Chapter 1

Introduction

This research entitled “In Search of Derrida’s Intellectual Forefather: Reading Derridean Deconstruction against the Backdrop of Nagarjuna’s Philosophy” is an exploratory study involving two thinkers, one an ancient Buddhist dialectical thinker, who raised serious doubts about the possibility of acquiring knowledge by pointing out the self-contradictory character of all means of acquiring knowledge and the other is a twentieth century post-war thinker who has been hailed as the most important philosopher in France of the modern day.

This study seeks to identify aspects of intellectual operations in both the thinkers and would try to establish Nagarjuna as an intellectual forefather of Derrida. Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines the term forefather as “… a person (especially a man) who is from an earlier time and has originated or contributed to a common tradition shared by a particular group.” (606) as in the definition, Nagarjuna is from an earlier time. His seminal philosophical mind and his discourses formed an important part of Mahayana Buddhist philosophy and whose philosophy has lots of similarities with the philosophy of Derrida, who is a French philosopher. Derrida’s impact on the Western Academy was immense in the post 1960 era.
Even though Nagarjuna and Derrida lived millennium years apart, Nagarjuna is sure to have contributed to the thought process of Derrida and there is the possibility of Nagarjuna being the originator of Derrida’s thought. Thus this research which comparative analyses the philosophy of the East and the West, accounts the contribution of the East to the western literary critical tradition.

India which is one of the prominent countries in the East has contributed a lot to the Western thinking. The term Indian philosophy refers to several traditions of philosophical thought that originated in the Indian subcontinent, including Hindu philosophy, Buddhist philosophy, and Jain philosophy. They have been formalised and promulgated chiefly between 1,000 BC to a few centuries A.D. Before plummeting into such a decisive comparative study, it would be really worthwhile to analyse in detail the contribution of India to the Western thinking.

**India’s Contribution to Western Thought**

From the very earliest times, India has made its contribution to the texture of Western thought and living. Though as Ninian Smart rightly acknowledges in his book *Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy* “Western philosophers do not pay much attention to Indian philosophy” (15) throughout the literature and philosophy of Europe, tales and ideas of Indian origin can be discovered. European mathematics - and through them, the full range of European technical achievement - could hardly have existed without Indian numerals. But until the
beginning of European colonization in Asia, India’s contribution was usually filtered through other cultures. Direct contact did not bring understanding, travellers’ tales, rather, increased the sense of wonder. Even commerce helped to feed the imagination, for its trading cargoes - of bezoars stones, musk, silk and pearls - were luxuries, exotic and non-European.

The ‘gorgeous East’ became an essential part of the western view of India, influencing the ideas of merchants as well as of poets and philosophers. In the second part of the eighteenth century, works of travel, memoirs and histories increased enormously in number, and from them Europe began to assemble an image of India less concerned with physical wonders than with ideas.

The philosophers, always on the lookout for some ideal civilisation, first thought they had found it in China, and then began to consider India a more likely place. By 1775, the well acclaimed French philosopher Voltaire was convinced that Western astronomy and astrology had come from somewhere along the river Ganges. The French astronomer, Baillie, who was guillotined during the French Revolution, maintained that the Brahmins of India had been tutors of the Greeks and, through them, of Europe.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, there was a general feeling amongst European intellectuals that Indian civilization and philosophy was of
great antiquity. The first adaptation of a Sanskrit work into a Western language had appeared as early as 1651; this was of a collection of lyrics by the poet Bhartrihari, who died in AD 651. The adaptation was, in fact, a paraphrase in Dutch prose of a version in Portuguese. The existence of Classical Indian philosophy in Sanskrit had been known for some time in the West, but as it was a sacred and liturgical language used only by the priestly caste for ritual observances, it was difficult to find a Brahmin willing to teach it to a European.

Jesuit missionaries had acquired some knowledge of the language, and it was a work compiled by them - *L’Ezour Vedam*, a highly inaccurate version of the *Yajur Veda*-which was to influence Voltaire. In 1762, a young Frenchman, Anquetil Duperron, who had discovered a manuscript in a Paris shop and had gone out to India as a soldier in the service of the French East India Company in order to learn how to decipher it - returned to Paris with a number of manuscripts, one of which was a Persian version of sixty sections of the ancient Hindu work, the *Upanishads*.

This he published in 1801-02 in a peculiar mixture of Persian, Latin and Greek. Duperron’s work known as the *Oupnekhat*, so affected the German philosopher, Schopenhauer that he later claimed that it had been the solace of his life, and that it would be the solace of his death. The real revelation of Classical Indian Philosophy and literature, however, was to come as a by-product of the
establishment of direct British rule in Bengal. Warren Hastings encouraged the study of Sanskrit for a purely practical purpose-to ascertain the nature of Hindu law.

A number of digests were first prepared, but these were found to be inadequate and it proved necessary to go to the original sources. Nevertheless, the first published translation from the Sanskrit was not of a law book, but of the great philosophical poem, the *Bhagwat Gita*. This appeared in 1785 and was the work of Charles Wilkins (1749-1836). In his preface Wilkins noted that the work was only imperfectly understood even by the most learned Brahmins of the time. It was even less likely to be understood by the Europeans, and its publication had no immediate impact.

Will Durant who took the study of philosophy into the households with his most famous book *The Story of Philosophy* speaks of East and West exchange thus,

Rather, Indian philosophy streams into Europe, and will profoundly alter our knowledge and our thought. The influence of the Sanskrit literature will penetrate not less deeply than did the revival of Greek letters in the fifteenth century. (339)

Thus, classical Indian Philosophy too has had great effect upon French writers and philosophers, this can be vouchsafed by the fact that French oriental scholarship
was of a particularly high order and there was constant intercourse between scholars and poets. French romanticism was not so much a quest for eternal truth as a search for new literary forms and language.

**Derrida following such a legacy**

In this line we have Jacques Derrida (1930 – 2004) an Algerian-born French philosopher, known as the founder or rather father of Deconstruction. His best known work is his master piece *Of Grammatology*. In contemporary Western philosophical and text critical circles, Jacques Derrida needs no introduction. His prolific works on various subjects has had a profound impact upon literary theory and continental philosophy. Jacques Derrida became popular on both the sides of Atlantic. His influence on contemporary thought has been enormous. Before going any further the life history of such a versatile mind who is one of the prime focuses of this thesis is discussed.

