Chapter 2

The Negative Dialectics in Derrida and Nagarjuna

This chapter sets forth to analyse the origin and the deployment of negative dialectics in Derrida as well as Nagarjuna by fixing each of them in their historical evolution of thought. In the opening pages of his book *The Spectres of Marx*, Derrida writes: “Upon rereading the Manifesto and several other great works of Marx, I said to myself that I knew of few texts in the philosophical tradition, perhaps none, whose lesson appears more urgent today.” (3) This remark of Derrida makes it evident that he was greatly influenced by Marxism in his philosophical development and more so he owes a lot to it, to the Frankfurt school and Adorno for the evolution of his Negative Dialectics.

The Indian philosopher Nagarjuna on the other hand owes a lot to Buddhism for the development of his Negative Dialectics. In order to plunge into the comparative analysis to further the quest to find the forefather of Derrida in the person of Nagarjuna, this chapter comparatively analyses how both Nagarjuna and Derrida use negative dialectics in their respective philosophical treatises. In fact both the thinkers share lots of affinity with each other in their negative dialectics. Prior to embarking on a detailed analysis of the Negative Dialectics of Derrida and Nagarjuna, a better understanding of the terms Dialectics as well as Negative is indispensable.
Exposition on Dialectics

The Online Etymology Dictionary defines “dialectics” as follows, from L. dialectica, from Gk. dialektike (techne) art of philosophical discussion or discourse… originally synonymous with logic; in modern philosophy refined by Kant, then by Hegel, who made it mean process of resolving or merging contradictions in character.


Thus dialectics is a method of argument which has been central to both Eastern and Western philosophy since ancient times.

As stated above it originated in ancient Greece, and was made popular by Plato’s Socratic Dialogues. David L. Hoggan in his article, Plato’s Dialectic v. Hegel and Marx: An Evaluation of Five Revolutions in Institute for Historical Review website clearly explains this in the following words,

… Plato’s dialectical method, as everyone knows, begins in its basic form with the deductive reasoning of the classical Hellenic syllogism, where one formulates an adequate major premise, confronts it with a contrary and qualifying minor premise, and from this artificially induced confrontation derives a synthesis or conclusion. This play of 1) thesis, 2) antithesis, and 3) synthesis is at the root of all twenty of Plato's dialogues, and, knowing as we do that the greatest Greek historian Thucydides was merely paraphrasing when he offered to his readers the verbatim speeches of
contemporary rival Dorian and Ionian politicians and military leaders in his epic narrative of the monumental Peloponnesian War, we would be naive indeed if we believed that we could accept literally the facts that Plato offers us about Socrates. http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v06/v06p67_Hoggan.html>

Different forms of dialectical reasoning have emerged in the East and in the West, as well as during different eras of history. The major forms of dialectical reasoning are Hindu, Buddhist, Socratic, Medieval, Hegelian and Marxist philosophical arguments. One can practically experience what dialectics is through the ordinary practice of a dialogue between two people, who hold different ideas and wish to persuade the other.

The presupposition of a dialectical argument is that the participants share at least some meanings and principles of inference in common, even if they do not agree. In short, it is a kind of discussion and reasoning by dialogue as a method of intellectual investigation; specifically: the Socratic techniques of exposing false beliefs and eliciting truth and also the Platonic investigation of the eternal ideas. One can call any systematic reasoning, exposition, or argument that juxtaposes opposed or contradictory ideas and usually seeks to resolve their conflict which aids an intellectual exchange of ideas as dialectics. Having discussed what Dialectics is in its historical evolution from the ancient times to the present day, one needs to move on the next term Negative.
Exposition on Negative

This term has got different meanings in different contexts. In Logic and Mathematics, negation, or *not*, is an operation on logical values, for example, the logical value of a proposition, that sends true to false and false to true. Intuitively, the negation of a proposition holds exactly when that proposition does not hold. In grammar, *not* is an adverb which acts as a coordinating conjunction.

Logical negation is an operation on one logical value, typically the value of a proposition. If statement A is true, then ¬A would therefore be false; and conversely, if ¬A is true, then A would be false. In Science and Mathematics, negative number is a real number that is less than zero, such as −3. In Photography, *Negative* is an image with inverted luminance or a strip of film with such an image. In Linguistics, negation or ‘No/negative’ is the opposite of ‘Yes/affirmative’. Negative also means to declare not to be true; to gainsay; to contradict; opposed to affirm, allow, or admit. After the above exposition of the terms Dialectics and Negative, the evolution of negative dialectics in the modern age is traced below.

Marxism and the evolution of Negative Dialectics

The term negation was introduced into philosophy by Hegel, but he invested it with an idealist meaning. In the Preface to the First Edition of his book *Science of Logic*, which he published in 1812, he records his impressions of
negative dialectics thus, “The understanding determines, and holds the
determinations fixed; reason is negative and dialectical, because it resolves the
determinations of the understanding into nothing; it is positive because it generates
the universal and comprehends the particular therein.”
<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hl/hlprefac.htm>

From Hegel’s point of view, it is the development of the idea, of thought,
that underlies negation. Marx and Engels, while preserving the term ‘negation’,
interpreted it in materialistic way. They demonstrated that entities tend to negate
themselves in order to advance or reproduce a higher quantity. This means that the
nature of opposition, which causes conflict in each element and gives it motion,
also tends to negate the thing itself. This dynamic process of birth and destruction
is what causes entities to advance.

This law as quoted by David L. Hoggan above is commonly simplified as
the cycle of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. In nature, Engels often cited the case
of the barley seed which, in its natural state, germinates and out of its own death or
negation produces a plant; the plant in turn grows to maturity, and is itself negated
after bearing many barley seeds. Thus, all nature is constantly expanding through
cycles. In society, we have the case of class. For example, the aristocracy was
negated by the bourgeoisie; the bourgeoisie then created the proletariat that will
one day negate them. This illustrates that the cycle of negation is eternal,
as each class creates its undertaker, its successor, as soon as it finishes burying its creator. V. Afanasyev in his book *Marxist Philosophy: A Popular Outline* explains the process of Negation as follows,

Negation is not something introduced into an object or phenomenon from outside, but is the result of the object’s or phenomenon’s own, internal development. Objects and phenomena are contradictory and develop on the basis of their internal opposites; they themselves create the conditions for their destruction, for the passage into new, higher quality. Negation is the overcoming of the old through internal contradictions, it is the result self development, of the self-movement of objects and phenomena. Thus socialism comes to take the place of capitalism as a result of its resolution of the internal, intrinsic contradictions of the capitalist system. (118)

This Marxist philosophy gave birth to many schools of thought which helped in the formulation of Negative dialectics, the most prominent of such a school is the Frankfurt school.

