāgata is one of the names of the Buddhas (one of the ten titles of a Buddha) Tathāgata; Arhat; Samyak-sambuddha; Vidyācarana-sampanna; Sugata; Lokavid; Anuttara; Purusa-damya-sārathi; Sāstadeva-manusyanām; Buddha-lokanātha or Bhagavān. 66

The Encyclopedia of Buddhism defines the tathāgatagarbha (“matrix”, “seed” or “treasure-store of the tathagata”) is a Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrine expressing the conviction that all beings have within themselves the virtues and wisdom of the Tathāgata (Buddha), but that they are hidden by a covering of defilements (kleśakośa). 67

Thus, some discuss the term “tathāgatagarbha” as “the embryo of tathāgata”. Tathāgata is itself understood as a compound word that can be interpreted in two ways: as tatha+āgata, “thus came”; or tathā+gata, “thus gone” It is an epithet for a Buddha who is “thus gone” in realization from samsāra to nirvāṇa, and “thus came” from nirvāṇa to samsara to work for the salvation of all human beings. The term “garbha” also has two meanings, embryo and womb. So the term “tathāgatagarbha” may mean either “embryonic tathāgata” (i.e., the incipient Buddha) or “womb of the tathāgata,” understood as that which processes the essential attributes of the tathāgata in their fully developed form. The first meaning often is discussed as the “cause” of the tathāgata, and the latter meaning as the “fruit” of Tathāgata. As “fruit”, it represents the fulfillment of the Buddha Path and is linked with such terms as dharmakāya, nirvāṇa, perfect wisdom, and realization.

65 Charlier S Prebish, Historical Dictionary of Buddhism, Publish 1993, pp. 256-57
The term “Thusness” (tathatā) is also employed in a qualified way for the Tathāgatagarbha. According to the RatnagotRVibhāga (I, 23), ‘Thusness’ defiled is the Tathāgatagarbha, and ‘Thusness’ undefiled is Enlightenment. The Queen Śrīmālā states: “Lord, ‘incomparable rightly completed enlightenment is an expression for the nirvāṇa-realm. ‘Nirvāṇa-realm’ is an expression for the Dharmakāya of the Tathāgata.” In the Śrīmālā there are two main conditions for the “embryo of the Tathāgata”: either covered by defilements, when it is called only “embryo of the Tathāgata”; or free from defilements, when the “embryo of the Tathāgata” is no more the “embryo” (potentiality) but the Tathāgata (the Dharmakāya) (actuality). 68

Now we can see the interpretation of the word tathagata as did our Chinese translators. The term Tathāgatagarbha is decided generally to translate in the latter sense as womb of tathāgata. In Chinese, the term is rendered 如來蔵 (pinyin: ru-lai-zang). The term 如來 (ru-lai) exactly renders Tathāgata as “thus came”, and ‘zang’ is a storehouse. Thus the Chinese translation shows a preference for conceiving the tathāgata as the container of the tathāgata (i.e., the womb) rather than that which is contained (the embryo).

The term Tathāgatagarbha is especially important in Yogacāra texts, where it is used mostly as an equivalent to the phase “Buddha nature”, employed to denote the inherent potential for Buddhahood in everyone. It also signifies an additional meaning in Yogacāra, especially in the Lankāvatāra sūtra, and is equated to the Ālayavijñāna (storehouse-consciousness) in this text.

68 Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr) Op. Cit.: 45
3.2.2. The Theory of Tathāgatagarbha in texts:

According to the approach of Alex Wayman and Hideko Wayman, the theory of Tathāgatagarbha is established by the ancient doctrine held by some old Buddhist sects, especially the Mahāsāṅghika, and this consciousness is intrinsically pure and defiled by adventitious defilements and there is a substratum consciousness (*mūlavijñānā*). The next stage in the development of the theory is found in the Mahāyāna scriptures such as the Avatamsaka, where it is said that the Buddha’s divine knowledge pervades sentient beings, and that its representation in an individual sentient being is the substratum consciousness. When this intrinsically pure consciousness came to be deemed as an element capable of growing into Buddhahood, we find the term tathāgatagarbha is employed.69 This suggestion is reasonable with the theory of tathāgatagarbha and ālayavijñāna. The word *garbha* in the term *tathāgatagarbha* is rendered as “embryo” in the sense of causal potentiality for becoming the Tathāgata (Buddha). The principal meanings of the Sanskrit word *garbha* are “womb”, “interior”, and “embryo”. The interpretation as “womb” is prevalent in Chinese translation of the term ‘*Tathāgatagarbha*’ beginning with those scriptures which pinpoint this term with the *ālayavijñāna*, a term usually rendered as “store consciousness”, where the “store” is understood to be a store of seeds remaining from past actions. The Chinese version of the Śrīmālā employs the term “womb”.

The theory of Tathāgatagarbha is developed in the Śrīmālā sūtra where the term refers to an inner potential that enables beings to become Buddha. The Śrīmālā identifies the tathāgatagarbha as the dharmakāya of the Buddha; which suffuses all beings.

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69 Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr) *Op. Cit.* 42
“Lord, this Tathāgatagarbha is the embryo of the Illustrious Dharmadhātu, the embryo of the Dharmakāya, the embryo of supramundane dharma, the embryo of the intrinsically pure dharma.”

The term “Tathāgatagarbha” is also described in the Laṅkāvatāra sūtra and Ghaṇḍayuha sūtra but identifies it with the “store consciousness”. A closely related concept to the tathāgatagarbha is the buddhadhātu, usually translated as “Buddha nature” with the famous phrase “all beings possess Buddha nature” in the Nirvāṇa sūtra. Like the Prajñāpāramitā literature, it is not the property of any identifiable school in Indian Buddhism. In the former we have a body of texts introducing and expanding upon a similar theme, the idea that “all sentient beings possess the tathāgatagarbha”. Although this theme and the set of concerns associated with it are readily identifiable in the texts, we can not pinpoint the authors of the texts nor even with any specificity the group among whom the texts circulated at the time of their composition. The four most important early Tathāgatagarbha sūtras are the Tathāgatagarbha sūtra, Śrīmālādevi-simhanāda-sūtra, Anūnatvā-Āpūrṇatva-Nirdeśa sūtra and Mahāparanirvāṇa sūtra. These texts were composed in India between approximately 200 and 350 C.E. That puts them before the time of Asanga and Vasubandhu. With the title of the Tathāgatagarbha sūtra we can see that it may have been the first of the Tathāgatagarbha texts. It introduces the idea that, “all sentient beings possess the Tathāgatagarbha” in a metaphorically and philosophically unsophisticated manner. The text has the main examples that represent the relationship between the tathāgartagarbha and the adventitious defilements that conceal it. So the Tathāgatagarbha is

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70 Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr) The Lion’s roar of Queen Śrīmālā, p. 106
compared to grain covered by the husk, a treasure buried under the ground or a Buddha statue wrapped in a rag.

Another text is the Anūnatva-Apūrnatva-Nirdeśa. It is a short text simply stated but paradoxical theme: the absolute identification of tathāgatagarbha, sattvadhātu (the totality of all sentient beings in their essential nature), and dharmakāya or dharmadhātu. The text accentuates that in order to become free from wrong views, one thing must be known; namely, the Single dharmakāya. The latter is identified with the Tathāgatagarbha and the Dharmacāya. This dharmakāya, when bound by defilements, “drifting on the waves of samsāra,” is called sentient beings.

This similar Dharmacāya, when filled with repugnance for the suffering of samsāra, in putting aside all desires, practicing the ten pāramitās, embracing the 84,000 Dharma gates, and cultivating Bodhisattva’s practices, is called bodhisattvas. Again, this same dharmakāya, when free from all defilements and utterly pure, is called Tathāgata. Thus the dharmakāya is the realm of sentient beings, and the realm of sentient beings is the dharmakāya. These are two names with one meaning.

The term Tathāgatagarbha also appears in the Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra. The text for these teachings has some differences within the Chinese versions or translations. The text was translated into Chinese by Dhamakṣema and Faxian. The first translation that of Faxian, indicated that the worst (icchantika) would not attain Buddhahood. Despite the authority of this scripture, the great monk Dao-sheng (Tao-sheng) doggedly insisted upon universal Buddhahood and consequently was ostracized from the Sangha. He was later vindicated and elevated to prominence when the much longer translation by Dhamakṣema was seen to comprise passages bolstering universal Buddhahood, even for the icchantika. The text has no changes with
other texts above, but the text stressed the eternity of the Buddha and slammed the idea that nirvāṇa means extinction and linked the belief with the idea of the tathāgatagarbha. In Dōgen’s View, Grosnick claims that within this framework the text speaks of the Buddha nature in so many different ways that Chinese scholars created a variety of lists of types of Buddha nature that they discerned in the course of their studies of the text.\textsuperscript{72}

Another text is very close to the Śrīmālā sūtra, and some quotations are cited from it in Ratnagotravibhāga, also known as the Mahāyānottaratantrashastra or simply Uteratantra. In the West this text is perhaps the best known of the early tathāgatagarbha texts (with the arguable exception of the Śrīmālā sūtra, which has received recent attention) having been translated into English and studied by both Obermitler and Takasaki. There are many scholars who are interested in this version of the text. A copy was edited and published in 1950. Sallie B. King points out the text in quotations, although the basic verses are from Maitreya. The Ratnagotra lacks characteristic of Yogācāra teachings and is a text of the tathāgatagarbha group. The Ratnagotra quotes extensively from the first three Tathāgatagarbha sūtra listed earlier and less extensively from the Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra. It does quote two Yogācāra texts, Mahāyānābhidharma sūtra and Mahāyānalamkāra sūtra, but without referring to their special Yogācāra teachings. In general it is a summary and systematization of then- extant tathāgatagarbha thought.\textsuperscript{73}

The Ratnagotra and the Śrīmālā sūtra are two texts with the same thought. The texts discuss the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha), and elevate the Buddha as the Supreme Refuge as compared to the Dharma and Sangha. Like the Śrīmālā sūtra this manifests the tendency of some

\textsuperscript{72}Grosnick, Dōgen’s View, p. 128f.
\textsuperscript{73}S.B. King, Op. Cit.: 15.
Tathāgatagarbha literature to provide a foundation for Mahāyāna devotionalism. There is a glorification of the Buddha and is combined with a discussion of the importance of faith. Apart from this, the Prajñāpāramitā sūtra also considered the relationship of these ideas to the idea of Sūnyatā (emptiness). As with the Yogacāra, we will behold that tathāgatagarbha thought, at least as it is found in the Ratnagotra and closely related texts, is a successor to sūnya thought. It seems nobody opposes this theory. Some analysis of the relationship between Prajñā thought and Tathāgatagarbha thought in the Ratnagotra. When we speak of the tathāgatagarbha, we come to know of the sūnyatā, Buddha nature, dharmakāya, dharmadhatu and nirvāṇa.

3.2.3. The Tathāgatagarbha in the Śrīmālā Sūtra;

The text we focus our attention on for analysis in this thesis is the Śrīmālā sūtra. From both logical and historical perspective the Śrīmālā sūtra is of critical importance for the study of the Tathāgatagarbha theory. The Tathāgatagarbha is built on this basic idea, and sometimes on the images themselves, in a much more sophisticated manner. The Queen Śrīmālā instructs the assembly, speaks in both devotional and philosophically astute gesture of a Tathāgatagarbha conceived in terms of positive attributes.