**Brief Biography of Jacques Derrida**

Jacques Derrida was born to Jewish parents in El-Biar, Algeria. He was the third of five children. His parents, Aimé Derrida and Georgette Sultana Esther Safar, named him Jackie, supposedly after a Hollywood actor, though he would later adopt a more correct version of his first name when he moved to Paris. His youth was spent in El-Biar, Algeria. He grew up fully exposed to the cauldron of
ethnic hatred and violence that ravaged Europe prior to and during World War II. Regarding his citizenship *Wikipedia* article writes as follows:

Derrida was born on 15 July 1930, in El Biar (near Algiers), then French Algeria, into a Sephardic Jewish family that became French in 1870 when Crémieux Decree granted full French citizenship to the indigenous Jews of French colonial Algeria.” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques_Derrida>

As a colony of France, Algeria fell under the control of the Vichy government in 1940, a regime that became part of the Nazi state-sponsored and bureaucratically implemented program of anti-Semitism. At that time Derrida’s father worked as a traveling sales representative for the Tachet house—a company marketing wines and other alcoholic beverages. Unlike many Jewish men in the region, he was allowed to keep his job under the Vichy government. Nevertheless, he endured a profound degree of victimization. Derrida witnessed on a daily basis the many ways in which his father sacrificed himself for the family. In one of the last interviews before Derrida’s death, he recalls the effect his father’s plight had on him as a child:

I felt humiliated to see him overflowing with respectful gratitude to these people for whom he had worked for forty years and who generously ‘consented’ to ‘keep him on.’ He worked a great deal; he worked all the time… Without going so far as to say I virtually identified with him, I no doubt saw in him an exemplary figure of the victim….. I took part in the
extraordinary transformation of the Algerian Jews; my great-grandparents were by language, custom, etc., still identified with Arabic culture. After the Cremieux Decree (1870), at the end of the 19th c., the following generation became bourgeois. <http://www.studiovisit.net/SV.Derrida.pdf>

But Derrida’s relation to his father was complex and divided. He recollects further,

With regard to my father, there was an ambiguous mixture of compassion and hostility. My father lacked authority, while also being prone to anger, and I regretted the fact that he always came to me to complain. 

<http://www.studiovisit.net/-SV.Derrida.pdf>

In 1942 Derrida himself became the target of anti-Semitism when he was expelled on the first day of the school, along with other Jewish students, from the Ben Aknoun High School by French administrators implementing anti-Semitic quotas set by the Vichy government. He secretly skipped school for a year rather than attend the Jewish lycée formed by displaced teachers and students. In the same interview he recounts,

Beyond any anonymous ‘administrative’ measure, which I didn’t understand at all and which no one explained to me, [this] wound was of another order, and it never healed: the daily insults from the children, my classmates, the kids in the street, and sometimes threats and blows aimed at
the ‘dirty Jew,’ which, I might say, I came to see in myself.

<http://www.studiovisit.net/SV.Derrida.pdf>

The sense of victimisation and misappropriated feelings of self-loathing taken up by the young Derrida became the wound that never healed throughout the remainder of his life. In response to the exceptional experience of alienation from a community of others, in response to this forced interiority and imposed self-consciousness, Derrida ultimately arrived at a new sense of himself. He realized that he was not alone with himself, no more than anyone else was. And he experienced this insight in a uniquely explicit way that he was not all-one because an ‘I’ is not an indivisible atom.

This unusual affirmation of self-division in reaction to adversity established the ground upon which Derrida was able to come to terms with being the object of hatred and discrimination and became the primary ground upon which his life and work evolved. While Derrida would resist any reductive understanding of his work based upon his biographical life, it could be argued that these kinds of experiences played a large role in his insistence upon the importance of the marginal, and the other, in his later thought.

Derrida saw that every self is always penetrated by the presence of an ‘other’ and this penetration is the source of double-edged and seemingly
contradictory bestowals that can generate intense experiences ranging from the tragic to the euphoric. Over time Derrida learned that this penetration, this internal division, this “non-identity to oneself” is not purely and exemplarily a Jewish experience. Regarding his Jewish culture he says the following in his last interview:

I took part in the extraordinary transformation of the Algerian Jews; my great-grandparents were by language, custom, etc., still identified with Arabic culture. After the Cremieux Decree (1870), at the end of the 19th c., the following generation became bourgeois.

<http://www.studiovisit.net/SV.Derrida.pdf>

At this time, as well as taking part in numerous football competitions (he dreamed of becoming a professional player), Derrida read works of philosophers and writers such as Rousseau, Camus, Nietzsche, and Gide. He began to think seriously about philosophy around 1948 and 1949. He became a boarding student at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand in Paris, which he did not enjoy.

Derrida failed his entrance examination twice before finally being admitted to the prestigious École Normale Supérieure (where Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and the majority of French intellectuals and academics began their careers) at the end of the 1951–52 school year. He hence moved from Algiers to France. On his first day at the École Normale Supérieure Derrida met Louis Althusser, with
whom he became friends. He also became friends with Michel Foucault, whose lectures he attended. Derrida received a grant for studies at Harvard University, and in June 1957 married the psychoanalyst Marguerite Aucouturier in Boston. During the Algerian War of Independence, Derrida was asked to teach soldiers’ children in lieu of military service, so he taught French and English from 1957 to 1959.

Following the war Derrida began a long association with the *Tel Quel* group of literary and philosophical theorists. He also began to play a major role in the leftist journal *Tel Quel*. Derrida’s initial work in philosophy was largely phenomenological, and his early training as a philosopher was done largely through the lens of Husserl. Other important inspirations on his early thought include Nietzsche, Heidegger, Saussure, Levinas and Freud. Derrida acknowledges his indebtedness to all of these thinkers in the development of his approach to texts, which has come to be known as ‘deconstruction’. From 1960 to 1964, Derrida taught philosophy at the Sorbonne, and from 1964 to 1984 at the École Normale Superieure.

Beginning with his 1966 lecture at Johns Hopkins University, *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*, his work assumed international prominence. A second son, Jean, was born in 1967. It was in 1967 that Derrida really arrived as a philosopher of world importance. He published
three momentous texts (*Of Grammatology*, *Writing and Difference*, and *Speech and Phenomena*). All of these works have been influential for different reasons, but it is *Of Grammatology* that remains his most famous work.

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida reveals and then undermines the speech-writing opposition that he argues has been such an influential factor in Western thought. Derrida’s preoccupation with language in this text is typical of much of his early work, and since the publication of these and other major texts (including *Dissemination*, *Glas*, *The Postcard*, *Spectres of Marx*, *The Gift of Death*, and *Politics of Friendship*), deconstruction has gradually moved from occupying a major role in continental Europe, to also becoming a significant player in the Anglo-American philosophical context. This is particularly so in the areas of literary criticism, and cultural studies, where deconstruction’s method of textual analysis has inspired theorists like Paul de Man. He has also had lecturing positions at various universities, the world over.