**The Frankfurt School**

The Frankfurt school is a development of Marxism extending Marxist analysis of capitalism to a critique of modern culture. The Frankfurt school originated with, the establishment in 1923 of, the Frankfurt school for Social Research. Its members were left wing German Jewish intellectuals. Their ideas are
sometimes known as “Critical Theory”. The leading members are Adorno (1903-1970), Horkheimer (1895-1973) and Marcuse (1898-1978). Graham Allen in his book on Roland Barthes describes the Frankfurt school thus,

…a group of German Marxist theorists and intellectuals from the 1920s onwards, collectively known as the Frankfurt School. One of the movement’s leading thinkers, Theodor Adorno (1903-69), refers to what he calls the modern ‘culture industry’, by which he means the manner in which contemporary capitalist society accommodates all artistic practices into its own processes of commercialism and commodification.

(19)

The members of the Frankfurt school were forced to flee to Western Europe and North America following the rise to power in Germany during the 1930s of the Nazi party. Some returned to Germany during the late 1940s. A characteristic feature of the school is its attack on modern culture in virtually every aspect. One part of this attack is their critique of the enlightenment. The enlightenment is the name given to the period of intellectual and cultural history of Europe taking place mainly during the eighteenth century. During this period, European intellectuals developed a cult of scientific and rational progress, which they believed would free human beings from superstition.

The European intellectuals also believed that science and rationality would enable society to be organised in a way that would bring prosperity to everyone.
The school gathered together dissident Marxists who, while remaining outspoken critics of capitalism, believed that some of Marx’s followers had come to imitate a narrow selection of Marx’s ideas, usually in defence of orthodox Communist or Social-Democratic parties.

These thinkers were particularly influenced by the failure of the working-class revolution in Western Europe (precisely where Marx had predicted that a Communist revolution would take place) and by the rise of Nazism in such an economically and technologically advanced nation as Germany. This led many of them to take up the task of choosing what parts of Marx’s thought might serve to clarify contemporary social conditions which Marx himself had never seen. They thus drew on other schools of thought to fill in Marx’s perceived omissions, using the insights of psychoanalysis, sociology, existential philosophy and other disciplines. Max Weber exerted a major influence, as did Sigmund Freud.

The Frankfurt School’s emphasis on the ‘critical’ component of theory was derived significantly from their attempt to overcome the limits of positivism, crude materialism, and phenomenology by returning to Kant’s critical philosophy and its successors in German idealism, principally Hegel’s philosophy, with its emphasis on negation and contradiction as inherent properties of reality. The Frankfurt school criticised this idea and argued that in this modern world scientific progress has worked in the opposite direction enabling the destruction of much valued
human freedom rather than its development.

The Frankfurt school under the leadership of Horkheimer and Adorno argued that the great success of Western science and technology did not bring about the freedom envisaged by Karl Marx or the Enlightenment thinkers, but only subtle forms of further domination. (Chethimattam 157)

The school’s chief proponent Adorno claims that it is progressive technical domination that leads to mass deception and the fettering of consciousness. Adorno was chiefly influenced by Max Weber’s critique of disenchantment, Georg Lukacs’s Hegelian interpretation of Marxism, as well as Walter Benjamin’s philosophy of history. Adorno argued that advanced capitalism had managed to contain or liquidate the forces that would bring about its collapse and that the revolutionary moment, when it would have been possible to transform it into socialism, had passed. Adorno further emphasised that capitalism had become more entrenched through its attack on the objective basis of revolutionary consciousness and through liquidation of the individualism that had been the basis of critical consciousness. To understand the negative dialectics of Adorno better, consideration of his life and times in the milieu of Marxist thought is essential.

Life of Adorno

Theodor Ludwig Wiesengrund Adorno was a German-born international sociologist, philosopher, musicologist, and composer. He was born in Frankfurt-
am-Main, the son of Oskar Wiesengrund, a successful Jewish wine merchant, and Maria Calvelli-Adorno, a Catholic of Corsican descent. While attending secondary school, Adorno studied privately in 1918-19 with Siegfried Kracauer, a German historian, social critic, and friend of the family. In 1921 Adorno graduated from the Kaiser Wilhelm Gymnasium and entered the newly founded Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, receiving three years later his doctorate in philosophy in 1924. From 1925 to 1928 he studied music composition under Alban Berg in Vienna.

In 1931 he became a lecturer at the University of Frankfurt. Adorno worked informally from 1928 with the Institut für Sozialforschung (Institute of Social Research). The Institute was dedicated to the study of Marxism, especially Marx’s early writings, and political economy. Adorno’s approach was more interdisciplinary. As mentioned earlier during the era of Nazism, the Frankfurt School was exiled to New York City, where it continued to develop a Society for critical theory, but returned home after World War II. The school’s cultural criticism and eclectic theories of mass society influenced deeply the New left in the 1950s and 1960s. It never produced a unitary social theory, but its members shared a critical view of modern capitalism, and rejected Soviet Communism and orthodox Marxism.

After the Nazis rose to power, Adorno first fled to Oxford. During this period he worked on a study of Husserl’s phenomenology and idealism. Next year he joined other members of the Institute at Columbia University in New York and
later moved to Los Angeles. In the United States Adorno wrote prolifically. His aphorisms, *Minima Moralia*, written during this period, were published in 1951. With Max Horkheimer he published *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), in which the writers saw that reason has become an instrument of totalitarian control. Much of the work is devoted to the study of anti-Semitism, the actual reversion of enlightened civilization to barbarism, and the culture industry, in which enlightenment has found its ideological expression.

**Adorno’s Negative Dialectics**

Adorno published his master piece *Negative Dialektik* in 1966. His negative dialectics was stepped outside standard Marxist framework. He criticized Karl Popper and Martin Heidegger of positing an object independent of the subject, when the object is, in fact, subjectively defined. He stated that there is no absolute starting point in metaphysics and epistemology - the false search for primacy leads totalitarian forms of thought. To avoid fallacy of the ultimate identity, he presented his principle of negative dialectics, in which all theories are systematically negated and concepts are constantly reformed to fit the object. However, Adorno did not believe that all contradictions can be solved and in *Negative Dialektik* he did not only reject utopian as the possibility of total reconciliation but all permanent concepts.

…Adorno’s resistance to the transparent presentation of philosophical concepts in writing has given way to a mode of composition that struggles
to present social relations in fragments, aphorisms and paratactic phrases (where one phenomenon is placed after another, without indicating relations of coordination or subordination between them) … Furthermore, Adorno’s use of chiasmus, or the grammatical figure whereby the order of words in one clause is inverted in a second clause, aims to provide readers with the glimpse of the concrete historical conditions and material relations which are distorted by western knowledge and cognition. (Morton, 41)

Adorno was one of the most important philosophers and social critics in Germany after World War II. Although less well known among Anglophone philosophers, Adorno had greater influence on scholars and intellectuals in post-war Germany. In the 1960s he was the most prominent challenger to both Sir Karl Popper’s philosophy of science and Martin Heidegger's philosophy of existence. Jürgen Habermas, Germany’s foremost social philosopher after 1970, was Adorno’s student and assistant.