It is a critique of a purely negative understanding of sūnyatā and teaches that the Tathāgatagarbha is both Sūnya (with respect to all defilements) and Asūnya, “not-empty” (with respect to the perfections of the buddhadharma). The dharmakāya possesses the four perfections (gunapāramitās) of permanence, bliss, self, and purity. It is the intrinsically pure mind that is concealed by defilement. This relationship between the intrinsically pure mind and the defilement that covers it is incomprehensible, understood only by a Buddha. Ultimately, the garbha is identified with the
Dharmakāya of the Tathāgata; thus only a Buddha attains nirvāṇa. This kind of elevation and laudation of the Buddha and his attributes is a popular theme in much of the Tathāgatagarbha literature and often is seen as an important foundation of Mahāyāna devotionalism.

This present study seeks an understanding of the Mahāyāna Buddhism relief belief in the inherent potentiality of all animate beings to acquire the supreme and perfect enlightenment of Buddhahood. Its principle of exposition has been 'a detailed analysis of the two concepts of Tathāgatagarbha and Ālayavijñāna through which the Mahāyāna tradition has grounded and sustained that belief. While the Tathāgatagarbha or "embryo of Tathāgata", and the Ālayavijñāna or "storehouse of consciousness" initially arose as independent theories, it has been stated that their mutual implication and inter-illumination as alternate determinations of Tathāta make them the necessary complement of each other. Together, they define a comprehensive metaphysics of "Absolute Suchness" and identify the soteriological and epistemological principles consistent with it.

Another factor of the Tathāgatagarbha in the Śrīmālā is Tathāgatagarbha-ālayavijñāna.

Alex Wayman points out that the Tathāgatagarbha is referred to as Ālayavijñāna, along with seven perceptions. This is evidently intended as a solution for Śrīmālā's obscure passage about vijñāna, which is the sixth perception in the sixth-fold perceptions and a further perception, unnamed by the scriptures in all constituting the seven momentary natures. In the Yogācāra type terminology of the Laṅkāvatāra, the seven momentary natures are the "evolving perceptions" (pravṛtti-vijñāna), namely, the five based on the outer sense, the sixth perception based on the mind itself, and the seventh
one called the “defiled mind” (klista-manas). He adds: “Previously (“stages of the ‘Bodies Made of Mind’”) we have shown how the doctrine of Dependent Origination is essential to understanding the Śrīmālā. Now we can further suggest that the Queen’s terminology of an undefined vijñāna is consistent with early Buddhist terminology of Dependent Origination, the famous twelve-member formula in which an undefined vijñāna is the third member. While the Chinese and Japanese commentaries that we utilized did not, when commenting on that passage of the Śrīmālā, mention what we take as a solution, we are reasonably certain that the Queen intends the further vijñāna to be that member of Dependent Origination, momentary in its application to the ordinary person who has “discontinuous passing away”, and intends the sixth-fold group to constitute the vijñāna as one of the five personality aggregates.”

As an embryo, the Tathāgatagarbha is unconditional-awareness of phenomenal existence as suffering, and as a realized Absolute Body it is synonymous with the cessation of suffering and is equivalent to the highest nirvāṇa-realm of the Tathāgata. Organically conceived as “embryo”, the tathāgatagarbha is the necessary emergence of its own self as its own self, the inherent process of moving from a latent to an articulate being ultimately is the self-expressive development from potential to actual Tathāgatahood.

While treating explicitly the Tathāgatagarbha, the Śrīmālā sūtra anticipated the role of the Ālayavijñāna in its conception as absolute consciousness. Having once defined the ontic dimension of the garbha as the unborn, imperishable, permanent, steadfast, and eternal ground of phenomenal and absolute reality (samsāra and nirvāṇa), it immediately

74 Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr) Op. Cit.: 54.
75 Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr), Op. Cit.: 54
became qualified for that status. Its unconditional nature was not to be apprehended as that of an absolute substantiability, so much as of an absolute subjectivity. The Tathāgatagarbha is the support of samsāra and nirvāṇa, not as some essential, hypostatic entity, but rather as that which alone possesses an unconditional awareness and consciousness, adequate to the definitive comprehension of phenomenal existence as suffering. Its reaction to the pain of samsāra and its simultaneous intention towards the emancipation of nirvāṇa implicitly identify the Tathāgatagarbha not so much as ontic substance, but rather as ontic subject. As such, its generic designation as “embryo” assumes a critical soteriological significance. For, its movement toward nirvāṇa is no mere undefined aspiration or indeterminate striving. Rather, it is the generic potential of animate beings to attain, not a multiplicity of variant goals, but one and the same “rightly completed enlightenment”, which means the universal awakening of Tathāgatahood. There can be only one ultimate nirvāṇa, synonymous with the Absolute Body of the Tathāgata, the Dharmakāya, and it is to that the end which the garbha “matures” all beings.

The Śrīmālā established equivalence between the two terms, viz., Tathāgatagarbha and the Dharmakāya. As embryo, the Tathāgatagarbha is unconditional-awareness of phenomenal existence as suffering, and as a realized Absolute Body it is synonymous with the cessation of suffering and is equivalent to the highest nirvāṇa-realms of the Tathāgata. Organically conceived as “embryo”, the Tathāgatagarbha is the necessary emergence of its own self as its own self, the inherent process of moving from a latent to an articulate being ultimately is the self-expressive development from potential to actual Tathāgatahood.
But, while all sentient beings may have the potentiality of Buddhahood, and may be tacitly considered as already being enlightened, through the universal endowment with the Tathāgatagarbha, that does not necessarily presume immediate and total actualization. It admits of varying degrees of self-manifestation within the consciousness of all beings, from those who have scant regard for spiritual values, through the Arhats, Pratyekabuddhas, and the tenfold stages of the Bodhisattva. It is only in the Lord, the Tathāgata, that it becomes what it truly is, that it obtains complete self-realization as the Absolute Body. In him, the Tathāgatagarbha gains an absolute self-confirmed consciousness of oneself as the Great Vehicle, the One Vehicle. The Buddha is the perfect knowledge through which the Tathāgatagarbha comprehends itself as what he is, as “the Refuge with nature imperishable which is of a permanent, steadfast nature.”

“Lord, the Tathāgatagarbha is neither self nor sentient being, neither soul nor personality. The Tathāgatagarbha is not the domain of beings who fall into the belief in a real personality, who adhere to wayward views, whose thoughts are distracted by voidness. Lord, this Tathāgatagarbha is the embryo of the Illustrious Dharmadhātu, the embryo of the Dharma, the embryo of the intrinsically pure dharma.”

The absolute status of the Buddha is a function if his exact and perfect knowledge. He alone has accomplished equality for understanding of all natures which has become omniscient and all seeing, unrestrained by any faults, liberated from all defilements, and possessed of infinite merit. Since the Buddha represents that stage of the Tathāgatagarbha’s perfect self-maturation, wisdom is both the means and end of that self-realization and is

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76 Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr), Op. Cit, p. 106
the very essence of the tathāgatagarbha for, inherent to it are the innumerable Buddha natures, the modalities of perfect wisdom and knowledge which progressively disperse “the nescience entrenchment” which, as the fundamental axis of ignorance, is the foundation of all primary and secondary defilements. As the obscurity-forces of the nescience entrenchment are ever more disbanded by the diverse knowledge models which essentially constitute the Buddha natures, they later display themselves with greater clarity.

By the principle of “self-liberation as self-explication”, while the defilements of ignorance are eliminated or purified, is a simultaneous revelation of the virtuous Buddha - natures, which are the very vehicles of their final and total self-development. It is this that constitutes the supreme nirvāna-realm of the Tathāgata. The relationship of the Buddha-nature to the nescience-entrenchment is but an alternate definition of the tathāgatagarbha as the end that is simultaneously its own beginning. For, from the perspective of finality as the Absolute Body, the Tathāgatagarbha is effect, result, and goal. Meanwhile, the possessive, self-determined movement towards that actualization is “embryonic” cause, means, and progression.

Its movement towards itself as goal (and thus, as Dharmakāya) is a function of its essential nature as self-explicating knowledge. It is not a self, a sentient being, a soul, or a personality. Rather, the Tathāgatagarbha is “embryonic” absolute knowledge. Its essence is to know itself or that which it is, to be aware of itself and to bring itself about. The content of the garbha’s knowledge is precisely itself as void (sūnya) of the extrinsic defilements which nevertheless conceal it, and not void (asūnya) of the inherent Buddha nature. It is content which must be made manifest; the garbha’s self-knowledge must be actually adequate to its content, and the known content is implied knowledge (i.e. the perfect wisdom of the Buddha natures).
When the Buddha natures are fully manifested, the tathāgatagarbha has realized its own plentitude, and is thus referred to as the Absolute Body of omniscience, the Dharmakāya. There, over all images projected by the Śrīmālā sūtra in narrating the relationship of the Tathāgatagarbha with the Dharmakāya, is that of a cycle that presupposes its beginning and reaches its beginning only at its end. Initially posited as an object of faith, the garbha is harmonized as an absolute status as existing without beginning or end; not being born and not dying; not subject to rebirth; but permanent, steadfast and eternal, the base and support of the intrinsic Buddha natures as well as the adventitious, discrete defilements, and the ground work of both samsāra and nirvāṇa. However, its organic designation as “embryo” quickly identified this beginning as the point of departure endowed with the propensity towards its own self-transformation, a process with a most specific teleological direction. For, the self-movement of the Tathāgatagarbha to the Absolute Body (Dharmakāya) is a self-teleological process of inner convergence, where the Absolute Body as tools is simply the point of the embryo’s full self-conscious, self-revelation.

In this cycle, if the Tathāgatagarbha is the beginning or cause (hetu), then Absolute Body is essentially the result (phala). The Tathāgata-embryo is the truth. The nature of the embryo is to be real, that which itself becomes. For if it starts with itself; the Tathāgatagarbha reaches its consummation with itself as Dharmakāya.

To put it another way, the Absolute Body can be a result only because it is already present from the start in an initial “embryonic” shape or content (the garbha). The cyclic transformation then, of the Tathāgatagarbha into the Dharmakāya is that of an original absolute becoming of an articulate absolute, where no new elements are acquired but the latent or inherent ones (i.e., the
innumerable Buddha natures) are expressed. In this context, self-exposition for the sake of self understanding would be revealed and then matured to manifestation.

The theory of the Tathāgatagarbha as formulated by the Śrīmālā sūtra provides a singularly comprehensive interpretation of the Buddhist transformation process and experience of enlightenment. While inconceivable even to the loftiest and purest minds, the Tathāgatagarbha, accepted in faith, initiates the self-unfoldment of all the properties and virtues necessary for the removal of ignorance and its obscurative defilements. It does as embryonic absolute knowledge, explicitated through the practices and observances of the path and the exercise of the perfections of charity, morality, patience, meditation, and exertion. Only thus does it come to the perfect self-revelation in the Dharmakāya as actually freed from, because intrinsically devoid of (sūnya) the defilements, and replete with, because intrinsically not devoid of (asūnya) the modalities of omniscient wisdom.

3.2.4. The Characteristics of Tathāgatagarbha:

3.2.4.1. Tathāgatagarbha as an Actual Subjectiveness:

The history of development of the theory of Tathāgatagarbha is the duration of development of Buddhist schools. The Śrīmālā sūtra from the point of view of the characteristics of Tathāgatagarbha from both logical and historical perspectives is of critical importance for the study of the Tathāgatagarbha-theory. The Śrīmālā sūtra is considered to be the primary scriptural advocate in India for the doctrine of a universal potentiality of Buddhahood. It undoubtedly contributed to its historical popularity as commentarial subject matter by Buddhist scholars in both China and Japan.
The Śrīmālā sūtra consists of many topics and conceptions such as Dharmakāya, Sūnyatā, Noble truth and One Vehicle. Specifically, there is a critical theory which finally deals with the nature of the Tathāgatagarbha as actual subjectivity, taken from a soteriological, epistemological and ontological focus. But it is not until its actual status has been established towards the very end of the sūtra that one becomes aware of the self consistency of the Tathāgatagarbha doctrine as presented in the earlier sections of the text.