He completed his *Thèse d'État* in 1980. In 1983 Derrida collaborated with Ken McMullen on the film *Ghost Dance*. Derrida appears in the film as himself and also contributed to the script. Derrida travelled widely and held a series of visiting and permanent positions. Derrida was director of studies at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* in Paris. With François Châtelet and others he in 1983 co-founded the *Collège international de philosophie* (CIPH), an institution
intended to provide a location for philosophical research which could not be
carried out elsewhere in the academy. He was elected as its first president.

In 1986 Derrida became Professor of the Humanities at the University of
California, Irvine. He was a regular visiting professor at several other major
American universities, including Johns Hopkins University, Yale University, New
York University, Stony Brook University, and The New School for Social
Research. He was awarded honorary doctorates by Cambridge University,
Columbia University, The New School for Social Research, the University of
Essex, University of Leuven, Williams College and University of Silesia. Derrida
was a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and received the
2001 Adorno-Preis from the University of Frankfurt. Derrida has often been
attacked by conservative academics, like Republican W.V.O. Quine. In 1992, a
number of analytical philosophers from Cambridge University tried to stop the
granting of the degree, but were out-numbered when it was put to a vote.

Derrida died at the age of 74 in a Paris hospital on October 8th in 2003,
succumbing to advanced pancreatic cancer. He emerged as the most famous, or as
some would have it, the most infamous philosopher of the late twentieth century
and one of the best and most original philosophical minds since Kant. His
challenging and often misunderstood praxis, notoriously known as deconstruction,
exerted cultural influence beyond academic philosophical circles—where it
challenged the dominant trends of analytic and ordinary language philosophy—to include contributions to theory and interpretation in fields as diverse as literature, law, politics, religion, business, film, art, and architecture. His extensive cross-cultural and interdisciplinary influence over the decades since the 1960s, stands as a sufficiently impressive achievement to be worthy of recollecting and reassessing in this dissertation.

**Derrida’s Indian Connection**

In theory, Derrida’s deconstruction attempts to undermine the possibility of transcendental consciousness. In practice, the mechanics of deconstruction suggest a field of pure possibility as the basis of language that corresponds to the ineffable experience of transcendental consciousness. In this way, deconstruction could be regarded as an undeveloped form of Sanskrit poetics which is central to Classical Indian philosophy. It emphasises the distinction between theory and practice, conceptualization and direct experience, at the same time the philosophy of *yoga* (union), holds that nature, consciousness and language are inwardly akin.

There have been very many attempts to further the East-West exchange in literary and philosophical studies. In this regard there has developed major arguments related to the question of language, consciousness and meaning. One of which argued that the principle of difference which Western Literary theorists and philosophers use in the attempt to undermine the experience of unity in literary
and philosophical studies, such as the unity between word and meaning, reflects a limited rather than a comprehensive view of the full range of consciousness and language.

Though one can find parallels in the thinking of Derrida and the eastern thought there are very many western commentators who pay scant regard and respect to such comparisons. In the journal *Consciousness, Literature and the Arts*’ article *Jacques Derrida’s Indian Philosophical Subtext*, Dimple Godiwala observes how the western commentators of Jacques Derrida hesitate to acknowledge his eastern connection in the following words:

> That Jacques Derrida’s commentators seldom link his conceptual genealogy to ancient Indian philosophy …. is for the most part due to the western-centric attitudes of his commentators, who, at best, are ignorant of the connections with ancient Indian philosophy, and at worst perhaps, whilst claiming to write a comparative analysis, dismiss a scholarly, philosophical tradition which predates western thought, as mere ‘mysticism’. (107)

Such a gross neglect on the part of the Derridean scholars goes against the tenets of Derrida himself who stood against such categorization of knowledge. Godiwala further comments about this in the following manner:

> This hierarchisation of western knowledge which dismisses other knowledges as ‘backward’ or lacking the seriousness and logic of
traditional Western enquiry, is not only characteristic of most of Derrida’s western commentators, but it directly contradicts the anti-hierarchical spirit of Derridean play (in its best conceptual sense). (107)

Thus commentators’ refusal to accommodate other cultures and myths is against what Derrida stood for in his life. Derrida in his book *Margins of Philosophy*, while speaking of metaphysics, said as early as 1971 that,

Metaphysics -- the white mythology which reassembles and reflects the culture of the West: the white man takes his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own logos, that is, the mythos of his idiom, for the universal form of that he must still wish to call Reason. [213]

For Derrida at least, ‘the culture of the West’ consists of that thought which derives from Indo-Europe, and this is an early acknowledgement that ‘the heritage’ he picks his concepts from is certainly a tradition of Indo-European origin. Perhaps the fact that Derrida never actually speaks of the specific philosophical origin of certain concepts which would identify them as ancient Indian, or indeed as extant in both traditions thereby becoming a kind of universal, has led to his commentators’ myopia to eastern philosophical links; but the same cannot be said when his philosophy evokes an ancient like Heidegger, whose thoughts or influence upon Derrida are instantly identified by those educated in a
strictly western system which functions, though claiming to teach philosophy, on
the basis of exclusion.

It is this ignorance, combined with the tendency, famously identified by the
late Edward Said as “Orientalism”, or the hegemonic classification of ‘oriental’
ideas by the west in order to assert a dominance and superiority especially in
intellectual endeavours, such as discussed here, that pervades the commentary of
the foremost Derridean scholars. Now as part of literature review and also as one’s
endeavour to analyse the earlier works comparing Derrida with the East let us see
some of the Derridean scholars who have pioneered such a study as this.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Gayatri Chakravorty is well known for her translation of Derrida’s
masterpiece *Of Grammatology*. Her dissertation was on Yeats (published as
*Myself Must I Remake: The Life and Poetry of W.B. Yeats* [1974]) and was
directed by Paul de Man. She ordered Derrida’s book *de la grammatologie* out of
a catalogue in 1967 and began working on the translation. Her subsequent work
consists in post-structuralist literary criticism, deconstructivist readings of
Marxism, Feminism and Postcolonialism (including work with the Subaltern
Studies group and a critical reading of American cultural studies in *Outside in the
Teaching Machine*), and translations of the Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi. She
is currently an Avalon Foundation professor at Columbia.
It is significant that a leading expert on Derrida’s work, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, has been able to use it conceptually for the purpose of postcolonial analysis and critique, especially in an Indian context. Although often critiqued for her bricolage of Marxism and Derridean deconstruction in the context of postcolonial theory by her, mostly Marxist, Indian commentators, Spivak is possibly putting a philosophy culled from a combined heritage to its best use. The concept of effecting change through deconstruction, though regarded by some of Derrida’s commentators as a deconstructive impossibility through impracticality, enables Spivak to combine this aspect of Derridean thought with the revolutionary aspect of Marxism.