The scope of Adorno’s influence stems from the interdisciplinary character of his research and of the Frankfurt School to which he belonged. It also stems from the thoroughness with which he examined Western philosophical traditions, especially from Kant onward, and the radicalness to his critique of contemporary Western society. He was a seminal social philosopher and a leading member of the first generation of Critical Theory. A study of how negative dialectics of
Derrida and Adorno are related with respect to the Marxist critique is analysed further.

**Negative Dialectics of Derrida, Adorno and Marxist Critique**

Negative dialectics of Adorno is a theorized model which sought to explain how opposing social forces produce change. He condemned capitalism as the driving force in a society on its way towards increased suppression. Throughout his works he adopted a certain Marxist terminology, especially when it came to explaining the relationship between the means of production and owners/subordinates.

Thus, Adorno and the rest of the Frankfurt school brought Marx’s interpretation of society to give it 20th century validity. In doing so, they utilized a significant feature of Marx’s contextualization. Adorno and Derrida do not share similar ideas often; in any sense except they are both steeped in reading the classics of German philosophy and both have a really difficult style, with very elaborate sentences, word play, and frequent references to philosophers, often in Latin, Greek and German.

One can use Derrida to support the view that concepts never simply apply to objects in the real world, and that philosophers, scientists and writers have to force them to do so. Adorno focuses on how objects are simplified and
domesticated through the various rituals of science, from operationalism to laboratory procedure (and one might add statistical analysis using standard formulae). In his book on *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* Stephen Morton vouches this idea in the following manner, “… Adorno’s approach differs significantly from that of Derrida’s because it seeks to redeem the object in its alterity” (41). Yet Derrida’s deconstruction to some extent mirrors Adorno’s voice against suppression. Martin McQuillan who brought out *Deconstruction: A Reader* quotes Derrida’s own words thus: “… I believe intimate connections between deconstruction and a certain ‘spirit’ of Marxism.” (547)

**Derrida’s Marxian Negative Dialectics**

Derrida has followed Adorno’s footsteps and was greatly inspired by Marxism like his predecessor. His work *Spectres of Marx* is a discussion of the relevance of Marxism. It was seen as the first explicit attempt to discuss Marxist politics, and thus deconstructionist politics, after Derrida’s long tactical silence. The title refers to the much used metaphor of the spectre or the ghostly presence which chronically haunts all texts, and which might be seen as that collection of meanings which have been repressed or denied in the final construction and attempts to fix meaning.

Derrida is interested in trying to see which aspects of Marx’s legacy might still be useful in the 1990s. It is clear that this is to be no simple application of
Marxism, but more a matter of recapturing a spirit or spectre. It is an examination of the ways in which Marx and Marxism still haunts us, still has influence. Deconstruction is fully in the spirit of Marxism. It attempts to find traces, ghosts, and uncovers undecidability. “Deconstruction wages war on everything that seeks to ‘maintain an effective inequality as monstrous as that which prevails today, to a greater extent than ever in the history of humanity.” (Royle 118)

This type of analysis can obviously be aimed at ideologies, which is clearly in the spirit of Marxism. Deconstruction can operate properly only within the space left by Marxist critique, which is both rational and universal in its appeal. Derrida explains that this shows how ghosts continue to haunt the living, and how difficult it is to separate the living from the spectre. This text also shows the power of the metaphor of the spectre, where it is central to Marxist analysis. Derrida himself comments in his book *Spectres of Marx* on how he cannot be without Marx,

It will always be a fault not to read and reread and discuss Marx… and to go beyond scholarly ‘reading’ or ‘discussion’. It will be more and more a fault, a failing of theoretical, philosophical, political responsibility… There will be no future without this. Not without Marx, no future without Marx, without the memory and the inheritance of Marx: in any case of a certain Marx, of his genius, of at least one of his spirits. For this will be our
hypothesis or rather our bias: *there is no more than one of them, there must be more than one of them.* (13)

Thus from the above detailed discussion on the evolution of negative dialectics through the Frankfurt School and Adorno one can clearly understand how one cannot do away with Marx and the Marxist critique in negative dialectics. A study of how far Derrida’s philosophy of deconstruction is related to negative thinking is imminent.

**Deconstruction and Negative Theology**

The question of the relationship of deconstruction to negative theology has been debated almost since deconstruction began. Deconstruction cannot be dissociated from the problematic of negative theology. Deconstruction has a comparable object and methods of signifying that object to those of negative theology. Before going any further it is necessary to analyse briefly what is deconstruction.

As elucidated in the introduction Jacques Derrida popularised the term Deconstruction. It’s is a term in contemporary philosophy, literary criticism, and the social sciences, denoting a process by which the texts and languages of Western philosophy appear to shift and complicate in meaning when read in light of the assumptions and absences they reveal within themselves. In his 1966 lecture
at Johns Hopkins University, “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” he coined the term Deconstruction and has proved more forthcoming with negative, rather than pined-for positive, analyses of the school. Danny J. Anderson in his contributory article in the book Contemporary Literary Theory attempts to define deconstruction in the following way,

In general terms, deconstruction investigates the nature and production of knowledge, a consideration with far-reaching implications for all aspects of human activity. More specifically, deconstruction aims its critique against a conception of knowledge and meaning as graspable essences that precede or follow expression. (Atkins, 137)

It is undeniable that Derrida’s works cannot be easily summarized or reduced to one-liners. The obscurity of his writing, however, does not conceal a code that can be cracked, but reflects the density and complexity characteristic of all great works of philosophy, literature and art. The more one lingers with them, the more they reveal about our world and about us. What makes Derrida’s work so significant is the way he brought insights of major philosophers, writers, artists and theologians to bear on problems of urgent contemporary interest.

Most of Derrida’s infamously demanding texts consist of careful interpretations of canonical writers in the Western philosophical, literary and artistic traditions - from Plato to Joyce. Nicholas Royle in his book Telepathy and
*Literature: Essays on the Reading Mind* comments thus on the versatility of Derrida,

Derrida has written numerous essays on the works of Freud, Lacan, and Abraham and Torok, and everything he has said, for example, about memory, desire, mourning, crypts and ghosts, demands to be read within the context of psychoanalytic concepts and their possible translations and transformations. (363)

When responsibly understood, the implications of deconstruction are quite different from the misleading cliché often used to describe a process of dismantling or taking things apart. The guiding insight of deconstruction is that every structure - be it literary, psychological, social, economic, political or religious - that organizes our experience is constituted and maintained through acts of exclusion. In the process of creating something, something else inevitably gets left out.

These exclusive structures can become repressive - and that repression comes with consequences. In a manner reminiscent of Freud, Derrida insists that what is repressed does not disappear but always returns to unsettle every construction, no matter how secure it seems. As an Algerian Jew writing in France during the post-war years in the wake of totalitarianism on the right (fascism) as well as the left (Stalinism), Derrida understood all too well the danger of beliefs
and ideologies that divide the world into diametrical opposites: right or left, red or blue, good or evil, for us or against us. Derrida showed how these repressive structures, which grew directly out of the Western intellectual and cultural tradition, threatened to return with devastating consequences. By struggling to find ways to overcome patterns that exclude the differences that make life worth living, he developed a vision that is consistently ethical. And yet, supporters on the left and critics on the right have misunderstood this vision.