In style more declarative than expository, the Śrīmālā defines the Tathāgatagarbha as the ground of phenomenal existence or *samsāra*, since it is possessed of an ultimate existence without beginning or end, and is of an undying and unborn nature. While “perished” and “born” are the processes conventionally descriptive of the respective loss and renewal of the physical senses, the tathāgatagarbha is beyond such mundane referents, beyond all that is caused, conditioned or compounded (*samskrta-dharma*). Because it is not born, nor does it perish, nor is it subject to transmigratory change, it is, rather, designated as permanent (*nitya*), steadfast (*dbhruva*), calm (*śīva*) and eternal (*śāsvata*). For this reason, the *garbha* alone can be ground of the Buddha nature (*bhuddhadharma*) which is proclaimed as inseparable and indivisible from the stores of defilement. And for the very same reason (i.e., its permanence and eternity), the *garbha* is simultaneously the base of those very defilement-stores which are however, separate from, and extrinsic to it. The sūtra proclaims:

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"But Lord, the Tathāgatagarbha is not born, does not die, does not pass away to become reborn. The Tathāgatagarbha excludes the realm with the characteristic of the constructed. The Tathāgatagarbha is permanent, steadfast, and eternal. Therefore the Tathāgatagarbha is the support, the
holder, the base of constructed (Buddha natures) that are nondiscrete, not
dissociated, and knowing as liberated from the stores (of defilement); and
furthermore is the support, the holder, the base of external constructed
natures that are discrete, dissociated, and knowing as not liberated”.\textsuperscript{77}

While disavowing any misconceptions of the garbha as some
elemental self, soul or personality, the Śrīmālā accords it an unmistakable
actual status, emphasizing its ultimate and self-consistent stability. And yet,
its unconditional nature is not that of an absolute substantiality, so much as of
an absolute subjectivity. The Tathāgatagarbha is the support (ādhāra) of both
samsāra and nirvāṇa not as any primordial objective entity, but rather as that
which alone is capable of experiencing suffering, and thus manifests itself as
reactivity against the pain of phenomenal existence, and a simultaneous
intentionality toward the emancipation of nirvāṇa:

“Lord, if there were no Tathāgatagarbha, there would be neither
aversion towards suffering nor longing eagerness and aspiration towards
Nirvāṇa. What is the reason? Whatever are there six perceptions, and
whatever be this (other) perception, these seven natures are unfixed,
momentary and lack experience of suffering; hence these natures are unfit for
aversion towards suffering or for longing, eagerness, and aspiration towards
Nirvāṇa.”\textsuperscript{78}

The classical Chinese and Japanese commentaries on the Śrīmālā
themselves remain obscure to us as to the exact interpretation of the seventh
perception referred to by the text. It is obvious that the first five perceptions
refer to those degrees of consciousness (vijñānas) which are distinguished by
the senses of the objects of the external world (i.e., sight, hearing, smell, taste,

\textsuperscript{77} Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr), Op. Cit. p. 104
\textsuperscript{78} Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr), Op. Cit. pp. 105-06.
and touch). The sixth perception is undoubtedly the sense centre of consciousness (manovijñāna), which unifies and coordinates the precepts derived from the first five perceptions of sense-consciousness. Whether the seventh perception of consciousness be the “root consciousness” (mūlavijñāna) common to the Mahāsāṅghikas, or the “defiled mind” (klistamanas) of the later Lankāvatāra sūtra, the Śrīmālā’s indictment remains the same. Only the Tathāgatagarbha of “ultimate existence without beginning or end” possesses an unconditional awareness and definitive comprehension of phenomenal existence of suffering. What is profoundly significant here is the Śrīmālā’s implicit identification of the garbha not so much as ontic substance, but rather as ontic subject. It is suggested that this insight is precisely the idea that would later initiate the Lankāvatara’s explicit equation of the Tathāgatagarbha with the ultimate consciousness that is the Ālayavijñāna.

The garbha’s condition as actual subjectivity demonstrates its dynamic role as primary soteriological principle. Its mode of existence is not one of mere passive submission, but rather, a concurrent movement toward nirvāṇa. Rightly completed enlightenment means universal awakening of Tathāgatahood. Expanding upon this, the scripture confirms that there can be only the one ultimate “Nirvāṇa realm” which is synonymous with the Absolute Body of the Tathāgata.

"The Dharmakāya of the Tathāgata is named ‘cessation of suffering; and it is beginningless, uncreated, unborn, undying, free from death; permanent, steadfast, calm, eternal; intrinsically pure, free from all the defilement-store; and accompanied by Buddha natures more numerous than the sands of the Ganges, which are nondiscrete, knowing as liberated, and
inconceivable. This Dharmakāya of the Tathāgata when not free from the store of defilement is referred to as the Tathāgatagarbha.”

Although technical differences remain unresolved within the text of the Dharmakāya, it is ascribed with the perfections of permanence, pleasure, purity, and self; it has been argued that the tathāgatagarbha does not represent a substantial self (atman); rather, it is a positive language and expression of “sūnyatā” and represents the potential to realize Buddhahood through Buddhist practices.

3.2.4.2. Tathāgatagarbha and Its transcendence:

The nature of the Tathāgatagarbha is the actual subjectiveness of the totality of existence in both its samsāric and nirvānic ways; its condition as fundamental soteriological principle should be more obvious, and the Śrīmālā’s lengthy discourse on the “Illustrious Doctrine” can be more cogently understood as integral to the embryo theory. By the very fact that, as embryo, Tathāgatagarbha alone is unconditional awareness of phenomenal existence as suffering, and it alone as the realized Absolute Body is synonymous with “cessation of suffering,” itself equivalent with the highest nirvāna realm of the Tathāgata (as opposed to various “fractional” nirvānic states). The Tathāgatagarbha is the basis for the Śrīmālā’s doctrine of the “One Vehicle” theory.

Despite that, at this point within the Śrīmālā, confusion can easily arise due to an apparent disjunction within the logical sequence of the text itself. This is compounded by the nebular terminological variation between “Illustrious Doctrine” (Saddharma) and “Great Vehicle”. The body of the

sūtra begins when Queen Śrīmālā, having taken ten vows in the presence of the Buddha, proceeds to elaborate upon the praises and meaning of the last vow, which binds her to embrace and never neglect the “Illustrious Doctrine”. As will become more clear below, the remarks which follow respecting the “Illustrious Doctrine” substantially demonstrate a distinction of superiority among classes of beings; not only among the Bodhisattva, but even between the levels of Bodhisattva on the one hand and the Disciples and Pratyekabuddhas on the other. The problem becomes more focused when the sūtra, somewhat abruptly, makes a direct equation of the “Illustrious Doctrine” with the “Great Vehicle” which recognized no distinctions between the vehicle of the Bodhisattva and the vehicles of Disciple or the Pratyekabuddha.

The Śrīmālā’s concept of the “Great Vehicle” accommodates itself precisely, ultimately and finally, to the Absolute Body. Its “greatness” does not polemically oppose itself to any “lesser vehicle” (Hinayāna) but rather ontically grounds and contains within itself all other vehicles, in spite of what they may be named, as well that these vehicles all possess the excellent qualities of knowledge and power. The Śrīmālā’s choice of imagery is strikingly deliberate.

“For example, whatever seeds there are, and plants, shrubs, herbs, trees, all of them, based on the great earth and resting on the great earth, sprout and grow. In the same way, whatever vehicles there be of Disciples and of the Self-Enlightened and whatever mundane and supramundane virtuous natures there be, they based on the Great Vehicle, sprout and grow. Hence, Lord, when one is based on the Great Vehicle, and embraces the Great Vehicle; he also has recourse to and embraces all the vehicles of
Disciples and of the Self-Enlightened and all the mundane and supramundane virtuous natures".  

As the text advances its interpretation on the comprehensive nature of the “Great Vehicle”, its concordance with the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law (Saddharmapundarīka sūtra) is evident. Like the Śrīmālā, the latter presents the “Great vehicle” as inclusive of those vehicles belonging to the Disciples and Self-Enlightened not as a third path, but as the one and the only genuine path. Like the Śrīmālā, its claim is based on the major premise that there is only one goal, one universally realizable awakening, one ultimate, innate Buddha-knowledge. The Lotus of the Wonderful Law agrees then, with the Śrīmālā’s equivalence of the “Great Vehicle” to the “Buddha-Vehicle”. Turning to the text of the Śrīmālā itself then, there is a passage of critical significance which demonstrates through a series of correlative terms the consummation of the “Great Vehicle” as the realized Absolute Body. Accordingly, it amounts to an implicit definition of the tathāgata-embryo conceived here from its perspective as the ultimate soteriological principle, since it is the One Vehicle that is the Great Vehicle precisely because of its inherent identity with the Absolute Body, and its universal presence within all beings, no matter how they be designated.

“The vehicles of the Disciples and the Self-Enlightened ones are included in the Great Vehicle. Lord, ‘Great Vehicle’ is an expression for Buddha Vehicle. In that way, the three vehicles are counted as One Vehicle (ekāyana). By realizing the ‘One Vehicle’ one attains the incomparable rightly completed enlightenment. Lord, ‘incomparable rightly completed enlightenment’ is an expression for the Nirvāṇa-realm. ‘Nirvāṇa-realm’ is an

80 Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr). Op. Cit.: 79
expression for the Dharmakāya of the Tathāgata. The ultimate realization of
the Darmakāya is the One Vehicle. Lord, the Tathāgata is not one thing, and
the Dharmakāya something else, but the Tathāgata is himself the
Dharmakāya. The ultimate realization of the Dharmakāya is the ultimate of
the One Vehicle. Lord, ‘ultimate of the One Vehicle’ is an expression for the
absoluteness of the One Vehicle.”

In terms of logical priority, it is only when this insight into the
tathāgata-embryo as “Great Vehicle” has been grasped, that one can reach a
clarified interpretation of the sūtra’s previous section on the “Illustrious
Doctrine” which allows different categories and stages among beings.

While the Tathāgatagarbha has been shown as implicitly identical to
the Dharmakāya in terms of finality, it simultaneously identifies itself as the
necessary emergence of itself to itself. Organically conceived as embryo
(garbha), it is the inherent process of moving from a latent to an articulate
and ultimately the self-expressive development from potential to actual
Tathāgatahood. And the dynamics of its self-explication by no means
precludes but even implies the factor of stages or degrees toward that fullness
of self-realization. While all sentient beings may have the potential for
Buddhahood, they may be tacitly considered as already enlightened, through
the universal endowment with the tathāgata-embryo that does not necessarily
presume its immediate and total actualization. It is the recognition of the
implied stages within the tathāgata-embryo’s self-objectification that
reconciles the Śrīmālā’s remarks on the “Illustrious Doctrine” and its
superficially conflicting identification of it with the “Great Vehicle”. The

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81 Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr) Op. Cit.: 92
coherence of the tathāgata-embryo as fundamental soteriological principle is preserved whether it is conceived as in process or as ultimately realized.

In highly laudatory terms, the Śrīmālā presents the Illustrious Doctrine initially as an object to be embraced, relied on, rejoiced in, and displayed by all sentient beings, because of its definitive salvific capacity to attain “the perfection of aim.” As such, it is variously described as a thing of enormous scope, having far ranging meaning, of great benefit, great fruit and possessing infinite merit. More specifically, it is thus credited because of its unequalled and singular ability to perfect all the innumerable Buddha natures. The Illustrious Doctrine is depicted as an immeasurable womb: “The embrace of the Illustrious Doctrine is the source yielding the Great Vehicle, and is the immeasurable womb giving rise to all the magical deeds of the Bodhisattva and the various entrances into the light of the Doctrine, as well as to all mundane perfection, all mundane mastery, and all supramundane bliss not previously experienced by gods and men.”