Harold Coward

Harold Coward’s *Derrida and Indian Philosophy*, is one of the few western commentaries which link the ‘Indo’ with the ‘Europe’ in the thought of Derrida and contemporary western philosophers. Coward’s book is a sound comparative study. He is Professor of History and Former Director, Centre for Studies in Religion and Society, University of Victoria, Canada. Dr. Coward has served as President of the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion, the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute.

He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and has served as President of Academy II. He has directed humanities research centres for the past 18 years.
Professor Coward is an internationally-known specialist in the philosophy and religion of India. He has eighteen authored books, thirty edited books along with over a hundred chapters and articles to his credit. For the past twelve years, he has been directing interdisciplinary research teams bringing knowledge of science, social science, and the world’s religions to bear on the major problems facing the world today. Issues addressed include the Greenhouse effect; population pressure; excessive consumption, environmental degradation; the crisis in the fisheries, religious conscience, the state and the law; and a cross-cultural approach to health care ethics.

In each case, an ethics analysis has been undertaken and the result developed in terms of public policy implications. One resulting book, *Population, Consumption, and the Environment: Religious and Secular Responses* was nominated for the Grawemeyer Award, the Religion equivalent of the Nobel Prize. Another, *Just Fish: Ethics and the Canadian Marine Fisheries* has evoked articles in major newspapers such as the Vancouver Sun and the Ottawa Citizen, as well as widespread interest from decision makers in unions, management, community, provincial and federal governments.

**Robert Magliola**

Robert Magliola is known for his book, *Derrida on the Mend*. He is a former professor of philosophy and religious studies at National Taiwan
University and Assumption University. He did his PhD in Princeton University, 1970, in comparative literature with specialty and dissertation in phenomenology/hermeneutics. He is retired from the Graduate School of Philosophy and Religions, Assumption University Thailand, where he was professor of philosophy and religious studies; and from National Taiwan University, where he was distinguished chair professor in the Graduate School of Liberal Arts. In 1983-84, he taught and researched at Tamkang University in Taiwan while on sabbatical from Purdue University, where he had taught since 1969 and been a professor since 1981. In 1985 he moved to the Orient, taking up residence there en permanence. He continued publication in Buddhism and deconstruction and also did interdisciplinary writing and conferencing on postmodernism (in literature and Religious Studies) throughout this period.

A Carmelite lay tertiary, he began to write more extensively both on the application of Derridean thought-motifs to Catholic theology, and on Catholic meditation, making an invited presentation in 1999 on ‘Catholic Meditation in Tibetan Vajrayana Form’ for the Pontifical Council for Culture and the Federation of Asian Bishops Councils. Robert Magliola’s *Derrida on the Mend* (1984) focuses on the intersections of Derridean ‘différance’ and Nagarjuna’s devoidness’ (*sunyata*). In that book the various Derridean terms like *hymen, pharmakon,* différance, supplement, *écriture* and trace are employed to unveil the middle, the
way of the in-between. Magliola describes that in his own words, “a slipping between and away from binary categories.” (87)

David Loy

Dr. David R. Loy was born in 1947. He has carried out lots of research on Nagarjuna and on the influence of Buddhism on western thought. He currently holds the Besl Family Chair of Ethics/Religion and Society. He also has a visiting appointment at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. He received his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Singapore. He was professor of philosophy at Bunkyo University in Chigasaki, Japan until January 2006. In 1971, he began practicing Zen with Robert Aitken Roshi in Hawaii and is an authorized teacher in the Sanbo Kyodan lineage of Zen Buddhism where he completed formal koan training under Zen Master Yamada Koun Roshi.

David Loy is the author of several books on philosophy and ethics, including: Nonduality: A Study in Comparative Philosophy, Lack and Transcendence: The Problem of Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism and Buddhism, A Buddhist History of the West: Studies in Lack etc, plus he has also numerous other publications as author or editor as well. He sits on the editorial boards of the journals Cultural Dynamics, Worldviews, Contemporary Buddhism, Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, and World Federation of Buddhists Review.
Jay Garfield

Jay Garfield is Doris Silbert Professor in the Humanities, Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Logic Program and of the Five College Tibetan Studies in India Program at Smith College, Professor in the graduate faculty of Philosophy at the University of Massachusetts, Professor of Philosophy at Melbourne University and Adjunct Professor of Philosophy at the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies. He teaches and pursues research in the philosophy of mind, foundations of cognitive science, logic, philosophy of language, Buddhist philosophy, cross-cultural hermeneutics, theoretical and applied ethics and epistemology. Garfield’s most recent books are his translation, with Geshe Ngawang Samten of the Fourteenth-Fifteenth Century Tibetan Philosopher Tsong Khapa’s commentary on Nagarjuna’s *Mulamadhyamakakarika (Ocean of Reasoning) and Empty Words: Buddhist Philosophy and Cross-Cultural Interpretation.*

Garfield is also working on projects on the development of the theory of mind in children with particular attention to the role of pretence in that process; the acquisition of evidentials and its relation to the development of theory of mind, the history of 20th Century Indian philosophy and the nature of conventional truth in *Madhyamaka.* He recently co-directed, with Peter Gregory, Jill Ker Conway Professor of Religion and Buddhist Studies, a year-long research institute, *Trans-Buddhism: Transmission, Translation and Transformation* investigating the
interaction of Buddhist societies with the West. Other books in progress include the *Oxford Handbook of World Philosophy, Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*.

**Comparing Derrida with Nagarjuna**

The knowledge of expanded awareness available through Classical Indian philosophy can take one beyond the oppositions inherent in deconstruction. One can compare the basic premises of Jacques Derrida with the Indian philosopher Nagarjuna. His name and work are for the most part totally unheard of in that same milieu. As noted in the introductory paragraph he is a second century Indian Buddhist philosopher, held to be the founder of a school of *Mahayana* Buddhism known as *Madhyamaka* (the ‘middle way’ school). Though any scholar of Indian or Buddhist philosophy would be conversant in his ideas, and though his work clearly challenges the same boundaries as that of Derrida, students of Western philosophy may greet Nagarjuna’s name with no more acknowledgement than a confused shrug.