Many of Derrida’s most influential followers appropriated his analyses of marginal writers, works and cultures as well as his emphasis on the importance of preserving differences and respecting others to forge an identity politics that divides the world between the very binary oppositions that it was Derrida’s mission to undo: black and white, men and women, gay and straight, light and dark, feminine and masculine etc., Betraying Derrida’s insights by creating a culture of political correctness, his self-styled supporters fuelled the culture wars that have been raging for more than two decades and continue to frame political debate.

**Derrida and Negative Theology**

Derrida discusses negative theology by means of the idea of ‘denegation,’ or ‘denial.’ In his work “*How To Avoid Speaking: Denials*” which forms part of the book *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and*
**Literary Theory** Derrida speaks of his Negative theology in the following manner, “Considering that every predicative language is inadequate to the essence, in truth to the hyper essentiality (the being beyond Being) of God; consequently, only a negative (‘apophatic’) attribution can claim to approach God and to prepare for a silent intuition of God. (Budick 70).

The French word “denegation” translates Freud’s term *Verneinung*. With its negative prefix (“ver”), this German term implies a negation of a negation, a denial then, but one that is also an affirmation. The fundamental question then for negative theology, but also psychoanalysis, and for Derrida is how to deny and yet also not deny. This duality between not telling and telling is why Derrida takes up the idea of the secret. Derrida says, “There is a secret of denial [denegation] and a denial [denegation] of the secret.” (Budick 7)

The secret as such, as secret, separates and already institutes a negativity; it is a negation that denies itself. It de-negates itself. Here Derrida speaks of a secret as such. A secret as such is something that must not be spoken; one then has the first negation: One promises not to give the secret away. And yet, in order to possess a secret really, to have it really, one must tell it to oneself. Here one can see the relation of hearing-oneself-speak that one just saw in Voice and Phenomenon. Keeping a secret includes necessarily auto-affection: one must speak to oneself of the secret. One might however say more, one might even say that one
is too weak for this speaking of the secret to oneself not to happen. One must have a conceptual grasp of it; one has to frame a representation of the secret.

With the idea of a re-presentation one also sees retention, repetition, and the trace or a name. A trace of the secret must be formed, in which case, the secret is in principle shareable. If the secret must be necessarily shareable, it is always already shared. In other words, in order to frame the representation of the secret, one must negate the first negation, in which one promised not to tell the secret: one must tell the secret to oneself as if one were someone else.

One, thereby, makes a second negation, a “de-negation,” which means one must break the promise not to tell the secret. In order to keep the secret (or the promise), one must necessarily not keep the secret (One must violate the promise). So, one possesses the secret and does not possess it. This structure has the consequence of there being no secret as such. A secret is necessarily shared. As Derrida says in *How to Avoid Speaking*,

This denial [denegation] does not happen [to the secret] by accident; it is essential and originary. … The enigma … is the sharing of the secret, and not only shared to my partner in the society but the secret shared within itself, its ‘own’ partition, which divides the essence of a secret that cannot even appear to one alone except in starting to be lost, to divulge itself, hence to dissimulate itself, as secret, in showing itself: dissimulating its
dissimulation. There is no secret as such; I deny it. And this is what I confide in secret to whomever allies himself to me. This is the secret of the alliance. (Budick 25)

Although negative theology denies God the predicate of Being, it does so ultimately in order to attribute to him a higher, more eminent mode of Being than those we understand by the term. Derrida notes this in his *Writing and Difference* “The face of God disappears forever in showing itself” (135) However it may deny the attribute of Being to God, in Derrida’s view, negative theology remains an ontological discourse, since it continues to posit God as Being in an inconceivable and transcendent mode. It is therefore altogether distinct from deconstruction, whose object is not any manner of being.

Harold Coward while discussing Derrida’s negative theology in his book *Derrida and Indian Philosophy* opines thus, “Derrida deals head on with negative theology as an interpretation of silence… The most negative discourse, even beyond all nihilisms and negative dialectics, preserves a trace of the other.” (142). This brings one to the discussion of nihilism in Derrida.

**Nihilistic charge against Derrida**

Derrida and deconstruction have often been labelled as nihilist. If nothing is real or certain or true, if everything is a text, then life/the universe/everything is meaningless and action is impossible. To his critics, he appeared to be a pernicious
nihilist who threatened the very foundation of Western society and culture. By insisting that truth and absolute value cannot be known with certainty, his detractors argue, he undercut the very possibility of moral judgment.

To follow Derrida, is to start down the slippery slope of scepticism and relativism that inevitably leaves us powerless to act responsibly. Some charge that the deconstructive project is “nihilistic” and claim Derrida’s writing attempts to undermine the ethical and intellectual norms vital to Academe, if not Western civilization itself. Derrida is accused of effectively denying the possibility of knowledge and meaning, creating a blend of extreme scepticism and solipsism, which these critics believe harmful.

This is an important criticism that Derrida is nihilistic requires a careful response. Like Kant, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, Derrida does argue that transparent truth and absolute values elude our grasp. This does not mean, however, that one must forsake the cognitive categories and moral principles without which one cannot live: equality and justice, generosity and friendship. Rather, it is necessary to recognize the unavoidable limitations and inherent contradictions in the ideas and norms that guide our actions, and do so in a way that keeps them open to constant questioning and continual revision. There can be no ethical action without critical reflection. Similar views are found in Nagarjuna, who is, as the thesis tries to establish as the forefather of Derrida.
Nagarjuna has also been charged for being nihilistic in his times and hence a brief exposition on nihilism and the way this concept has evolved in the milieu of thought becomes highly essential in order to understand both Nagarjuna and Jacques Derrida in a better way. This exposition would help in the assertion that there are parallels in both the thinkers thought and words and would help in establishing the fact that Nagarjuna is really the forerunner of Derridean thoughts.

**Exposition on Nihilism**

‘Nihilism’ comes from the Latin root word *nihil*, or nothing, which means not anything, that which does not exist. The Latin root appears in the verb ‘annihilate’, meaning to bring to nothing, to destroy completely. Nihilism as theory of revolution was popular among Russian extremists until the fall of the Czarist government in 1917; the theory was given its name by Ivan Turgenev in his most famous novel of his times *Fathers and Sons* (1861). Lee Spinks who has authored a book on *Friedrich Nietzsche* has explained what nihilism is in a wonderful way thus,

Nietzsche employed the term ‘nihilism’ to describe the sense of emptiness or ‘nothingness’ befalling a people that had no faith in the standards and values that regulated its daily life, but who could find no way to bring new values into being. The problem for humanity today, he argued, is that it no longer believes in the moral ideals that shaped the Christian view of the
world, but lacks the power to create values capable of underpinning a new vision of life. (4)

Nihilism stressed the need to destroy existing economic and social institutions, whatever the projected nature of the better order for which the destruction was to prepare. Nihilists were not without constructive programs, but agreement on these was not essential to the immediate objective, destruction. Direct action, such as assassination and arson, was characteristic. Such acts were not necessarily directed by any central authority. Small groups and even individuals were encouraged to plan and execute terrorist acts independently. The assassination of Czar Alexander II was the result of one such terrorist activity.