Then, in a manner consistent with what has already been noted elsewhere in the text, the Śrīmālā gives us a significant equation:

“Lord, the embrace of the Illustrious Doctrine is called ‘embracer of the Illustrious Doctrine’. The Illustrious Doctrine is not one thing and the embracer of the Illustrious Doctrine something else. That embracer of the Illustrious Doctrine is himself the Illustrious Doctrine. Neither is he different from the Perfections, nor are those different from the embracer of the Illustrious Doctrine. Lord, that embracer of the Illustrious Doctrine himself is the Perfections”.

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82 Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr) Op. Cit.: 66.
83 Ibid. p. 70.

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Obviously, no longer is the Illustrious Doctrine to be considered an object to be grasped but, as already indicated, something to be “displayed,” to be realized and actualized, within the phenomenal consciousness of all beings. The Śrīmālā clearly recognizes degrees of success judging that, “even a little embrace of the Illustrious Doctrine of the Great Vehicle, because of its expanse, and is superior to all the virtuous doctrines of the Vehicles of the Disciples and the Self-Enlightened”.

Recalling what the scripture has already announced concerning the all-comprehensive nature of the “Great Vehicle” as the “One Vehicle”, while the Bodhisattva always remains superior to the Arhat and Pratyekabuddha because of his vow, the latter are not excluded from but rather incorporated into, the stages of Bodhisattva progress. Where exactly they fit into the traditional ten stages of the Bodhisattva is never mentioned by the Śrīmālā itself, but has been garnered over the centuries in Chinese and Japanese commentaries on the Sūtra. From such sources, Alex Wayman and Hideko Wayman have concluded that the Bodhisattva shares his body made of mind with the Arhat on the sixth stage and with Pratyekabuddha on the seventh.

The eighth, ninth, and tenth stages have been commented in the Queen’s remarks as descriptive of “the good son or daughter of the family” who makes three renunciations for the sake of all beings. Here, the sūtra distinguishes a level of superiority among the class of Bodhisattva itself, delineating all those who have not yet renounced body (agreed by the majority of commentary-material to be the eighth stage of Bodhisattva), life force (the 9th stage of Bodhisattva), and possessions (the tenth stage of Bodhisattva), as “all those newly entered into the Great Vehicle who still care for body and life force”.

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85 Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr), *Op. Cit.*: 77.
Since the Śrīmālā’s own remarks remain only suggestive as to any exact classification, what is significant for the present study is the peculiarly universal soteriological context in which the Illustrious Doctrine is presented. It was there depicted as an ultimate maternal principle which, like the womb, is alone capable of bringing all sentient beings to the highest level of spiritual maturity. The same image is operative where the sūtra discusses those who embrace, display and actualize the Illustrious Doctrine within themselves, indeed turn the Illustrious Doctrine. Their mode of activity, regardless of the level of their own development, is expressly maternal in their function of supporting and bearing four great burdens. Embodying the productive principles that are the Illustrious Doctrine, those who embrace it (to whatever degree) are themselves called “the world mother of the Dharma”\(^{87}\) because they sustain, like the earth (itself a maternal metaphor), the four tasks of helping beings to be virtuous; adding others to the vehicle of the Disciples; leading others into the vehicles of the self-enlightened or leading still others into the Great Vehicle. In this process, while there is recognition of different stages of mature development (expressed in the terminology of the particular vehicles) there is no sectarian polemic. This is because, as was demonstrated above, the Illustrious Doctrine is itself the Great vehicle which is itself the One Vehicle, all of which are inherent definitions of the Tathāgata-embryo in its universal causal and thus, soteriological aspect. In its explication of itself as what it implicitly is, an Absolute Body (Dharmakāya), it is not only conceived as active potential and thus as embryonic, but also as nutritive maternal principle leading all sentient beings to their finalized maturity in Buddhahood. Hence, its implied designation is ‘womb’.

\(^{87}\) Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr) *Op. Cit.*: 72.
This dual aspect of the concept of garbha as both “embryo” and “womb” presents problems in development of the theory by Western translators. But, as be noted in the third chapter of the present work, all of which count upon the perspective from which it is considered. This has been the hermeneutical principle for the present interpretation of the Śrīmālā sūtra. While never directly referred to as such by the text, it appears certain that the Tathāgatagarbha is simultaneously an ontological, soteriological and epistemological principle and the present investigation makes a modest to demonstrate the interdependent coherence of all three aspects. Thus, it has been argued that the scripture’s remarks on both the Great Vehicle and the Illustrious Doctrine represent the Śrīmālā’s understanding of the tathāgatagarbha’s significance as a primordial salvific factor. Its implicit intention has not been to expose any contradictory imbalance but rather, to expound the garbha’s inherent richness as both active potentiality leading to its own inherent finality (and thus as “embryo”, and its simultaneous status as universal mater determinant (and thus, as “womb”).

3.3. The Theory of Trikāya:

The Trikāya doctrine (Three bodies or personalities) is an important Buddhist teaching both on the nature of reality, and what a Buddha is. The term “trikāya” is a Sanskrit word. According to ‘A Commentary on the Uttara Tantra Śāstra’ of Asaṅga, ‘trikāya’ means the three bodies of the Buddha: the nirmāṇakāya, sambhogakāya and dharmakāya. The dharmakāya (the “truth body”), is the complete enlightenment of the Buddha which is unoriginated wisdom beyond form and manifests in the sambhogakāya and the nirmāṇakāya. The sambhogakāya (the “enjoyment body”) manifests only to Bodhisattvas. The nirmāṇakāya (the “emanation body”) manifests in the
ordinary world and in the context of the Uttara Tantra manifests as the Śākyamuni Buddha.\(^{88}\)

The concept of Trikāya predominantly developed in texts associated with the Yogācāra School (such as the Laṅkāvatāra sūtra) in Mahāyāna Buddhism. The fundamental sense of the Sanskrit word “kāya” is body, meaning the physical body of a living being. The term ‘kāya’ in rūpakāya in pre-Mahāyāna and Mahāyāna texts generally refers to Buddha’s “body” or physical “form”. It can also be used to connote all such meaning at once. In India, commentaries on the Abhijamayālankāra (those by Ārya Vimuktisena, Bhadanta Vimuktisena, Dharmamitra, Ratrakarasanti, and Abhayākaragupta, and in various Indian Yogācāra commentaries), the word ‘kāya’ in dharmakāya was generally etymologized in one or more of the ways which are pointed out by John J. Makrasky in “Buddhahood Ensocried” as follows:

1. Kāya “body” in the sense of samcaya, a collection of components or an accumulation of parts; dharmakāya the collection (kāya) of Buddha’s excellent qualities lanasravadharma; in some pre-mahāyāna texts and a few early Mahāyāna passages, it has meant the collection (kāya) of the Buddha’s teachings (dharma).

2. Kāya “body” in the sense of asraya, substratum or basis; dharmakāya the substratum (kāya) of excellent qualities (anasravadhamah) or the basis (kāya) or sovereignty over all phenomena (sarradharmah).

3. Kāya “body” in the sense of embodiments; e.g., dharmakāya that which embodies the real nature of things, the embodiment (kāya) of the real nature of things (dharmata) in knowledge.\(^{89}\)

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\(^{88}\) The Uttara Tantra: A Treatise on Buddha Nature, (tr) Ken and Katia Holmes, Sri Satguru Publication, Delhi, 1994, p. 194

In the Pāli canon the Buddha told Vasettha that the Tathāgata was Dharmakāya, the “Truth body” or the “Embodiment of Truth”, as well as Dharmabhūta, “Truth-become”, is ‘One who has become truth’. On another occasion, the Buddha told Vakkhali: “He who sees the Dharma (Truth) sees the Tathāgata, he who sees the Tathāgata sees the Dharma.”\(^9^0\) That is to say, the Buddha equal to Truth and all Buddhas are one and the same, being no different from one another in the Dhamakāya, because Truth is one.

After the Buddha’s Parinirvāṇa a distinction was made between the Buddhas physical body, rūpākāya, and his Dharmakāya aspect. This was an understandable and necessary development. As the Buddha told Vakkhali, he was a living example of the ‘Truth’ of the Dharma. Without that form to relate to, the Buddha’s formers could not relate to the Dharmakāya aspect of him. Despite the growth of the stūpa cult in which the remains or relics of enlightened beings were unclipped, Buddhism sees such things as symbols of the Truth, rather than the Truth itself.

The development of Buddhist thought and the theory of Trikāya was established in the 3\(^{rd}\) and 4\(^{th}\) centuries with the Mahāyāna Buddhist texts such as Prajñāpāramitā sūtra, and Yogācāra texts. The theory of Trikāya developed during the time when the Mahāyāna Buddhist was established, the Buddha (and all Buddhas) are in their essential nature identical with the ultimate truth or absolute reality known as the Truth Body of the Buddha. This is their first ‘body’. At the same time, Buddhas have the power to manifest themselves in a sublime celestial form in splendid paradies where they teach the doctrine surrounded by beings. This is their second body, known as the Enjoyment Body (Sambhogakāya). Furthermore, motivated by boundless compassion (makka-karunā), they project themselves into the world of suffering beings

\(^9^0\) Samyutta Nikāya II. 87, p. 103
(e.g. the human world) disguised in an appropriate manner through the use of ‘skillful means’ (upāya-kausaya) so as the Emanation Body (nirmānakāya).

There are some explanations by scholars whereby the order of trikāya is changed and the first body is nirmānakāya, the second body is sambhogakāya, and the third body is dharmakāya.

"Trikāya is the three bodies of the Buddha, the Nirmanakāya or created body which manifests in time and space; the Sambhogakāya or body of mutual enjoyment which is a body of bliss or clear light manifestation; and the Dharmakāya or Truth body which embodies the very principle of enlightenment and knows no limits or boundaries."\(^{91}\)

According to ‘Buddha Nature’ the book of Sallie B. King, the trikāya, or three Buddha bodies, are related and divided into two “natures”; the Buddha nature that dwells in itself and the emergent Buddha nature. Three Buddha bodies- Dharmakāya, Sambhogakāya and Nirmānakāya all become complete because of these two natures. In other words, the trikāya are subsumed within the Buddha nature. Specifically, the Dharmakāya is identified with the Buddha nature that dwells in itself, whereas the sambhogakāya and nirmānakāya are identified with the emergent Buddha nature. Thus the Dharmakāya represents what the Buddha nature is in itself, whether recognized or unrecognized, and the other two kāyas represent what it is as it comes into its own, so to speak, the Buddha nature in its manifest form of self-knowledge and action for the liberation of others.\(^{92}\)

There are many characteristics of the Dharmakāya affording us further insight into the soteriological character of this fruition stage of the Buddha nature. First, the Dharmakāya is characterized as the Middle Path, which is

explained as meaning “separation from extremes.”\textsuperscript{93} The existence of the dharmakāya as a possibility achieves the goal of nirvāṇa or the “fruit” of nirvāṇa.\textsuperscript{94}

“If the supreme and worldly truths are the same, the ordinary persons, upon perceiving worldly truth, should penetrate the supreme truth. But if they penetrated the supreme truth, they should be sages [instead of ordinary people]. But as they do not perceive the supreme truth, the two truths are not one.

If you say the two truths are different, than sages, perceiving worldly truth should not penetrate supreme truth. But if they did not penetrate supreme truth, they would be ordinary people. Therefore, because sages perceive [both truths], [the two truths] are not different. Therefore, we know [the two truths] are neither the same nor different.”\textsuperscript{95}

With this quotation, we come to learn that the characteristic of Dharmakāya is the harmony between Thusness and phenomenal reality. With respect to variety of things, “when you consider the penetration of Thusness you cannot say they are different, but because of worldly distinctions, you cannot say they are the same.”\textsuperscript{96} Whereas, Thusness and phenomenal reality are not distinct, they are mutually identifiable. Just as form is emptiness is form, so Thusness is phenomena, phenomena are Thusness. On one hand, because they are not the same, therefore, one is not reduced to the others and each maintains its own significance.