Nagarjuna is often referred to as “the second Buddha” by Tibetan and East Asian *Mahayana* (Great Vehicle) traditions of Buddhism, Nagarjuna proffered forceful criticisms of Brahminical and Buddhist substantialist philosophy, theory of knowledge, and approaches to practice. It is imperative to know briefly the life history of Nagarjuna.
Brief Biography of Nagarjuna

In his book *Ocean of Nectar*, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso quotes a well-known passage from “Gone to Lanka Sutra” wherein Buddha is asked who will uphold the doctrine after he has passed away. Gyatso gives Buddha’s reply as follows:

In the Southern region, in the Land of the Palms,
The monk Shriman of great renown,
Known by the name, ‘Naga’,
Will destroy the positions of existence and non-existence.
Having proclaimed to the world my vehicle,
The unsurpassed Great Vehicle,
He will accomplish the ground, Very Joyful,
And depart to the Land of Bliss. (17)

As predicted, four hundred years after Buddha passed away, a son was born to a prosperous Brahmin family living in an area of Southern India known as *Bedarwa*, or the Land of the Palms. An oracle predicted that the child would live for only seven days, but that his life span could be extended by a further seven days if gifts were bestowed upon a hundred ordinary people, by a further seven months if offerings were made to a hundred brahmins, or by a further seven years if offerings were made to a hundred monks. However, the oracle knew of no method to extend his life beyond that. Accordingly, his parents made offerings to a hundred monks and as a result were able to live happily with their son for 7 years.
As the child’s eighth birthday drew near, however, they sent him on a pilgrimage with several of their servants, for they could not bear to witness his death. Guided by a manifestation of Avalokiteshvara, the party made its way to Nalanda Monastery where they met the great Teacher Saraha. They explained the boy’s plight to Saraha, and he told them that the child could avert an untimely death by staying at Nalanda and ordaining as a monk.

Saraha gave the child an empowerment into the long-life practice of Buddha Amitayus, and encouraged him to practice that yoga extensively. On the eve of his eighth birthday the child recited the mantra of Amitayus without interruption and, as a result, averted untimely death. K. Venkata Raman narrates this in his book *Nagarjuna’s Philosophy*, “However the boy escaped from this fate, so these sources say, by entering the Buddhist Order and practicing the aparimitayudharani according to the instructions of his teacher Rahulabhdra (or Saraha) at Nalanda.” (26) The following day he was ordained as a monk and was given the name Shrimanta. He remained at Nalanda where, under the protection of Manjushri, he was able to study all the Sutras and Tantras. He soon became a fully-accomplished scholar and Teacher, and his reputation spread widely. Eventually he was appointed Abbot of Nalanda.

Nagarjuna’s life comprised three great periods of auspicious deeds that correspond to Buddha’s three turnings of the Wheel of Dharma; which is why he
is often referred to as the Second Buddha. Regarding the enlightenment and turning of the wheel of Dharma James Bisset Pratt observes in his book *The Pilgrimage of Buddhism* the following,

…. apparently through the double process of hard thinking and semi-mystical practices of mind control, he gained the insight he had sought. This “enlightenment” seems to have been sudden, and took place during the night, as he sat under the Bodhi Tree at Buddh Gaya. Immediately thereafter he began “turning the wheel of Dhamma” (or Law) – i.e., he preached his sermon – in deer park (now Saranath) in the suburbs of Benares. (5)

**The First Period**

The first period was during Nagarjuna’s tenure as Abbot of Nalanda. Unfortunately, the moral discipline of the monks at the monastery at Nalanda had degenerated since the time Buddha first gave vows, and Nagarjuna was very active in restoring the purity of the discipline. He clarified many points of moral discipline in extensive teachings, and composed a number of works on pure conduct. These writings of sage Nagarjuna, known as the *Collection of Advice*, include such precious works like *Precious Garland*, *Friendly Letter*, *Tree of Wisdom*, *A Hundred Wisdoms*, and *Drops for Healing Beings*. These activities of Nagarjuna and his composition of books are likened to Buddha’s first turning of the Wheel of Dharma.
The Second Period

Nagarjuna is best remembered, however, for the works of the second period. Not long after Buddha passed away, the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras, the principle Mahayana teachings, disappeared from this world. It is said that this is because some Nagas who had received this teaching from Buddha had taken the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras to their own world for safekeeping. There remained only a few practitioners who could understand these teachings, and most of them kept their practice secret.

The only teachings of Buddha to remain widespread were the Hinayana teachings; and as a result many people assumed that these were the only teachings Buddha had given. Sometime later the Nagas invited Nagarjuna to visit them, and returned the Perfection of Wisdom scriptures to him.

Nagarjuna brought the scriptures to the human world and propagated them widely. Because of his special relationship with the Nagas, and because he cured many Nagas of sickness by means of special ritual prayers, Nagarjuna was given the name ‘Protector of the Nagas’. The term ‘Arjuna’ was added to his name because Nagarjuna spread the teachings of Mahayana with great speed and accuracy, just as the legendary archer, Arjuna, in Mahabharata had delivered arrows from his bow, with great speed and accuracy. Hence he finally became
known as ‘Protector Nagarjuna’. K. Venkata Raman cites this version too in his book,

The tradition that Nagarjuna brought these Sutras from the country of the Nagas may be taken as pointing to the preservation of another tradition of the Buddhist teaching in the South, different from those that were prevailing in his time in the North. (27)

Since Nagarjuna had a very lucid mind and great wisdom, he was able perfectly to understand the Sutras and explain them to others. He spread these teachings widely, thus instigating a great revival of the Mahayana doctrine in this world. He presented a system of reasoning which, because it steers a flawless course between the two extremes of existence and non-existence, became known as the ‘philosophy of the middle way’, or ‘Madhyamika’.

Kenneth K. Inada in his work *Nagarjuna: A Translation of his Mulamadhyamakakarika* comments thus on the significance of Nagarjuna to Buddhism,

Nagarjuna then appeared at the opportune moment to present a concise and systematic view of thoughts crystallized over the five or six centuries since Buddha. (5) … It is sometimes said that Nagarjuna appeared at the right moment and at the right place in Buddhist history to provide the necessary
corrective measures to Buddhist philosophical analysis of man’s nature and thereby initiated a “new” movement within the Mahayana tradition. (11)

Thus Nagarjuna composed many commentaries to the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras that elucidate the Madhyamika view. T.R.V. Murti acknowledges the importance of this in his book The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of Madhyamika System by quoting that the “Madhyamika system is primarily a revolution in Buddhist thought…” (92). These treatises, known as the Collection of Reasonings, include the famous Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way i.e., Mulamadhyamakakarika and its four limbs: Sixty Reasonings, Seventy Emptinesses, Finely Woven, and Refutation of Objections. He also wrote Compendium of Sutras, Five Stages of the Completion Stage of Guhyasamaja, and many other commentaries to the Sutras and Tantras. These activities are likened to Buddha’s second turning of the Wheel of Dharma.