The constructive programmes published by nihilists include the establishing of a parliamentary government; the programs were on the whole moderate in comparison with the revolutionary measures of 1917. Nihilism was too diffuse and negative to persist as a movement and gradually gave way to other philosophies of revolt. A true nihilist would believe in nothing, have no loyalties, and no purpose other than, perhaps, an impulse to destroy.

While few philosophers would claim to be nihilists, nihilism is most often associated with Friedrich Nietzsche who argued that its corrosive effects would eventually destroy all moral, religious, and metaphysical convictions and
precipitate the greatest crisis in human history. In the 20th century, nihilistic themes--epistemological failure, value destruction, and cosmic purposelessness--have preoccupied artists, social critics, and philosophers. Mid-century, for example, the existentialists helped popularize tenets of nihilism in their attempts to blunt its destructive potential. By the end of the century, existential despair as a response to nihilism gave way to an attitude of indifference, often associated with antifoundationalism.

**Absolving Deconstruction of Nihilistic charge**

There is no need to take that kind of nihilist step against deconstruction, as it allows for a kind of affirmation. Human action, in the face of the realisation that access to the ultimate Truth has been denied, is all the more admirable, all the more humane. Derridean deconstruction is a clear-eyed admission that no Truth, no Meaning has ever fallen fully formed from the sky and never will. All humans can ever do is construct (and then deconstruct) meaning from the chaos around and within them. A genius for interpretation is all one has. In this sense, deconstruction is a powerful denial of all fundamentalisms which rely on the myth of a direct and untrammelled connection to a Truth out there, somewhere.

In his own life, Derrida has not felt deconstruction as a restriction to political action. As John Rawlings says in the introduction to Derrida on the *Stanford University web site* devoted to him:
However one values Derrida’s writings and the philosophical positions and intellectual traditions from which he proceeds, it would be wrongheaded to think of him as an occupant of some 'ivory tower'. Derrida is the proverbial activist-theorist, who, over the years, has fought for a number of political causes, including the rights of Algerian immigrants in France, anti-apartheid, and the rights of Czech Charter 77 dissidents. True to his own construction of the world and his own autobiography, he has admitted few, if any, strict dichotomies in his life. As he put it in another context, ‘I am applied Derrida’. <prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/derrida/>

Deconstruction is thus endless; Derrida would be the first to deconstruct the above paragraphs as a re-appropriation (along standard Existentialist / heroic/utopian lines) of him and deconstruction. In order to understand the negative dialectics of Derrida one had to understand the way how negative dialectics developed through Marxist philosophy. In the same manner in order to understand the negative dialectics in Nagarjuna one has to understand how Nagarjuna followed the philosophic line that was left by Buddha and fix Nagarjuna within the umbrella of Buddhist thought. In order to accomplish this one needs to deal, to some extent, on the origin of Buddhism and the evolution of Buddhist dialectics and delve deep into Nagarjuna’s negative dialectics. Nagarjuna, often addressed as the second Buddha, is one among the most of prominent Indian Buddhist philosophers.
**Origin of Buddhism**

Buddhism begins with the Buddha (literally, “the Awake”), c. 563-483 B.C. The usual problem of legendary origins is further complicated by the fact that Buddha, like Socrates and Christ, wrote nothing; when two disciples sought permission to translate his vernacular teachings into classical Sanskrit verse, he refused, saying that in each region the teachings should be presented in the local language. Jo Durden Smith’s book *The Essence of Buddhism* records how biography of Buddha turned into a kind of myth,

By the time the first biography was actually written down – by a Sanskrit poet Asvaghosha in the first or second century AD – the Buddha’s life-story had accumulated an accretion of myth, legend and derring-do, which had turned its central character into a demigod, a supernatural figure out of epic. (21-22)

Unlike the brief life of Christ, the Buddha lived for 45 years after his enlightenment, leaving behind extensive oral teachings later recorded in the Pali Canon, which is approximately eleven times the length of the Bible. One of the most striking things about this voluminous material is that it says so much about the path to nirvana and so little about nirvana itself. The Buddha’s attitude seems to have been that it’s not helpful to talk about it very much; so that if you want to know what nirvana is, you must experience it yourself. Except for some terms of praise, the few descriptions are negative: they say what nirvana is not.
The Pali canon contains several different accounts of exactly what the Buddha realized in his paradigmatic enlightenment under the Bo tree. Perhaps most significant from a deconstructive approach is that none of these earliest accounts invokes an inexpressible self-presence. According to the most common story, the Buddha realized the Three Knowledges: he was able to remember his past lifetimes as far back as he wanted, to see the karmic connections between those lifetimes, and to understand the Four Truths: how life is duhkha (“suffering” or “dissatisfaction/frustration”), that the cause of duhkha is desire and ignorance, that there is an end to duhkha — nirvana — and an eightfold path leading to that end, which he himself had reached and thus at last ignorance was dispelled, knowledge arose.

According to another account, the Buddha realized the truth of pratitya-samutpada, ‘dependent origination’, which was to become the most important doctrine of Buddhism; according to a third, he realized that there is no persisting self, and that the impersonal physical and mental processes whose interaction creates the illusion of self are impermanent and cause suffering. Oliver Leaman’s *Key Concepts in Eastern Philosophy* explains the significance of dependent origination as follows,

According to Buddhist philosophy, the only thing that comes about without being dependent on preceding conditions is nirvana. Everything else including the aspects of human personality is part of the world of
conditioned arising or dependent origination. This is far more complex than just referring to the fact that there are causal links in the world, it is a principle of the illusory nature of phenomenal reality. (92)

In contrast to the other main Indian tradition, the Upanishadic, which emphasizes the identity of self, substance, and transcendental Absolute, the Buddha emphasized that there is no self, that everything without exception arises and passes away according to conditions, and hence there is no personal or impersonal Absolute.

The Buddha’s mostly impromptu talks were in response to questions, but there were some questions he would not answer, because they are not conducive to enlightenment. These included whether or not the world had an origin or will have an end, whether or not it is finite, whether or not a Buddha exists after death, and whether or not the life-principle (jiva) is identical with the body. Buddhism postulates no golden age of plenitude before a fall into the suffering of history and self-consciousness, and therefore harbours no dream of returning to any such pure origin. There is no attempt to explain suffering as a result of original sin; nor is there any Last Judgment.