The Dharmakāya is always in a relationship with Dharmadhātu, Thusness, Supreme truth, Mahāpaninirvāṇa, super powers, compassion, own-

\textsuperscript{93}S. B. King, \textit{Op. Cit.} 68.
\textsuperscript{94}Ibid., 66
\textsuperscript{95}S. B. King, \textit{Buddha Natue}, Ibid. 70.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 70
nature, prajñāna (wisdom of Buddha), the cause of enlightenment, the superior path, liberation, the fruit-essence of liberation or Buddha virtue (bliss, purity, entity, and self) or pāramitā. What is found here is a list of the fruit of realization? The “purity” of the dharmadhātu, the realm in which Buddhism comes to fruition, then, exists in the absence of defilement in these fruits. Hence, there is no change (a source of suffering), no adherence to forms (a manifestation if ignorance), no binding or attachment. Rather, there is transformative power (the ability to act on behalf of others), the nurturance of compassion, non-rejection of the plight of sentient beings in samsāra, and so forth. Thus, the two main characteristics of purity seem to be absent of any defilement in one’s own behavior and mental process and action on behalf of the liberation and welfare of others. This, of course, is none other than the practice and realization of the Bodhisattva path, as manifest in prajñāna and karunā (wisdom and compassion).

Having already discussed the Dharmakāya, we will examine the Sambhogakāya next.

“For the mention of sentient beings to be caused to attain perfect fulfillment, three things are necessary pleasure in the Dharma, the six superpowers (abhijñā) and the giving of aid by removing [sentient beings from their suffering]. Thus great compassion removes [sentient beings] from the three evil paths of suffering and establishes people and Devas in great peace. Great meditation brings about the arising of faithful joy by manifesting the six superpowers. Wisdom takes pleasure in the Dharma and realizes liberation. This is what is called the sambhogakāya.”

The characteristics constitutive of this kāya are introduced in terms of the greatness of their influence and activities; that is, their power and ability

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to effect change. Wisdom is constituted by nondiscriminative knowledge, pleasure in the Dharma, and the realization of liberation. Knowledge, pleasure and realization of actions, not things; their meaning perhaps would be conveyed more accurately if they were translated verbally as knowing, enjoying, and realizing. Wisdom, as described here, is a manner of being in the world characterized by nondiscriminative apprehension of what is, and the active self-transformation of realizing freedom. This aspect of the sambhogakāya, then, constitutes its soteriological functions for the practitioner.

The following description of the Nirmānakāya bears certain similarities to that of the sambhogakāya. The third body of the Buddha is nirmānakāya or the Emanation body or physical embodiment of a Buddha. As for the sambhogakāya, the nirmānakāya also have three main characteristics are wisdom, meditation, and compassion. In this case, compassion is the need of the existence of this kāya, Samadhi power enables this kāya to take form (i.e., incarnate) and wisdom provides the direction for this kāya’s actions. Again, as for the other kāya, here too this kāya is wholly constituted by soteriological functions, this time entirely for the benefit of others. It specifies the most significant events in the life of the Buddha Sakyamuni as well.

3.3.1. The Concept of Dharmakāya in the Śrīmālā Sūtra:

Previously mentioned to the theory of the Trikāya, now we focus on the concept of the Dharmakāya as presented in the Śrīmālā sūtra. Though comparatively brief in form, this sūtra dealing with the concept successfully sketches out the major propositions of the theory. The text provides a certain basic instruction on the fundamental of the Absolute Body (Dharmakāya).

In the sūtra, the Queen Śrīmālā says:
“Lord, the cessation of suffering is not the destruction of Dharma. Why so? Because the Dharmakāya of the Tathāgata is named ‘cessation of suffering,’ and it is beginningless, uncreated, unborn, undying, free from death; permanent, steadfast, calm, eternal, intrinsically pure, free from all the defilement-store, and accompanied by Buddha natures more numerous than the sands of the Ganges, which are nondiscrete, knowing as liberated, and inconceivable.”

One of the questions posed by the Śrīmālā is its position with regard to the doctrine of Sunyāta of the Prajñāpāramitā sūtra. What is novel is the attribution ‘not void’ (asunyāta) to the Tathāgatagarbha and Dharmakāya. To positively define them as steadfast, eternal, of ultimate existence and intrinsically replete with the infinite Buddha nature, as well as to designate the Dharmakāya as the perfection of permanence (nitya), pleasere (sukha), self (ātman), and purity (śubha), was a radical departure from, and confrontation with, the classical Śunyavāda of the wisdom (prajñā) literature.

"If the Śrīmālā generally engages in an epistemological critique of the various classes of sentient beings, what is the actual of the spiritual path? What creative role or position does the diverse disciplines and practices of orthodox Buddhism play in the process of the embryo’s realization as Absolute Body? Although the text clearly indicates that embryo is fundamentally synonymous with the Great Vehicle, grounding in itself all other vehicles, what is the actual relationship between the embryo’s transformation and the classical stages of the spiritual path? What are the psychological dynamics involed, noted on the level of the individual, phenomenal consciousness that accounts for and witnesses to, the potential Tathāgatahood becoming actual? Only with the insights of the Vijnānavāda

98Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr) Op. Cit.: 98.
and its analysis of the Alayavijnāna (Storehouse Consciousness) could this critical area be elucidated.  

In the Śrīmālā sūtra, there are many degrees of the self-manifestation of the tathāgata-embryo within the phenomenal consciousness of sentient beings. It is only in the Lord Buddha, the Tathāgata, where complete self-realization as the Dharmakāya has been attained. And the tathāgata can be rightly credited with salvific intimacy as "the imperishable refuge, the permanent refuge, the steadfast refuge at the uttermost limit," not so much because the Lord Buddha has "gained the Absolute Body". It is, rather, the Tathāgatagarbha that has acquired an absolute self-witnessing, self-confirmatory, consciousness of itself as the Great Vehicle, the One Vehicle. The Tathāgata-Arhat-Samyaksambuddha is the perfect knowledge through which the Tathāgata-embryo comprehends itself as what it is as "The Refuge with imperishable nature, permanent nature, steadfast nature". The Dharma and Sangha, when properly considered, can be mere ancillary, temporal refuges. The former (Dharma) can only teach the path of the One Vehicle leading to the ultimate realization of the Absolute Body. Its role remains that of a directive, and is not itself the consummation as the rightly completed enlightenment. Likewise, the Sangha is a representative term for all those of the three vehicles (that are in fact only one), through fear, have themselves taken refuge in the Tathāgata, and who, while seeking methods, study of practices and training in disciplines, are yet moving toward that perfect maturity. Soteriology now becomes more acutely defined as epistemology, since the Tathāgata’s status as absolute refuge is dependent

100 Alex and Hideko Wayman, Op. Cit.: 93.
101 Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr) Op. Cit.: 92.
upon his perfect knowledge. This is the meaning of authentic ‘Lion’s Roar’
because He alone has achieved an unqualified understanding of all natures,
his becoming omniscient and all seeing, unrestrained from all faults, liberated
from all defilements, and possessed of infinite merit.

While the Arhats and Pratyekabuddhas may utter a similar
proclamation attesting their goal of freedom from the bondage of *samsāra.*
They may think to themselves that their births are put to an end, that there is
nothing to be known beyond what they have already encompassed, and thus
concluded to themselves, “*without dependence on another, I have attained
the (Nirvāṇa) stage with remainder; I am certainly in the incomparable
rightly completed enlightenment*”\(^{102}\) The Śrīmālā insists that though they have
undoubtedly experienced liberation “in the supreme Nirvāṇa stage of arrested
breath”, characteristic of the fourth *dhyāna.* There is merely a “fractional
Nirvāṇa,” a skilful means established by the Tathāgata.

The Śrīmālā sūtra has stated that only when the nescience entrenchment
with issue from it has been completely eliminated, is the Buddha nature
finally manifested in total lucidity and that thus, the Tathāgata embryo attains
an explicit and complete self-awareness as the Absolute Body of the
Tathāgata. From this perspective, the Buddha nature appears as effect, the
result of the removal of the nescience entrenchment. But if the Buddha nature
represents, as it has been shown to, the substance of the most profound
wisdom and knowledge, should they not be more properly considered as the
cause rather than the effect of that removal and elimination? Put another way,
how but by knowledge (and therefore the Buddha nature) can the

beginningless core of ignorance be dissipated, if wisdom is the effect of liberation, then what is the cause?

Actually, the question itself is deceptive, and the problem if any, is one of perspective. For the Buddha nature is both the cause and the effect in the process of dissolving the nescience entrenchment and its defilements. Here it is suggested that this is but an alternate way in which the Śrīmālā implicitly exposes the bivalent character of the Tathāgata-embryo. It has been already pointed out how; from the angle of finality, it is self-realized.

In the Absolute body, the embryo is effect, result, and goal. At the same time as the process, self-determined movement towards those actualizations, it is a cause, means and progress. The relationship of the Buddha nature to the nescience entrenchments is simply a more specific, dynamic, and functional, definition of this; and that is simultaneously its own becoming. In an earlier section, while discussing the relationship of the Illustrious Doctrine and the Great Vehicle, the scripture allowed for the possibility of different classes of beings, even though all were equally embraced by the Buddha Vehicle. Their various stages of realization were translated as the degrees in the phenomenal manifestation of the Tathāgata-embryo. Another way of elucidating this self-manifestation is from the complementary mechanics of the removal of the barrier. As the obstructive force of the nescience entrenchment is ever more dispersed by the diverse knowledge modes which essentially constitute the Buddha nature, these latter display themselves with greater perspicuity. This principle of self-liberation as self-explication explains the Queen Śrīmālā understands that the defilements of the nescience entrenchment are eliminated or purified and there is a simultaneous attainment of the virtuous Buddha natures which are

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the very vehicle of their final and total self-development. It is this that constitutes the supreme Nirvāṇa-realm of the Tathāgata as the sūtra insists.

"It is attained by those for whom knowledge is equal; it is attained by those for whom liberation is equal; it is attained by those for whom pure knowledge and vision are equal. Therefore the Nirvāṇa-realm has a single taste (ekarasa). That is to say, the tastes of knowledge and liberation are identical. Lord, whichever persons do not eliminate or purify the nescience entrenchment, is ones without the single taste of the Nirvāṇa-realm; that is to say, for them, knowledge and liberation taste different."  

Besides, the Queen Śrīmālā focuses on the second main class of persons, those of “discontinuous transference,” encompassing ordinary persons, Disciples, Self-Enlightened Ones, and Bodhisattvas newly entered on the path. While the first group just considered (the Arahats, Pratyekabuddhas and Bodhisattvas from the 8th stage on) are still subject to the continued, subtle influence of the nescience entrenchment, gained control over the four Static defilements and the accompanying changing ones. Turning their failures to attain a corresponding mastery over those same four forms of indulgence, the beings of the second class are subject to the “discontinuous passing away” the equivalent of rebirth in some new forms of corporeal embodiment.