The Third Period

Nagarjuna’s third period of auspicious deeds took place towards the end of his life. Acting on advice from Tara, he returned to Southern India and dwelt at a place called Mount Splendour, where he gave further extensive teachings on both the Sutras and Tantras, and composed many more texts. These writings, known as the Collection of Praises, include such works as Praise to the Dharmadhatu, Praise
of the Supramundane, Praise of the Inconceivable, and Praise of the Ultimate. These activities are likened to Buddha’s third turning of the Wheel of Dharma.

It is not possible in such a brief account even to begin to do justice to Nagarjuna’s life and works. Throughout his life he devoted himself entirely to reviving the Mahayana Dharma and to sustaining the Mahayana Sangha. To this end he gave prolific teachings, composed many books, and performed countless other virtuous deeds. In all, Nagarjuna lived for over six hundred years. Nagarjuna thus is known as the founder of Mahayana philosophy. James Bisset Pratt asserts this in the following lines, “Nagarjuna … with Asvaghosha is commonly considered as the founder of Mahayana philosophy and who (tradition says) was won over from Brahmanism about 150 A.D” (237)

Nagarjuna’s Philosophy

Nagarjuna’s philosophy represents something of a defining moment not only in the history of Classical Indian philosophy but also in the history of philosophy as a whole, as it calls into questions certain philosophical assumptions so easily resorted to in our attempt to understand the world. Among these assumptions are the existence of stable substances, the linear and one-directional movement of causation, the atomic individuality of persons, the belief in a fixed identity or selfhood, and the strict separations between good and bad conduct and the blessed and fettered life.
All such assumptions are called into fundamental question by Nagarjuna’s unique perspective which is grounded in the insight of emptiness (sunyata), a concept which does not mean “non-existence” or “nihility” (abhava), but rather the lack of autonomous existence (nihsvabhava). Denial of autonomy according to Nagarjuna does not leave us with a sense of metaphysical or existential privation, a loss of some hoped-for independence and freedom, but instead offers us a sense of liberation through demonstrating the interconnectedness of all things, including human beings and the manner in which human life unfolds in the natural and social worlds.

_Sunyata: The Essence of Mahayana Spirituality_ a book by Moti Lal Pandit outlines Nagarjuna’s work in a nutshell,

Nagarjuna would make use of the Middle Way for the purpose of showing how each view of reality suffers from internal contradictions. Adhering strictly to the Middle Way, would point out that we can neither say that reality exists nor can we say that it does not exist. What we can say regarding reality is that it is emptiness. (10)

Nagarjuna’s central concept of the “emptiness (sunyata) of all things (Dharmas),” which pointed to the incessantly changing and so never fixed nature of all phenomena, served as much as the terminological prop of subsequent philosophical thinking as the vexation of opposed Vedic systems. The concept had
fundamental implications for Indian philosophical models of causation, substance ontology, epistemology, conceptualizations of language, ethics and theories of world-liberating salvation, and proved seminal even for Buddhist philosophies in India. Indeed it would not be an overstatement to say that Nagarjuna’s innovative concept of emptiness in many different ways by subsequent philosophers in both East and West was to profoundly influence the character of philosophical thought of the West, especially Jacques Derrida.

**Relating Nagarjuna’s thought to Derrida**

In Nagarjuna one can find some pioneering efforts at relating his thought to that of Derrida already in place. Nagarjuna’s Middle Path, the Way of the Between, tracks the Derridean “trace”, and goes beyond Derrida in that it frequents the unheard of thought, and also, with one and same stroke allows reinstatement of the logocentric too.

In short, one can say that in Nagarjuna one can find the solution for which Derrida is searching. In fact Nagarjuna is more systematic in his critique of all metaphysical views than Derrida. Nagarjuna fully deconstructs both identity and difference as opposing metaphysical qualities whereas Derrida deconstructs only identity and remains attached to difference. Derrida and Nagarjuna employ similar strategies of deconstruction, Derrida stops short of the logical completion of his
program to safeguard his attachment to difference. According to Valentine Cunningham,

…Derrida with his deconstructive vision of reading as a game forever poised between ‘two interpretations of interpretation’on the one hand the weary old logocentric quest for meaning as truth, and on the other the zippier new expectation of meaning as imponderable, indeterminate, caught in endless web, the maze, the labyrinthine tangle of meaning. (18)

Nagarjuna, however, suffers no such failure of nerve and pushes his critique home, completely deconstructing both identity and difference. Thus Derrida remains stuck in language with its duality whereas Nagarjuna realizes an experience beyond language and its dualistic entrapments. Moti Lal Pandit speaks of this in the following manner,

Insofar as linguistic tools in describing reality, one will encounter inconsistency that is innate to all dualistic forms of thinking. It is this approach to the Middle Way which will be made the basis of Mahayana thinking. What seemingly are contradictions at the empirical level are no more seen to be at the absolute level. (10)

This dualistic line of thought in Mahayana and in Nagarjuna can easily be compared with Derrida’s discussion of binary oppositions and decentring of Western thought.
Unearthing Definite Parallels

The search for philosophical parallels is fraught with pit-falls. Some parallels are fruitful and significant, others incidental and unexpected. This research proposes to discuss the parallels to Nagarjuna’s thought in Derrida in order to establish Nagarjuna as the forefather to Derrida and Derridean thinking. The perception which this research study seeks to confirm or clarify is that there are definite parallels which can be worked out between these two thinkers. There is also the feeling that the philosophical arguments of Nagarjuna, especially in the areas of their negative dialectics, discourse generation and enquiry are very much akin to the Deconstructive thinking Derrida, even though both the thinkers are millennium years apart.

Deployment of Negative Dialectics

As noted in the above paragraph, in comparing Derrida and Nagarjuna, one can observe impressive parallels in the deployment of negative dialectics. In the context of this discussion of negative theology one needs to directly impinge on such pivotal “concepts” in Derrida’s work such as différance, trace, and supplement. The role negative theology plays in Derrida’s work is a complex and revealing one. On the one hand, différance, he says in his book *Writing and Difference*, though it resembles negative theology occasionally, “even to the point of being indistinguishable from negative theology” is “not theological, not even in the order of the most negative of negative theologies.”(6).
Derrida acknowledges that negative theology has an irregular position in the history of classical ontotheological discourse, that what is called ‘negative theology’ does not let itself be easily assembled under the general category. Hence his often cited “fascination” with a discourse that subverts from within the tradition the confident affirmative delineations of ontology and theology, by means of systematic negations of the adequacy of all conceptual determinations, pushing to the limits of sense and signification its attempts to unsay the sayable, and to say the unsayable.