The Buddha emphasized that he who understands pratitya-samutpada, understands the dharma [his teaching], and vice-versa. ‘Dependent-origination’
explains one’s experience by locating all phenomena within a set of twelve factors, each conditioned by and conditioning all the others. The twelve links of this chain (which integrates shorter chains that the Buddha elaborated on different occasions) are traditionally explained in the following manner:

1. Ignorance (avidya) of the Four Holy Truths, which results in belief in the reality of what we experience. This is followed by
2. Conceptualization, where our self is shaped by karmic forces to make distinctions about that experience. Then we arrive at
3. Discernment
4. The combination of the mind and the body
5. The six sense-organs
6. The fact that the mind can receive sense impressions
7. The ability to feel
8. Craving, which is the basis of suffering
9. Grasping or clinging to things
10. Becoming, or the continuing process of change that makes up life
11. Birth, and then the whole process comes to a temporary end when it reaches
12. Death, and the experiences that we encounter on the way to this form of dukkha or suffering.” (Leaman 92-93)

These twelve links are usually understood to describe three lifetimes: the first two factors give causes from the past that have led to our present existence; the next
five are their effects in the present; the following three are causes in the present
life that will lead to another birth; the last two are their effects in a future life.
However, these three ‘lifetimes’ have also been taken metaphorically, as referring
to the various factors conditioning every moment of our existence.

In neither case is ignorance a ‘first cause’ that began the whole process in
some distant past. Although ignorance is presented as if it were a precondition, the
important point is that there is no first-cause. All the twelve factors are
interdependent, each conditioning all the others, and there is no reference in
Buddhism to some past time before this cycle was operating.

In response to the problem of how rebirth can occur without a permanent
soul or self that is reborn, rebirth is explained as a series of impersonal processes,
which occur without any self that is doing or experiencing them. In one Pali sutra,
a monk asks the Buddha to whom belong, and for whom occur, the phenomena
described in *pratitya-samutpada*. The Buddha rejects that question as misguided;
from each factor as its preconditions arise another factor; that is all. *Duhkha*
occurs without there being anyone who causes or experiences the *duhkha*. When
the Buddha died he did not appoint a successor and had let the *dharma* be the
followers guide. *Dharma* was soon canonized as a guide. It was like a raft that can
be used to cross the river of suffering, but not afterwards to be carried around on
our backs.
Within a few generations, the Buddha’s clearly non-metaphysical approach yielded to the desire to abstract an *abhidharma* or “higher dharma” from his extensive and repetitious talks. Since the sense-of-self is due to interaction among the various factors constituting *pratitya-samutpada*, the *abhidharmikas* concluded that reality is plural: what exists are these various elements, which they enumerated and classified. This process of extricating a core-teaching transformed the Buddhist path of liberation into an atomism nonetheless onto-theological: in place of the one substance of Vedanta, Buddhism is now understood to assert that there are in effect innumerable substances. This led to the formation of many Buddhist schools of thought.

**Nagarjuna’s Madhyamika Buddhist thought**

Of the many philosophical developments from the viewpoint of Buddhist thought, possibly the most in line with the Buddha’s traditional silence about philosophical questions was that of the *Madhyamika* School, as voiced by the philosopher Nagarjuna.

The *Madhyamika* … embodies that pragmatic and antimetaphysical attitude which was the real heart of Buddha’s teaching. As such, it acknowledges the fact that all experience is mental and that metaphysical speculation is soteriologically counterproductive. This is evident in the works of Nagarjuna. He has said, “the world of illusion, a delusion of consciousness, comes not from anywhere, goes not nor really stays.” (Santina, 46)
It is unlikely that any philosophical exploration of ontological and epistemological issues would have especially reflected the Buddha’s original intent, but of the many philosophical dialectics that ultimately came out of his tradition, the exploration of Nagarjuna would probably have displeased him the least. This is because Nagarjuna’s intent was to answer the questions to which the Buddha only responded with silence, and because Nagarjuna’s answer was arguably very close to the same thing—sunyata. Where other Buddhists proposed existent mind or matter, Nagarjuna proposed nothing as independently existing. Everything was dependently originating.

Nagarjuna has refuted the doctrine of origination, the concept of subject, object, space, time, causality, matter, motion etc. He proved them to be unreal. They are in fact, not as false as a sky flower or hare’s horn, but they do not have abiding or ultimate validity too. (Srivastava, 388)

Nagarjuna’s most important argument was his philosophical negative dialectic, the result of which, he maintained, was the conventional proof that no philosophical explanation of reality was ultimate. Unfortunately for Nagarjuna, his proof may not have been as complete as he thought—he may be saying more in espousing sunyata than his negative dialectic is able to prove. Nagarjuna is taken to be the voice of the Madhyamika School. Unlike other Buddhist thinkers, he did not abandon philosophical enquiry altogether. Instead, he used a philosophical examination to show how common ideas of permanence and causality, upon which
our conventional ideas about the universe are based, are inadequate or self-contradictory.

In his philosophical works Nagarjuna questions the prospect of man’s capacity to attain rationally warranted convictions regarding factual matters. He subjects the ‘knowledge claims’ made by the Naiyayikas and others to severe dialectical criticism and shows that these claims are not supported by scientific justification. (Mohanta, 54)

Another most important argument in Nagarjuna was against causality. He argued that the concept of causality ultimately contradicts itself. Nagarjuna asserted that there were only four possible relationships that an effect can have with its cause. Either it is caused by itself alone, by something other than itself, by itself and some other thing, or by neither itself nor another. This is merely a detail of the possibilities for causal connections. Nagarjuna argued: If a thing was caused by itself and nothing else, then no change has occurred and nothing has been caused. If a thing is caused by something other than itself, then something has been produced from nothing.

If a thing is caused both by itself and by some other thing, then to the extent to which it is self-similar, there is no change or causation, and in the extent to which it is caused by something else, something has come from nothing, which cannot be. Finally, if a thing is caused by neither itself nor anything else, it has not
been caused, because there is no cause. Thus, Nagarjuna argues, nothing can be caused by another thing. In the introductory verse of his masterpiece *Mulamadhyamakakarika* itself he remarks this thought in the following manner,

(Therein, every event is “marked” by):

non-origination, non-extinction,
non-destruction, non-permanence,
non-identity, non-differentiation
non-coming (into being), non-going (out of being). (39)

Another important argument that is yielded by Nagarjuna’s dialectical method is against ordinary notions of time. He argues that if present and future depend on the past, as we believe, that they would have to exist in the past. But they do not. If they do not exist in the past, they must not be dependent on the past. If they are not dependant on the past, what can they be dependent on?