When the Buddha nature is fully manifest, the Tathāgatagarbha has realized its own plentitude, and is thus referred to as the Absolute Body of omniscience, the Dharmakāya. The overall image projected by the Śrīmālā sūtra in describing the relationship of the Tathāgatagarbha with Dharmakāya is that of a cycle that presupposes its beginning and reaches its beginning only at its end. Initially posited as an object of faith, the garbha is accorded an

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103 Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr) Op. Cit. 87.
absolute status as existing without beginning or end; not being born and dead; not subject to rebirth, but permanently steadfast, and eternal; the base and support of the intrinsic Buddha natures as well as the adventitious, discrete defilements, and the ground of both samsāra and nirvāṇa. In spite of these, its organic designation as “embryo” quickly identified this beginning as the point of departure endowed with the propensity towards its own self-transformation, a process with a most specific teleological direction. For, the self-movement of the Tathāgatagarbha to the Absolute Body is a self-teleological process of inner convergence, where the Absolute Body as tools is simply the point of the embryo is fully self-conscious, self-revelation.

The Dharmakāya can be a result only because it is already present from the beginning in an initial “embryonic” shape or content (the garbha). The cycle transformation then, of the Tathāgatagarbha into the Dharmakāya, is that of an original absolute becoming an articulate absolute, where no new elements are acquired but the latent or inherent ones (i.e., the innumerable Buddha natures) are expressed.

3.4. The Noble Truth and the meaning of Voidness:

3.4.1. The Noble Truth:

The Noble Truth or The Four Noble Truths is the main doctrine in Buddhism. Schools or sects in Buddhism are possible based on this doctrine of practicing and propagating this teaching. The Four Noble Truths, (Catvārī-ārya-satyāni), are as follows: consisting of suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path to the cessation of suffering. Being among the most fundamental Buddhist teachings, the Four Noble Truths appear many times in Pāli canon. They arose as the core of the Buddha’s enlightenment experience, and are regarded in Buddhism as psychological
insight into a step-by-step cognitive methodology, and not mere philosophical theory. Therefore, the Buddha said in the Samyutta Nikāya:

"These Four Noble Truths, monks, are actual, unerring, not otherwise. Therefore, they are called Noble Truth.\textsuperscript{104}"

This teaching was the basis of the Buddha’s first discourse after his enlightenment, the Discourse on Setting in Motion the Wheel of Dharma at Sārnāth. In the Cūlamāluṇikyā sūra of the Majjhima Nikāya, the Buddha explained why he delivered the Four Noble Truths:

"Why have I declared the Four Noble Truths? Because it is beneficial, it belongs to the fundamentals of the holy life, it leads to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to dissect knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nirvāṇa. That is why I have declared it.\textsuperscript{105}"

The Four Noble Truths, as contained in the initial enlightenment of the Buddha, are seen by the Buddhists as being the result of such compassion. These Truths constitute the essence of Buddha’s enlightenment, in that they denote and express the awakening of Siddhārtha Gautama. Initially these Four Noble Truths were disclosed to the five ascetics in the Deer Park in Vārāṇasī. Collectively, the Truths form “an existential path wherein one’s own awakening awakens others”. The Truths as such are intended to awaken in others the desire or thirst for supreme enlightenment. It is in the context of the soteriological goal that each Truth must be evaluated and judged. Apart from the ultimate goal of existence which the Buddha set for himself and for his followers, the truths may also be seen as a description of psychological states one undergoes in the process of encountering various experiences of life in


\textsuperscript{105}Bhikkhu Nānamoli, The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya, p. 533-36.
the world. For a Buddhist the Truths are not mere descriptions of what goes on inside us; rather they are meant to point out the way that leads to what the Buddhists call Nirvana. Below is presented each Truth in its own right and context.

The First Noble Truth gives a general statement concerning the actual condition of existence in the world. It tells us that life as such is suffering (duhkha). In terming life as suffering the Buddha thereby gives a value judgment about its worth. Insofar as the phenomenal mode of life persists, the stark fact of suffering can not be avoided at any cost. This does not mean that life is totally destitute of experiences which are joyful and ecstatic, but the fact remains that joy as well as ecstasy are of brief duration, and ultimately terminate in suffering. Whatever is of temporal nature, can not last for long. So, suffering and temporality are closely related to each other. Using the analogy of burning fire to denote impermanence, this is what the Dhammapada has to say: "How can there be laughter, how can there be pleasure when the whole world is burning?" 106

The Second Noble Truth is the Causes of suffering. If the phenomenal mode of existence is characterized by suffering, it is reasonable to infer that it must have a cause. Empirical experiences as well as common-sense tells us that nothing in the world exists without a cause. In the context of suffering it means that the existential ills too must have a cause. It is the purpose of the Second Truth to tell us as to what causes suffering to be. The origin (samudaya) of suffering is said to be craving (trṣṇā).

The Third Noble Truth is the Cessation of suffering. Since suffering has its cause in craving, it means that suffering can be overcome if the cause,

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that is craving, is destroyed. It is the possibility of cessation (nīrodha) of suffering which the Third Noble Truth explains. Cessation of suffering results in absolute freedom and truth is experienced as it is in itself. This experience of transcendence is non-conceptual and non-cognitive, in that it can be neither be conceived nor expressed in conceptual language. Often the extinction of suffering, and thereby of ego-self, is identified with what the Buddhists call nirvāṇa.

The Fourth Noble Truth, which is the last one, tells us as to how to overcome sufferings that is the main characteristic of the conditioned existence. The path (mārga), which this truth prescribes, is intended to culminate in the realization of the extinction of suffering. The methods that constitute this path are cessational in nature. They terminate in the cessation of suffering when practiced diligently, persistently and regularly. The number of methods of the path are said to be eight, and so the path is also spoken of as the Eightfold Path. The methods are: right view, right aspiration, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. The Eightfold Path is also known as the Middle Way (madhyamā pratipat). The Middle Way as a doctrinal concept plays a very important role in the Mahāyāna thought.

In the text of the Buddha nature and the Śrīmālā sūtra, the Four Noble Truths is the pivotal subject in the scriptural analysis on the imperfect realization of the Arhat and Pratyekabuddha. The Four Noble Truths now assume a central position for the cognitive perceptual critique of ordinary beings and, especially, of the Disciples and Self-Enlightened Ones. The Śrīmālā also displays its comment on the knowledge of the Noble Truths to the Disciples and Self- Enlightened, it mentions them in connection with the Arhats and Pratyekabuddhas. It notes that, since they have not eliminated the
nescience entrenchment completely, they do not adequately comprehend The Four Noble Truths. Not having attained the full manifestation of the Buddha natures, they are those “persons attend with remainder of suffering to search, attended with remainder of source of suffering to eliminate, attended with remainder of cessation of suffering to realize directly, and attended with remainder of path leading to the cessation of suffering to cultivate.”

Here, once again, the particularly Buddhist intuition into the interdependence of knowledge and salvation, epistemology as soteriology, it is clearly apparent, and the Śrīmālā references to the Tathāgata-embryo become most explicit.

According to the Śrīmālā sūtra, the Disciples and Self-Enlightened ones realize only a one-sided knowledge of the Four Noble Truths which, while allowing a certain genuine discrimination into their nature, and removing thereby certain static defilement, they are yet incapable of removing all of them. There is still a second, “supramundane adamantine knowledge” (vajropoma-samadhi) of the Noble Truths, perfected only by the Tathāgata, eliminating all the defilement stores, together with their originative center, the nesciences entrenchment. The critical, definitive character of this ultimate, disintegrative and therefore salvific intuition is described as the “inconceivable voidness knowledge”.

At this juncture, there emerges a break in the logical sequence of the text. Instead of providing an immediate and straightforward elaboration of this “inconceivable voidness knowledge” belonging to the Tathāgata alone, the Śrīmālā introduces a lengthy passage amounting to its own peculiar hermeneutic of the Four Noble Truths. Only then does it resume its definition of the unique “voidness knowledge”. Actually, the seeming hiatus is the very

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107 Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr) *Op. Cit*: 86.
manner in which the sūtra renders the final purport and full extent of that particular term. The “inconceivable voidness knowledge” of the Tathāgata, which eliminates all defilement impressions at their very root, is the bi-polar wisdom concerning the Tathāgata-embryo. But what the Queen Śrīmālā intends is that the correct and exact insight into the nature of the embryo is simultaneously interdependent with one’s understanding of the sūtra. This affects a direct equivalence between the two, where the explanation of the one is the very exponent of the other:

“Lord, the explanation of the meaning of the Noble Truths should be considered to be profound and subtle, difficult to understand, incapable of being judged and not in the domain of logic. It takes a wise man to appreciate it. It cannot be the concern of any worldly persons. Why is that? Because it profound teaching explains the Tathāgatagarbha. The Tathāgatagarbha is the domain of the Tathāgata. It is not the domain of any Disciple Self-Enlightened one. Lord, the Tathāgatagarbha is the locus of this explanation of the meaning of the Noble Truths. Because the locus of the Tathāgatagarbha is profound, the meaning of the Noble Truths is considered to be profound and subtle, difficult to understand, incapable of being judged, and not in the domain of logic. It takes a wise man to understand it. It cannot be the concern of any worldly persons.

“Lord, whoever does not doubt that the Tathagatagarbha is wrapped up in all the defilement-store, also does not doubt that the Dharmakaya of the Tathagata is liberated from all the defilement-store. When anyone’s mind reaches the ultimate purport of the Tathagatagarbha, the Dharmakāya of the Tathāgata and inconceivable realm of the Buddha, he has implicit trust and the conviction in two kinds of explanation of the meaning of the Noble Truths.
The two kinds of explanation of the meaning of the Noble Truths are difficult to know and difficult to understand.108

Actually, the dual explanations of the Noble Truth as “Created” (krta) and “Uncreated” (akrta) present no great challenge; their interpretation is quite direct and simple. While the former mode of discernment into the meaning of the Four Noble Truths is imperfect due to intellectual limitation, the latter is perfect, being without such limitation. More importantly, the “Great” explanation of the Truths is perceptually incomplete because it essentially entails dependence on another; it fails to effect that perfect self-determined, self-witnessing probe into the very source of the suffering that is samsāra. Without such an ultimate consciousness of the wellspring of suffering, one cannot adequately cultivate the path leading to the finality of that experience.

The designation, Arhat-Samyaksambuddha, is applicable to the Tathāgata since he alone is properly and perfectly enlightened as the sole one who, in sounding the profound origin and seat of suffering, perfectly realized its cessation. Thus, the Four Noble Truths are his discovery and subsequent gift to a world enclosed in the shell of sorrow. It is his unsurpassed, direct and unconditional intuition of phenomenal existence of suffering that validated and assured the perfect consummation of his path to liberation. It is thus that the Śrīmālā speaks of the Tathāgata as perfecting the “Uncreated” explanations of the Noble Truths:

“Lord, the Uncreated explanations of the meaning of the Noble Truths present the Noble Truths without intellectual limitation. Why so? Because in dependence on oneself, one seeks out all deepfelt suffering, eliminates all

deepfelt sources of suffering, directly realizes the deepfelt cessation of all suffering, and cultivates the entire deepfelt path leading to the cessation."\(^{109}\)

In the commentary by Tue Sy in his work about the Śrīmālā, he comments: "The content and meaning of The Four Noble Truths are not the high phenomena to overcome the non-phenomena to get through the process of thinking deeply. The Noble Truths, firstly, it is the existing of reality and humanity. Furthermore, it is an epistemology and the way to evaluate the reality."\(^{110}\)

In an apparent attempt to rationalize its "Created" and "Uncreated" explanations of the Four Noble Truths, and to integrate them with its doctrine of Nirvāṇa and Samsāra, the sūtra here injects a single declarative phrase.

The synthesis it obviously intends to impact by doing so results, however, in a technical schema, more abstruse than classificatory. Then designed precision involves the Śrīmālā in a sonance forced diagrammatic structuring leaving the terms involved more recondite than explicit. The text, without any amplification, simply states that not only is there a constructed (conditional) and unconstructed (unconditional) samsāra but, there is likewise a constructed and unconstructed Nirvāṇa.