**The issue of Language in Nagarjuna and Derrida**

This research would also focus on the role of language in Nagarjuna in an attempt to establish a basis for comparison with the thought of Derrida that engages more with views of the phenomenal and immanent than of the conceptual and transcendent. The issue of language in *Madhyamika* thought bears directly on its treatment of the doctrine of the “two truths” and of the unique position of Buddhism with respect to ‘praxis’ and, consequently, to the relation between immanence and transcendence. In analysing the role of language, Nagarjuna brings out the theoretical and praxial confrontation between the realms of *samsara* and *nirvana*. Thus the discussion would allow some interesting observations of affinities with the thought of Derrida which would aid the researcher’s intention of Reading Derridean Deconstruction against the backdrop of Nagarjuna’s philosophy so as to establish him as the forefather of Derrida.
Operational Difficulties

Any research into a school of thought whose texts are in a language that is unintelligible to the researcher encounters certain difficulties in deciding which words to translate and which ones to leave in the original. It is all the more of an issue when the texts in question are from a language ancient. Many of the texts this thesis analyses were written in two languages: the earliest texts of Buddhism were written in a simplified form of Sanskrit called Pali, and most Indian texts of Madhyamika were written in either classical or “hybrid” Sanskrit.

Terms in these two languages are often different but recognizable, e.g. “dhamma” in Pali and “Dharma” in Sanskrit. For the sake of coherency, all such terms are given in their Sanskrit form, even when that may entail changing a term when presenting a quote from Pali. Since this thesis is not intended to be a specialized research document for a select audience, terms have been translated whenever possible, even when the subtleties of the Sanskrit term are lost in translation.

In a research paper like this, where only aspects of positive interactions between two thinkers are undertaken, those subtleties are often almost irrelevant. For example, it is sufficient to translate “Dharma” as either “Law” or “elements” without delving into its multiplicity of meanings in Sanskrit. Only four terms have been left consistently untranslated. “Karma” and “nirvana” are now to be found in
any English dictionary, and so their translation or italicization is unnecessary. Similarly, “Buddha” while literally a Sanskrit term meaning “awakened” is left un-translated and un-italicised due to its titular nature and its familiarity. This has been done because translations of the term do not do justice to its mystic import and esotericism. A detailed glossary of difficult Sanskrit, Pali and literary terms is appended for the sake of clarity and for proper understanding.

**Why Nagarjuna and Derrida?**

Why Nagarjuna and Derrida? Such a comparison is inviting because both are obvious and difficult. On the one hand, they are arguably the two greatest thinkers. There are however vast cultural differences, due not only to the geography and the millennium that separate them but just as much to the disparity between their very different languages, Sanskrit and French. These linguistic differences are further reflected in their extraordinarily different textual styles. Sanskrit has sometimes been considered the archetypal philosophical language; for it’s easily formed substantives have encouraged a preponderance of abstract universals.

Certainly Nagarjuna is a philosopher’s philosopher, notorious for a terse, knife-edged logic that wields distinctions that no one had noticed before and that many since have been unable to see the point of. In contrast, Derrida’s language has a much more concrete flavour, with a preponderance of simile and metaphor.
Derrida’s works are as allusive as Nagarjuna’s *Mulamadhyamakakarika* is dialectical and dry. Both Derrida and Nagarjuna seem preoccupied with splitting what some see as conceptual hairs.

What, then, can be gained from comparing them? Both Nagarjuna and Derrida point to many of the same insights because they deconstruct the same type of dualities, most of which may be understood as versions of our commonsense but delusive distinction between substance and attribute, subject and predicate. This will be demonstrated by analyzing the enigmatic chapter 2 (on motion and rest) of the *Mulamadhyamakakarika* and by examining Derrida’s writings on binary pairs. One should also be concerned with determining the limits of this similarity.

**What Does Nagarjuna Deconstruct?**

Few, if any, Buddhist scholars would dispute that Nagarjuna is the most important Buddhist philosopher, and none of them would deny that the *Mulamadhyamakakarika* is his most important work. It is something of a scandal, then, that the basic meaning of this difficult text remains so obscure. This is not for want of interpreters—no Buddhist thinker has received more attention—yet there is little agreement among his Western expositors. It is curious, and more than a little suspicious, that Nagarjuna usually ends up expounding something quite similar to one's own favorite philosopher or philosophy.
The basic problem is not the nature of Nagarjuna’s arguments themselves but their target; for, despite (or because of) the various opinions of traditional and contemporary commentators on this matter, it remains unclear from Nagarjuna's texts precisely what or whom he is criticizing. Since one has no other reliable access to Nagarjuna’s intentions, this is an issue that may never be settled. The opportunity provided by ambiguity in Nagarjuna is not entirely negative, but then the onus falls upon each interpreter not only to offer a plausible account of Nagarjuna’s motives but also to justify the continued importance of those motives for us.

Why should one be concerned about metaphysical debates between obscure Buddhist schools that thrived two thousand years ago? The significance of those philosophical views increases for us, though, if they are attempts to resolve an inconsistency that plagues our ordinary “commonsense” way of understanding the world. If this is true, however, it may not be necessary or even worth our while to devote time and energy expounding those particular metaphysical systems; it may be more useful for us to turn immediately to that commonsense understanding and address its supposed aporia more directly.

In chapter 2, of his master piece *Mulamadhyamakakarika*, Nagarjuna attacks this distinction in terms of the duality we ordinarily make between a goer and his or her going. By any standards, “the analysis of going and coming” (40) is
a peculiar and difficult text. Following the first chapter, which demonstrates our inability to understand the relationship between things and their causal relations, chapter 2 is evidently meant to exemplify the general argument presented earlier, by offering a more concrete instance of Nagarjuna’s deconstructive approach to the relationship between things (in this case, movers) and their predicates/attributes (moving). In the process, however, Nagarjuna seems to engage in a kind of logic-chopping that is difficult to follow and whose import is unclear: exactly what is it that is being deconstructed?

The import of the arguments above is that the usual way of understanding motion—which distinguishes the goer from the going and from the place of going—does not really make sense when examined carefully, for the interdependence of the three shows that each is unreal when considered apart from the others. Nagarjuna’s logic here (and in many other chapters) proceeds by demonstrating that once one has thus distinguished them—as ordinary language and common sense do—then it becomes impossible to understand their relation—a difficulty familiar to students of the mind-body problem.