Consequently Nagarjuna concludes, time must have no concrete reality and can only make sense in reference to other dependently originating things. Taken together, these arguments go a long way towards supporting Nagarjuna’s idea that conventional ideas about reality are inadequate. They go a long way to suggest that the ultimate nature of reality may be *sunyata*, or emptiness. Thus one can find these revolutionary *Madhyamika* School thought by Nagarjuna having been permeated far and wide.
The “Madhyamika – Mahayana” Buddhism spread, and having
“naturalized” itself in the northern countries, such as Tibet, China, and
Japan, it gave rise to such off-shoots as Zen, and became the other living
tradition of Buddhism along with the Theravada of southern countries.
Nagarjuna “revolutionized” Buddhist thought, was considered a
Bodhisattva, and also had an impact on the development of Hindu
thought… He holds a central position not only in Buddhist thought but also
in Indian philosophical thinking in general. (Gunaratne, 213)

Absolving Nagarjuna of Nihilistic charge

As Derrida, Nagarjuna’s thoughts too could be charged as nihilistic. There
are a number of traditional responses to Nagarjuna’s dialectics. Jay L. Garfield and
Graham Priest in their response to Nagarjuna’s thought process remark,
Nagarjuna is one of the most difficult philosophers to interpret in any
tradition. His texts are terse and cryptic. He does not shy away from
paradox or apparent contradiction. He is coy about identifying his
opponents. The commentarial traditions grounded in his texts present a
plethora of interpretations of his view. (1)

This type of argument in Nagarjuna makes one claim that Nagarjuna’s
version of reality is nihilistic. Nagarjuna escapes this criticism by pointing out that
his dialectic contains no propositions, it only shows how conventional
propositions contradict one another. He also says of sunyata that it is only empty insofar as it is impossible to categorize using conventional notions. Indeed, Nagarjuna splits reality into two truths--conventional truths which we live with and entertain, and ultimate truth, which is not describable in words and can only be called sunyata.

Other critics claim that his view is self-critical--that if sunyata cannot be described in conventional terms, then his dialectic and his distinction between conventional and ultimate truth are conventional and so cannot reflect ultimate reality. Nagarjuna counters by claiming that though conventional truth is not ultimately true, it can point to ultimate truth, which his philosophy does.

Nagarjuna’s ultimate purpose was similar to the Buddha’s--he intended to show that philosophical notions are inadequate to describe ultimate reality, that it must be experienced. Unlike other Buddhists who shunned philosophical approaches, Nagarjuna thought that it would be helpful to come to a philosophical understanding of the problem of philosophy on the way to experiencing ultimate reality directly.

The Madhyamika philosophy is so spoken because it adheres to the Buddha’s doctrine of the Middle Way by not adhering to the extreme philosophic standpoints of eternalism and of nihilism. While avoiding like a plague all extreme philosophical viewpoints, it at the same time does not
propound any standpoint view of its own, fearing it would trap itself in the
net of views if it propounds any theory or view. (Pandit, 250). Having absolved Nagarjuna of nihilistic charges, a focus on his negative dialectics seems imperative.

Nagarjuna’s Negative Argument

Nagarjuna’s negative argument is strong and clear. “The Karikas are full of negative judgments” (Betty, 129) He proves with great adeptness that conventional notions of time and causality are less than ultimately coherent. He admits that they serve conventional purposes well and sets up a scheme for talking about causal relationships as characterised by conditions rather than causes.

Nagarjuna’s denial of time and causality primarily denies the possibility of change for independently existing objects. Thus it denies the appropriateness of our concepts of time and causality. What it fails to deny is the idea of a connectedness between objects or events that one ordinarily thinks of as being causally related. If one’s intuition of connectedness is correct, then the conventional conceptual framework need not be denied the status of ultimacy on the sole basis of inadequate notions of time and causality.

Ultimately, what Nagarjuna succeeds in proving is that our notions of time and causality are inadequate, so if one can correct, replace, or remove these faulty
notions from one’s conventional understanding, it may not be subject to Nagarjuna’s criticisms. For example, one may consider causality as a number of discrete conceptual components working together: time, change, and connectedness. The concept of time involves a reality that exists moment to moment, with an existent present moment a no-longer-existent past moment, and a yet-to-exist future moment.

The idea of change involves independent objects which once were, now are, and will be but are not yet. Note that change and time are almost inextricably bound. General concepts of past and future involve a change of the present moment, and require a change of present objects to be detectable. Connectedness, on the other hand, is altogether a different sort of concept than either time or change, and requires connections to neither. Thus it may not be fallible to the same arguments. In fact, one avows the continuity of spatial relationships, both within and without objects, as a kind of connectedness not subject to time or change. That is, one ordinarily thinks of one slice of desk, mountain, or air as being connected to the next by virtue or its proximity, and one is not required to compare one moment to the next or establish a causal relationship for the connection to be plausible. It just is.

One just thinks of space as a continuous continuum. If one takes the concept of causality, then, and removes from it the notions of time as coming-to-
be and ceasing-to-be, cut out the notion of change entirely, and come to view it in the same way one ordinarily views space, one avoids entirely the notions of time and causality that Nagarjuna proved faulty.

Our universe, then, would become a four-dimensional solid in which no change occurs. This alternative notion of time has important implications for many of negative Buddhist arguments which shore up notions of dependant origination or sunyata. The argument against permanence, for instance, is undermined because the universe would be static. The concept is not perfect, it conflicts with ordinary notions of humans, for instance, but that may only mean that our ordinary notions of humans are inadequate.

Nagarjuna was attempting to answer the philosophical questions--the questions to which the Buddha remained silent. He thought that he could help people to realize the ultimate nature of reality by showing how conventional truths fail to be ultimately true. He attempted to do this by showing, through his dialectic, that since conventional notions are contradictory the nature of the ultimate reality must be uncategorizable--sunyata.

In the end, it seems that philosophical undertakings demand a rigor that the Buddha’s silence did not. Perhaps, if enlightenment is possible without tackling philosophy on its home field, then the Buddha’s response was the more prudent, if
not the more convincing. Thus the reaction to this philosophical development and other tendencies was the development of *Mahayana*, a revolution as important to Buddhism as the Protestant Reformation for Christianity.

Although Buddhism, curiously split into apparently incompatible directions: in popular religious terms, the paradigmatic but very human Buddha when asked whether he was a man or a god, he answered that he was a man who has awakened was elevated into a metaphysical principle, in fact the ground of the universe, and granted a pantheon of bodhisattvas who help others attain salvation.

Philosophically, however, there was a thorough-going self-deconstruction of the Buddhist teachings that has continued to reverberate through all subsequent Buddhist thought, so radical and influential it has never been completely re-appropriated. The locus of this *Madhyamika* School is in the *Mulamadhyamakakarika* of Nagarjuna. The *Mulamadhyamakakarika* offers a systematic analysis of all the important philosophical issues of its time, not to solve these problems but to demonstrate that any possible philosophical solution is self-contradictory or otherwise unjustifiable.

Nagarjuna’s *karikas* systematically present the philosophy of the *Madhyamika* School. It presents Buddha’s ‘principle of relativity’ or *svabhava-sunyata* (the emptiness of self-being), which is to say that everything is relative
and nothing absolute. Starting from this point, He set out to prove that no conceptual system can hold absolutely true. This he did by first accepting the various concepts and propositions of the various opposing schools of thought current in his day, and using the standard rules of formal debate, arrived at contradictions in all of the systems.