The Queen says: "Lord, whoever are attended with remainder of suffering to search, of source of suffering to eliminate, of cessation of suffering to realize directly, and the path leading to the cessation of suffering to cultivate are persons who have a fractional Nirvana. Those who have attained a fractional Nirvana, Lord, are called ‘directed toward the Nirvana-realm’. Those who search all suffering, who eliminate all source of suffering, who realize directly the cessation of suffering, and who cultivate all the paths

\(^{109}\) Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr) *Op. Cit.* 97.
\(^{110}\) T. Sy, p. 63
leading to the cessation of suffering attain the permanent, calm, and cooled Nirvana in the world destroyed by impermanence and ever sick, and become the protection and refuge of the world in a world without protection and without refuge.\textsuperscript{111}

Evidently, in the present context of the Noble Truths, the unconstructed Samsāra suggests reality as suffering which has already been linked to the Tathāgata-embryo, since it alone is said to experience it so. The constructed samsāra would then amount to the defilement stores which, though constituting and occasioning the samsāric condition, remain nevertheless external and essentially unconnected to the embryo. Actually, the unconstructed Nirvāṇa would equate with cessation of suffering, or the Absolute Body, while the Buddha natures would be left to round off the quadruplicate classification as the constructed nirvāṇa. The problem is in this last designation of the Buddha natures as constructed (conditioned) nirvāṇa, since it portrays an inconsistent strain within the Śrīmālā sūtra. It has already been noticed that the Tathāgata-embryo “excludes the realm with the characteristic of the constructed.” But at the same moment, it claimed that the embryo is the “support, holder and base” of the (constructed) Buddha natures that are nondiscrete, not dissociated, and knowing as liberated from the stores (of defilement). Elsewhere, the Buddha natures assumed an ultimate value in the Śūra’s description of the Absolute Body, which is said to be “accompanied by the Buddha natures more numerous than the sands of the Ganges, which are nondiscrete, knowing as liberated and inconceivable.” There appears, then, to be a textual inconsistency where the Śrīmālā at one time implicates the Buddha natures to be conditioned or constructed, and at

\textsuperscript{111} Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr) \textit{Op. Cit.} 86.
another time, not to be so designated, but in fact, unconditional or unconstructed. This would, of course, imply a logical incongruity as well. The schema of “constructed unconstructed” suggests a disparity of mutual exclusion between the two. For if, as has been noted, the unconstructed samsāra (i.e., the Tathāgata-embryo as experience of suffering) excludes the constructed samsāra (i.e., the defilement stores), could not the same relation hold for the unconstructed and constructed nirvāṇa? In that event, the Absolute Body as the cessation of suffering would exclude the Buddha natures. But, it has been repeated in the existence of the Queen Śrīmālā that just the opposite is the case.

Its reiterated critique of the Arhat and Prateykbuddha realization consisted of the fact that their Nirvāṇa-realm was not the supreme nirvāṇa of the Tathāgata, not the rightly completed enlightenment, and therefore not the perfection of the embryo as Absolute Body. This is precisely because they failed to manifest the Buddha natures that were nevertheless inherent to them as inseparable from the Tathāgata-embryo. The sūtra itself does not explain or expand upon this rather isolated and somewhat problematic statement. If it is doctrine of an unconstructed and constructed then the noted inconsistency is not critical to the coherence of the Śrīmālā’s doctrine on the Tathāgatagarbha.

Nirvāṇa as well as an unconstructed and constructed samsāra, remains largely undeveloped and non-integral to the present discussion of the Noble Truth; therefore, the hesitation it occasions as to the status of the Buddha natures must be weighed against the overall intent of the text. It is therefore suggested that the Śrīmālā simply means that the unconstructed nirvāṇa is “accompanied by” the constructed nirvāṇa and that the unconstructed samsāra is “accompanied by” the constructed samsāra. In the case of the latter pair, the Tathāgata-embryo is accompanied by the defilement stores,
which nevertheless remain adventitious and non-essential to it. While in the former, the Absolute Body is not only attended by, but essentially constituted of the Buddha natures. It should also be noted here that the latter śāstra commentary of the Ratragotravibhaga obviates the entire question, since its quotation of the particular passage under consideration from the Śrīmāla contains no reference whatever to “construct” or “conditioned” as descriptive of the Buddha natures. Whether this is a work of a consciously editorialized deletion or a matter of different textual source, has not been ascertained. What is important is that according to the śāstra, the Buddha natures are simply an inherent element essential to the Absolute Body. Its quotation from the Śrīmāla sūtra includes no reference to the modifier “constructed” or “conditioned”: “Therefore O Lord, the Matrix of the Tathāgata (tathāgatagarbha) is the foundation, the support and the substratum of the immutable elements (properties) [Buddha nature] which are essentially connected with, indivisible from (the Absolute Entity), and unreleased from wisdom.”

Through the explanation of constructed (on conditioned) or unconstructed (unconditioned), it is suggested that the central intuition is the important aspect of this process. There is an exact correspondence between the proper understanding of the Four Noble Truths and the correct insight into the nature of the Tathāgata-embryo. The difficulty in totally comprehending the “Uncreated” explanation of the meaning of those Truths without intellectual limitation is the very measure in attaining the direct and precise comprehension of the Tathāgata-embryo. Most of this process is out of the knowledge of Arhat as the Prateykaabuddha or only “one side of knowledge” of the Four Noble Truths translated here as the “Great explanation” of their

112 Takasaki, A study on the Ratragotravibhaga, p. 292.
meaning. And if it eliminates only a certain amount of the static defilements, it is because of an intellectual dependency, a perciptent failure to sufficiently penetrate in an unqualified self-comprehensive grasp, the source of all suffering. One’s intensive cultivation of the path leading to the cessation of suffering is directly contingent upon the exhaustive and unmitigated depth of that self-realization; to modulate the one is to restrict the other.

Thus, it is also apparent that the “supramundane adamantine knowledge”, capable not only of eliminating all primary and secondary defilements, but also completely dissipating their causal, primordial source in the nescience entrenchment, is the “Uncreated explanation” of the Noble Truths, perfected by the Tathāgata. It is this second kind of knowledge of the Noble Truths that was accorded the “Right knowledge”, and more specifically, the “inconceivable voidness knowledge”. This last designation, initially somewhat gratuitous and unexplained, now assumes critical focus as the final development in the Śrīmālā’s doctrine of the Tathāgatagarbha.

In the process of enlightenment of an Arhat, they move behind the guidance of the Buddha, not for the self-enlightenment. So, the Noble Truth which is enlightened by the Arahats, the Śrīmālā called created Noble Truths. Because it is created, it is called not the Boundless Noble Truth (無邊聖諦). And the Noble Truths is enlightened by the Buddha; it is called The Boundless Noble Truths.

3.4.2. Meaning of Voidness:

The Doctrine of Voidness (Śūnyatā) changed into the first stage in the Buddhist history from the transformation of the metaphysical basis which was
already completed in the second century B.C.E.\textsuperscript{113} This doctrine belongs to several schools, but the earliest school which possesses this doctrine came to be known as the Madhyamaka, the teaching of Nāgārjuna. It was Nāgārjuna who first explained philosophically the concept of Śūnyatā (Emptiness).

Nāgārjuna is a Buddhist philosopher, deemed to be the founder of the Madhyamaka School. Little is known of his life, although it is generally accepted that he lived during the late 2\textsuperscript{nd} century B.C.E. and was primarily active in South India. He is deemed by many Buddhists of the Mahāyāna tradition to be a “Second Buddha”, and his philosophy of emptiness (śūnyatā) was enduring for later Buddhist thought.\textsuperscript{114}

Perhaps the earliest class of such discourses is a number of sūtras known as Prajñāparāmitā, the Perfection of Wisdom. Many of them may be from as early as the first century B.C.E, and we may take them as evidence that at the time when they appeared the new teaching was being systematically promulgated in the schools. It is expressed as nativism or even nihilism. It was even so-called by contemporary opponents, and Nāgārjuna’s commentator Chandrakirti had to deny that the Mahādhyamikas were nihilists (nāstika, nasti, “is not”). D.T. Suzuki says, “It simply means conditionality or transitoriness of all phenomenal existence.”\textsuperscript{115} Stcherbatsky translates śūnya (void) and śūnyatā (voidness) by “relativity” and says, “We use the term ‘relative’ to express the fact that a thing can be identified only by mentioning its relations to something else, and becomes meaningless without those relation.”\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{114} Damien Keown, Dictionary of Buddhism, Oxford, p. 185
\textsuperscript{116} Stcherbatsky, \textit{Concept of Nirvana}, p. 42.
This explicates the relative side, but says nothing about the positive. It is not the doctrine that all is relative, but that all is relative to an absolute.

However, says Nāgārjuna, "If everything is non-void (real in the popular sense), there is neither arising nor passing away. Of what is there Nirvāṇa, either by abandonment or cessation?" The Hīnayānist replies, "If there is Nirvāṇa, there will indeed be no depravities or skandhas (aggregates) when Nirvāṇa is attained, hence their destruction will be Nirvāṇa."

The response, as stated by the commentator, is "to get rid of your false view" (graha). If things exist in reality, they cannot become non-existent. Nāgārjuna says: "The limit of Nirvāṇa is also the limit of Samsāra; not the finest distinction is found between them. It must be understood that there is no abandoning of anything."

There are four questions about the passing away of Lord Buddha; it is neither (1) existent, (2) nor non-existent, (3) nor non-existent and non-existent, (4) nor non-existent and not non-existent. From that phenomenon, the Middle doctrine of Nāgārjuna appears later than the earliest form of the doctrine of the Voidness, as taught in the sūtra of the Perfection of Wisdom (Prajñāparāmitā), but it cannot be assumed that all the sūtras of this class are earlier than Nāgārjuna. They probably continued to be composed and revised. The doctrine of the Middle's literature is collected from Mahāyāna sūtras and its development in the second Mahāyāna school, Yogācāra. We find a popular presentation in sūtra form, and then a systematic treatment by several scholars. Asanga and Vasubandhu are two big contributors in this school. And after the famous pilgrim Xuan-zhuang traveled in India in the 7th century C.E., he returned to China and established Madhyamaka.

118 Ibid, pp. 228-29.
3.4.3. The meaning of Voidness in the Śrīmālā;

The Tathāgatagarbha, Buddhātā, or Dharmakāya of the Buddha is free from adventitious defilements. In the terminology of the Tathāgatagarbha doctrine, the unconstructed Dharmakāya, evidently also the knowledge Dharmakāya is the set of Buddha natures, which are the Ten Powers\textsuperscript{119} (Daśabala) and the Four confidences\textsuperscript{120}. The Queen Śrīmālā reserves the term “Dharmakāya” for the unconstructed kind. The queen mentions that it is accompanied by the sands of the Ganges, but does not call these the “constructed Dharmakāya” or “knowledge Dharmakāya.” We have seen previously that the queen calls it the “constructed nirvāṇa”. Therefore, the inconceivable Voidness knowledge of the Tathāgata is explained in the Śrīmālā sūtra with a radical hermeneutic on the meaning of “emptiness” or “voidness” from which perspective the sūtra continues its epistemological critique, and completes its theory of the Buddha nature or Tathāgata-embryo.