The point of Madhyamika Critique

This helps one to understand the point of the general Madhyamika critique, by revealing what is being criticized: our usual, commonsense understanding of the world, which sees it as a collection of discrete entities interacting causally in
space and time. Nagarjuna's rampage through the notions of the philosophers is
directed at uncovering their ultimate non-sense with a view to releasing men from
humiliating bondage to them.

Yet Nagarjuna attacks more than the philosophical fancies of Indian
metaphysicians, for there is a metaphysics, although an inconsistent one, inherent
in our everyday view-most personally and painfully in the contradiction between
one’s sense of oneself as something non-temporal and unchanging and the
awareness that one is growing older and subject to death. It is one or another
aspect of this dualistic view that is made absolute in systematic metaphysics. This
commonsense understanding is what makes the world *samsara* for us, and it is this
*samsara* that Nagarjuna is concerned with deconstructing.

It is a consequence of our taken-for-granted distinction between things and
their attributes that I now perceive the room I am writing in not nondually, but as a
collection of books and chairs and pens and paper-and me-each of which is
unreflectively taken to be distinct from all the others and to persist unchanged
until affected by something else. The causal relation is what we use to explain the
interaction among things that are distinct from each other. If causality explains the
interaction between things, then these things in themselves must be noncausal,
and, by no coincidence, this is precisely our commonsense notion of what an
object is: a thing whose continued existence does not need to be explained, for once created it “self-exists.”

The objectivity of the world depends upon this dualism between things and their attributes/causal relations. This constitutes samsara because it is by hypostatizing such “thingness” out of the flux of experience that one becomes attached to things-again, the primal attachment being (to) the sense of self. Yet what one experiences as such self-existing objects (svabhava) are thought-constructed reifications, a shorthand way of remembering that our perceptions tend to have a certain stability, which allows us to relate them together and form expectations. This may be a necessary habit for us (which is why it is a lower truth), but such reifications create a delusive bifurcation between objects and their attributes (which is why it is a lower truth).

This point about the way one perceives the world is important because without it one might conclude that Nagarjuna’s critique of self-existence svabhava is a refutation of something no one believes in anyway. One does not escape his critique by defining entities in a more commonsense fashion as coming into and passing out of existence.

The logic of the Karikas demonstrates that there is no tenable middle ground between self-existence independent of all conditions-an empty set-and the
complete conditionality of sunya phenomena. Nagarjuna’s arguments against self-
existence show the inconsistency in our everyday, taken-for-granted way of taking
the world: while one accepts that things change, one also assumes that they remain
the same-both of which conditions are necessary if they are to be things that have
causal relations.

Chapter 1 of the Karikas argues, in effect, that any understanding of cause-
and-effect that tries to connect these two separate things can be reduced to the
contradiction of both asserting and denying identity. Nagarjuna concludes that
their relationship is incomprehensible and therefore, from the highest point of
view, unreal. In sum, there is something confused and deluded about our ordinary
understanding of the world, because it dualizes substance from attribute, subject
from predicate, permanence from change.

Instead of attempting to supply the correct view, however, the Madhyamika
simply deconstructs this commonsense understanding, a removal which allows
something else-obvious but hitherto overlooked-to manifest. With the benefit of
hindsight, however, one can notice that Nagarjuna’s critique of such dualisms
themselves generate other dualisms, the ones that during the following millennium
would become increasingly problematical: that between language and silence.
These dualisms became so important because they reflect essential and perhaps
inescapable dualisms at the heart of Buddhism: between delusion and enlightenment.

Nagarjuna, of course, is very sensitive to the dualism of *samsara* and *nirvana*, and its deconstruction in chapter 25 forms the climax of the *Karikas*: there is not the slightest difference between them, for the limits of the one are the limits of the other that which arises and passes away (i.e., *samsara*), when taken noncausally and without dependence, is *nirvana*. Its beatitude (*sivah*) is the coming-to-rest of all ways of taking things (*sarvopalambhopasamah*), the repose of named things (*prapancopasamah*), which is why no truth has ever been taught by any Buddha to anyone anywhere.

The problem, however, is that this solution to the dualism of delusion and enlightenment resolves the tension between them only by displacing it onto another dualism between the manifold world of named things (*prapanca*) and its coming-to rest in silence (*prapancopasamah*). If *nirvana* involves realising the *sunyata* of *sarisara*, for Nagarjuna that ‘emptiness’ involves the cessation of thought-construction. Some translations de-emphasize this cessation, but many other passages in the *Karikas* leave no doubt as to Nagarjuna’s perspective on this matter: from the ultimate point of view no predication is possible. Nagarjuna is well aware of the tension intrinsic to the claim that the true characterization of the
nature of things is that things cannot be conceptually characterized. His solution, of course, is the two-truths doctrine. All predication is part of the lower truth.

Thus this research is going to be demonstration showing how the philosophy of the West and Classical Indian philosophy can come together in constructive and critical dialogue as two strong men standing face to face though they come from the ends of the earth. The comparative analysis brings out not only the common ground between Eastern and Western approaches to language but also serves to highlight distinctions between viewpoints within Classical Indian Eastern Philosophy and the Western philosophy.

The quest to find the forefather of Derrida in the person of Nagarjuna in this thesis has five chapters. The introductory first chapter deals with the contribution of India to the Western thinking and narrated in brief the life history of Derrida and Nagarjuna and established Derrida’s Indian connection and sketched out the review of literature. In addition to this, the introductory chapter also discusses how Derrida and Nagarjuna can be compared and tried to cull out definite parallels in the philosophy of Derrida and Nagarjuna besides bringing forth the operational difficulties.

Chapter 2 entitled The Negative Dialectics in Derrida and Nagarjuna analyses the origin and the deployment of negative dialectics in Derrida and
Nagarjuna through their historical evolution of thought. **Chapter 3** entitled *Derrida’s Différance and Nagarjuna’s Sunyata* would focus on the comparative study of Jacques Derrida’s highly influential concept of “différance” with Nagarjuna’s sunyata.

**Chapter 4** entitled *Derrida’s Word Game and Nagarjuna’s Word Maze: Lexical-Syntactical Deconstruction* focuses its’ attention to the unexplored parallels in Derridean and *Madhyamika* deconstructive use of language. **Chapter 5** is the **Concluding** chapter which repeats and repackages the main points to enact the deduction by rendering the results of the comparative study and would firmly establish Nagarjuna as the forefather of Derrida and much that one sees in Derridean thought.