In more specific terms, Nagarjuna took causality – the basis not only of Buddhism but also very much the basis of all scientific thought – and reduced ad absurdum both our conception of the causal law and all realistic theories. That is, by holding that there exist no separate, distinguishable real things or elements (dharmas), he threw causality out the window. All relationships are thus seen to be false. As Ian W. Mabbett vouches, “Nagarjuna followed Marx eastward to Mongolia; deconstruction followed Berkeley westward to America… Eastward and westward: opposites meet. Perhaps the apposite of the Middle Way and the prophet of infinite deferral have something in common.” (203) Having seen the evolution of negative dialectics in both the thinkers, it is imperative to proceed with the parallels that obtain with respect to the crucial concepts in Nagarjuna and Derrida.

**Derrida and Nagarjuna Deconstructive Parallels**

Though Nagarjuna and Derrida are separated from each other in time and space, it is highly remarkable to find how both of them have similar view points.
The important and interesting parallel to Derrida’s type of deconstruction, from Nagarjuna’s point of view, is that it is logocentric. For Derrida philosophy always re-appropriates for itself the discourse that delimits it. It is equally true of Indian Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna. Like all religions, Nagarjuna’s Mahayana Buddhism includes a strong onto-theological element, yet it also contains the resources that have repeatedly deconstructed this tendency.

In Nagarjuna’s Mahayana Buddhism every form and all concepts are overcome or annihilated in the realization of the highest reality, the highest reality is grasped in forms and through concepts. It absolutely negates the self by extinguishing it and uniting it with Buddha. This union, however, does not dissolve one into Buddha. Rather, by ‘entrusting oneself’ to Buddha, one enters into a relation of absolute dependence, a relation in which there is an absolute gap between the base and evil self on the one hand and Buddha on the other; and nevertheless there is a union of the two. This union, as an element essential to holiness, has the gap as its prerequisite. No order of holiness is possible without this separation. Precisely because it is transcendent and separate from us, holiness can be revered, worshiped, trusted, and believed in.

In the final realization which Nagarjuna proposes, there is only one reality in which ‘I’ and ‘the other’, ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘purity’ and ‘impurity’, and ‘holy’ and ‘non-holy are fused. But the fusion is possible only when there are such co-
ordinate concepts. Derrida also speaks of similar kind of dichotomy or binary opposites in his deconstruction. According to Derrida, people think in terms of opposites.

All things are identified in part by what they are not. There are countless dichotomies, such as beginning/end, tall/short, masculine/feminine, presence/absence, and speech/writing. In addition to being dichotomies, these pairs are also hierarchies. One thinks of a beginning as more important than an end, presence as better than absence, and, perhaps most disturbing to Derrida, speech as more important than writing. Derrida attacks this idea in and attempts to subvert the boundary between speech and writing. In the negative dialectics of Nagarjuna there is a noteworthy analysis of the highest truth in two divisions - the 'mundane' truth and the 'supra-mundane truth' - usually termed 'two truths'.

One is the highest truth, which is formless and beyond conceptual understanding, and the other, the manifestation of the formless in the realm of human conception, that is, forms. It was Nagarjuna who first presented the notion of 'two truths' as an analysis of sunyata. The highest truth is beyond words or description, i.e. beyond the reach of conceptual understanding and yet it was presented by the Buddha as his teaching so that one’s conceptual understanding could grasp it. It is in this sense that the teaching is regarded as an 'expedient means', often likened to a finger pointing to the moon. What is crucial about this
metaphor is that the finger and the moon are mutually reflexive. Without the finger, the moon would not be known. Without the moon, there would be no need for the finger pointing to it. The one is involved in the other. The finger and the moon are inseparable. In this sense, the ‘two truths’ may be called the ‘twofold truth’.

Thanks to sensitivities that Derrida’s texts have helped to develop, it is possible to understand Nagarjuna’s Buddhist tradition as a history of this struggle between deconstructive delimitation and metaphysical re-appropriation, between a message that undermines all security by undermining the sense-of-self that seeks security, and a countervailing tendency to dogmatize and institutionalize that challenge.

According to this version of deconstruction, however, Derrida’s approach is still logocentric, for what need to be deconstructed are not just language but the world one lives in and the way one lives in it, trapped within a cage of one’s own making, bound by one’s own rope. The consequence of this struggle has been self-consciousness about those _aporias_ of negative theology that Derrida points out; the secret society’s secret is that there is no secret.

All these aspects are to be found in Nagarjuna, but, rather than being tendencies that need to be exposed, the history of Nagarjuna’s thought is the
history of making these problems central and deconstructing them by revealing the
logocentricity that motivates them. Nagarjuna’s Buddhist philosophy has been
preoccupied with refuting any tendency to postulate a transcendental-signified,
including any ‘hyperessentialism.’

Nagarjuna himself emphasized that he had no secret, although that did not
stop later generations from attributing one to him. Thus both Nagarjuna and
Derrida share similar view stating that they do not have any secrets to reveal.
Through this one could easily understand how Derrida’s thoughts mirror his
pioneer Nagarjuna.

The researcher’s juxtaposing of Nagarjuna and Derrida helps to highlight
aspects of the similarities which would help to prove that Nagarjuna is really the
pioneer of Derrida’s thought. In certain sense Derrida is seen to agree with
Nagarjuna. Like Derrida, Nagarjuna was also charged of being nihilistic.
Nagarjuna’s negative dialectics is not a mere nihilism which engulfs all entities in
its universal darkness, abolishing all differences and particularities. On the
contrary, it is the fountainhead from which the Buddha’s compassionate activity
flows out. Once the summit is reached, differentiation and discrimination occur
again.

The positive aspect of Nagarjuna’s negative dialectics is the ‘differentiation
and discrimination’ and ‘all differences and particularities’, is indispensable for
understanding the negative aspects. An attempt has been made to absolve the nihilistic charges against both of Derrida and Nagarjuna. This similar criticism on both the thinkers could be taken as a proof for Nagarjuna being really the forefather of Derrida’s negative dialectics.

Thus this initial comparative study of Derrida and Nagarjuna with special focus on their life and their times and through elaborate discussion on the evolution of each other’s negative dialectics has proven to be stimulating and fruitful in trying to establish Nagarjuna as Derrida’s forefather. Further this chapter has also tried to identify points of formal and at times substantive contact or link between Derrida’s thinking and Nagarjuna’s negative arguments.

Thus the parallel study of Derrida’s and Nagarjuna’s concepts really brings out how Derrida’s deconstructive thought has its roots in Nagarjuna who could be considered the forefather of Jacques Derrida and his Deconstruction. Nagarjuna and Derrida did employ the same negative logical strategy and negative arguments. Nagarjuna’s central concept sunyata is equivalent with Derrida’s différence. The next chapter entitled ‘Derrida’s Différence and Nagarjuna’s Sunyata’ would further focus on the crucial philosophies of both the thinkers in furthering the quest.