“Lord, the knowledge of the Tathāgatagarbha is the voidness knowledge of the Tathāgatas. The Tathāgatagarbha is something not seen before or understood before any Disciple or Self Enlightened One. It has been seen directly and understood by the Lord. The Voidness knowledge of the Tathāgatagarbha is of two kinds. The two are as follows: Lord, the tathāgatagarbha is void (sūnya) of all the defilement stores, which are discrete and knowing as not liberated. Lord, the tathāgatagarbha is not void

\textsuperscript{119} The ten powers of a Buddha, giving complete knowledge of: 1. What is right or wrong in every condition; 2. What is the karma of every being, past, present, and future; 3. All stages of dhyāna liberation, and samādhi; 4. The powers and faculties of all beings; 5. The desires or moral direction of every being; 6. The actual condition of every individual; 7. The direction and consequence of all laws; 8. All causes of mortality and of good and evil in their reality; 9. The end of all beings and nirvana; 10. The destruction of all illusion of every kind. (see William Edward Soothill. A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist terms, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, p. 46)

\textsuperscript{120} The four objects of unfailing purity (or faith), i.e. the three precious ones (triratna) and the moral law. (Ibid, p. 169)
of the Buddha dharmas which non-discrete, inconceivable, more numerous than the sands of the Ganges, and knowing as liberated.”

In the sūtra, the Queen Śrīmālā initially cautioned that the Tathāgata-embryo was not the domain of anyone falling into a belief in a real personality, self, or soul, nor was it comprehensible to those whose thoughts are distracted by voidness. Its intentionality is here more completely elucidated as it continues its critical examination of the percipient-cognitive failure of ordinary beings, Disciples, and Self-Enlightened ones from that precise norm of the tathāgata-embryo as bipolar voidness. Without articulating it as such, the Śrīmālā unquestionably views its doctrine as a genuine Madhyamaka position, advocating as authentic “middle path” within the bipolar contour of the Tathāgata-embryo as simultaneously void (śūnya), not void (asūnya). The risk of a one-sided emphasis to the exclusion of either one of the collateral terms is the failure to realize perfectly the Noble Truth, cessation of suffering and thus, the Absolute Body. In this regard, the Disciples and Self-Enlightened ones are no different from the condition of the ordinary immature beings, both falls short of the median realization, differing only in the angle of approximation to the common ideal.

Obviously, the faculties of those judged “ordinary” and “immature” are the more than grossly errant, conditioned as they are by an egotistic attachment to the five grasping personality aggregates (Skandhas). Aggregates consist of form or material: (rūpa); feeling (vedanā); perception (samjñā); motivation (samskāra); and consciousness (vijñāna). Corrupted by this personality appropriation, such beings exemplify the classical mistake with connection to the “four wayward objects”, that which is impermanent

121 Alex and Hideko Wayman (tr) Op Cit: 99.
they judge to be permanent, what is suffering to be pleasure, what is non-self to be self, what is impure as pure. Variously combined, these fundamental misperceptions (Viparyāsas) constitute the “wayward views of the two extremes”, nihilism and externalism. Misconstruing the deterioration of body, sense organs, feelings and volitions as final, and have no appreciation for the reality of transmigration a nihilistic connotation characteristic of the faulty judgmental designations of many led astray beings. Opposed to them, but no less mistaken, all those who lack a sufficient, self-reflective awareness of the monetary perishing of consciousness, and thus err in the belief that the objects of their superficial, everyday perceptions persist inalterably and eternally.

The Queen Śrīmālā affirms the background of its doctrine of the permanent, steadfast and eternal nature of the Tathāgata-embryo. In doing so, it exposes a major problem which it will be incapable of solving and which was one of the major reasons that unexpectedly accounted for the development of the complementary notion of “the storehouse consciousness” (ālayavijñāna) as identical to the tathāgata-embryo and the subsequent development of the theory in the Lāṅkāvatara sūtra. Merely suggestive at this point, the problem yet poses itself. It has become increasingly apparent; the Tathāgata-embryo is to be more properly understood as Absolute Body. It is the domain of omniscient knowledge, of perfected self-awareness. How else but as consciousness can it be designated. Therefore, is it not implicated in the very critique by which the Queen Śrīmālā initially established it untimely? Is it not fundamentally compromised in its definition as the very category (i.e., consciousness) that the scripture previously found wanting in permanency and stability? From such a problematic contradiction the later refinements of the Tathāgatagarbha-Ālayavijñāna theory would find resolution.
The term ‘śūnya’ (empty or unreal) and asūnyatā (nonempty or real) also are discussed clearly in the text of the Buddha Nature. The latter term is associated in the Buddha nature and other Tathāgatagarbha texts with the Tathāgatagarbha, the Buddha nature, and the Dharmakāya, which are said to be innately pure. The text about Buddha Nature claims: "Attachments are not real, therefore they are called Vacuous. If one gives rise to these attachments, true wisdom will not arise. When one does away with these attachments, then we speak of Buddha nature." Attachments are not real; Buddha nature is. Again: "If the Dharmakāya were nonexistant, then all correct practices should be in vain. Taking right view as the foremost practice, and including in addition such good things as morality, concentration and wisdom, the correct practices that one cultivates are not empty or fruitless. Because the correct practices do yield fruit, we know that the Dharmakāya is not nonexistence." Dharmakāya, the practices that lead one to it and the fruits of those practices are neither nothing nor empty. Again, "training in the Way is not a vain error." Through the same epistemological of the Buddha Nature, we unveil the scripture as the development thought of the Queen Śrīmālā. The quotation of the Buddha Nature: "World Honored One, the Tathāgatagarbha is not empty because of the wisdom that it does not abandon and from which it is inseparable, as well as the inconceivable and incalculable Buddha virtues. Therefore we know that the Tathāgatagarbha, because of the Tathāgata’s virtues, is not empty." Here it is stated as plainly as one could wish that the

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123 Ibid. 108.
124 Buddha nature, Taisho, Fo-xing-lun, p. 787b.
126 Ibid, p. 811c-812a

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tāthagatagarbha is not empty due to the reality of the Buddha nature or pāramitā (purity, self, bliss and eternity).

However, the term Tathāgatagarbha, or Buddha nature, does not refer to anything substantial but rather, indicates each person’s potential to achieve Buddhahood (this being a matter of activity) and identifies each person as Thusness (hence, as ontologically nonsubstantial and nondual). Moreover, although the text claims that the Tathāgatagarbha, the Dharmakāya, and the Buddha virtues or pāramitās are asūnya; this does not mean they exist in any substantial sense. Rather, the attribution of the sūnyata qualifier can be seen as part of the inversion process exemplified by the four pāramitās. Thus, just as purity is the inversion of the impurity perceived in phenomena, so the asūnya nature of this purity is the inversion of the sūnya nature of the impurity. In fact, it would have been inconsistent for the Tathāgata, Buddha nature theories, not to ascribe asūnyata to the dharmakāya and parāmitā. As we saw in the case of the self parāmitā, not-self is the property that “really” (in an asūnya manner) describes phenomena, and it has become of the self pāramitā. In this sense, the sūnya-asūnya concept presents nothing philosophically new that was not already present in the notion of the culmination of practice, the asūnya of the culmination of practice, the asūnya notion is a linguistic tool used to further emphasize the reality of the fruits of that practice.

The Śrīmālā expresses that the perception of ordinary beings proves its inadequacy to the correct knowledge of the Tathāgata-embryo. Their views are demented faulty “reasoning”, falling “too short” as they do in the eternalistic speculations, or over-extending “too far” in the nihilistic ones. The text does not actually apply these two inappropriate judgments to an exact correspondence with the void - not void of the Tathāgata-embryo. And
one might be tempted to infer that the eternalistic rationale has been led astray by an undue emphasis upon the asūnyā aspect, while the nihilistic suffers from too exclusive an attention to the opposite pole. But, conformity, especially in the former pair, is inexact and forced. What the Śrīmālā really intends is not so much an acute analysis of externalism and nihilism as it is modes of thought, but more to condemn the egoistic attachment to the five Skandhas (aggregates) which generate such delusion. As long as false personalism persists, such beings will ever be “immature” and never attain that exact and liberating intuition of the Tathāgata-embryo and, therefore, the coincidence of that final and absolute cessation of suffering.

If the Śrīmālā mentioned the “voidness knowledge” (空智) of the Disciples and Self-Enlightened ones, it immediately censures that insight as the very reason why they never perceive or understand the Noble Truth of the cessation of suffering. While attaining a correct perception into the voidness of the four wayward objects, they fail to reach that corresponding insight into the Absolute Body (Dharmakāya) as permanent, bliss, self and pure. They may very well have witnessed a realization of an unconditioned state, or nirvāṇa as void (sūnya) of the defiling wayward views (顛倒妄想). But their claim to absolute cognitive finality (and here there is a noticeable similarity to the text’s earlier criticism of the Arhats and Pratyekabuddha) is illegitimate. Though credited with a perfection of the four resorts¹²⁷, this “pure knowledge” (淨智) of the Disciples and Self-Enlightened ones, fails to perceive the collateral “not void” (asūnya) dimension of reality which, only when encompassed as such, can be considered. But as soon as this has been

¹²⁷ Four resorts: one should cultivate by resort to the meaning, rather than to the letter, second by resort to the meaning, rather than to personalities, third by resort to knowledge, rather than perception, and fourth by resort to scriptures of final meaning (nitartha), rather than ones of provisional meaning ‘neyartha’.) (See Lion’s roar of queen Śrīmālā, p, 95-103)
said, an immediate corrective is demanded, bringing to a final conclusion the substance of the Śrīmālā’s doctrine on the tathāgata-embryo. It may be correct to say that only with the exact and precise knowledge of the embryo (garbha) as both void (śūnya) and not void (asūnya), a knowledge which for differing reasons both the ordinary immature beings as well as the Disciples and Self-Enlightened ones lack, one can not obtain to the perception of the Noble Truth, cessation of suffering, and thereby, the Absolute Body. But the problem with such a formulation is the erroneous implication that this “domain of omniscient knowledge” is a thing to be acquired, a conceptually obtainable object, a circumscribable precept that would thus be reified by however lofty mode of wisdom.

The Śrīmālā itself, for a third time, yet without explicating it as much, suggests the need of its doctrine of the Tathāgatagarbha has for the complementary notion of the Ālayavijñāna. Throughout its presentation, the sutra essentially accentuates the ultimate, stable, and permanent nature of the embryo. Becoming clarified more as ontic subjectivity rather than substance, its designation (in the concluding section of the text) as innately pure consciousness is not inconsistent. Nevertheless; the Śrīmālā admits to a difficulty with such a qualification of the Tathāgatagarbha: “The virtuous consciousness, being momentary, it not polluted by defilements; and also the un-virtuous consciousness, being momentary, is not polluted by defilements. Lord, since neither do defilements touch that consciousness nor does that consciousness touch defilements, in that case, how does consciousness having a non-contacting nature, gets defiled? Lord, there is both the defilement and
the defiled consciousness. Therefore the meaning of the defilement on the intrinsically pure consciousness is difficult to understand."\(^{128}\)

What is immediately apparent is that the sūtra simply reiterates its dictum that the Tathāgatagarbha is void (sūnya) of the defilement which are adventitious and extrinsic. It has not made, and does not make, any exploration into the nature of defilement (kleśa) that would expound its accidental specification. That defilement exists is asserted, but its provisional status has not been sufficiently reviewed and established. Undoubtedly, this reflects the entire tenor of the Śrīmālā, the whole thrust of which has been to maintain the categorical reality of the Tathāgatagarbha and its identification with the Absolute Body. Such an emphasis tends to neglect an adequate investigation of how and why the defilements come to veil or obscure the embryo.

Furthermore, the ‘garbha’, as consciousness, is now admitted to be momentary and of “a noncontacting nature.” Does this not seriously jeopardize its claim as the ultimate ground of the phenomenal world; how can the garbha, than conceived, remain the substratum (adhara) of samsāra if it is essentially unconnected and non-concomitant to it. This dual ambiguity seeks its resolution in the complementary system of the Vijñānavāda, it is necessary to study the Tathāgatagarbha literature, the complete and final systematization of the garbha theory as a separate and independent theory in the Buddhist development.