PRELIMINARY

Importance and Statement of Problem

Often referred to as “the second Buddha” by Tibetan and East Asian Mahayana (Great Vehicle) traditions of Buddhism, Nagarjuna offered sharp criticisms of Brahminical and Buddhist substantialist philosophy, theory of knowledge, and approaches to practice. Nagarjuna’s philosophy represents something of a watershed not only in the history of Indian philosophy but 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. 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 Buddhist 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, Tibet, China and Japan very different from Nagarjuna’s own. Indeed it would not be an overstatement to say that Nagarjuna’s innovative concept of emptiness, though it was hermeneutically appropriated in many different ways by subsequent philosophers in both South and East Asia, was to profoundly influence the character of Buddhist thought.

**Objective**

The goal of this thesis is to expound and present Buddhist metaphysical concept and its possibilities with special reference to Nagarjuna’s *Mulamadhyamakakarika* in as clear and concise a manner as possible. This treatise is the premier work both of Nagarjuna and of the
Madhyamika School of Buddhism as a whole. It includes all of the main themes of the school, serves as a model for the school’s method of argumentation, and it is the focus of the subsequent history of the school.

This is not to ignore the epistemological phase of the school, since the theory of reality is only meaningful in the context of epistemology. Any metaphysical discussion on the matter should be meaningful in the context of epistemology. Hence an attempt is made to deal with epistemological aspect of the school also along with our discussion on Buddhist metaphysics.

**Hypothesis**

The hypothesis of this thesis is that the Mulamadhyamakakarika of Nagarjuna, who is the master of paradox and apophatic of Buddhism, can present the Buddhist metaphysical standpoint.

**Methodology**

This thesis is based on the information culled out from the relevant works of Nagarjuna and Madhyamika school of Buddhism which are cited in the footnote as well as in the bibliography. Mainly three methods are employed in preparing this thesis viz., analytical, comparative and critical method. The analytical method is employed in that an attempt to
analyze the concept of Buddhist metaphysics made in this dissertation and these concepts are presented in a systematic manner. The method is also comparative in that incidental comparison of the metaphysical concept of Madhyamika School with the other schools is made in order to have a systematic view of the problem. The method is also critical in that the thesis tries to show merit as well as demerits, if any, in the Buddhistic concepts cited above.

For the methodology of exploratory the karika, there is no such easy and apparent way to examine the karika. Most of the modern commentators have chosen to approach the karika by examining in segregation of the wider topics with which it deals, such as self or dependent arising, and drawing quotation and samples from all sessions of the work and from works of the others to elucidate each topic. Other modern experts have taken the selection only one subject of Madhyamika to the analysis, such as non-substantiality, or take only one methodology into consideration, such as the use of dialectic in the karikas.

Such methods appear to be unsatisfied for the current analysis of Madhyamika because only the karikas are the focus here in this study, not the range of Madhyamika as a whole. Efforts have also been made to classify the sections of the karika into larger groupings of various chapters and indicate the extensive themes which Nagarjuna seemingly
had in mind within each section. This methodology can also be ambiguous and has no definitive validity; eventually it may disclose little more than the explanatory bias of the translator.

The most productive approach in the current framework will be first to present in summary form the scope and thoughts of the karika itself and subsequently to deliberate its wider philosophical meaning and possible intent. However, there are two important points to be noted in this context. One, it will not be possible to present the thought of Nagarjuna as a whole. Other of his works show different sides of his thought and character and provide fruit for differing interpretations of his place in the broad spectrum of Buddhist thought. For example, the karika makes almost no mention of any of the themes which came to be emblematic of the Mahayana. The second point to be noted is that presentations of his concepts could often be made clearer by recourse to other of his or his follower’s works. It will be responded that these two drawbacks are not debilitating, and may not even be handicaps. An exposition of solely the karika can be defended because this work is truly the cornerstone of the entire subsequent Madhyamika School in all of its variety. The karika is the vitalizing influence of Madhyamika and all the main themes of the school are to be found in it.
A Brief Survey of Literature

Mulamadhyamakakarika is the most important of Nagarjuna’s texts. It is the subject of major commentaries by the Indian scholars Buddhapalita, Bhavaviveka, Avalokitavrata, and Candrakirti, and many more commentaries in Tibet\(^1\). It is cited widely in subsequent Buddhist literature, and debates about how to interpret it define differences between major Buddhist philosophical schools. It has been translated not only into all non-Indian Mahayana canons, but also a number of times into Western languages, with five English translations appearing in the last few decades. It is, however, a very difficult text to read and to interpret, and modern interpreters differ among themselves about the correct way to read it at least as much as canonical interpreters.

The karika consists of 27 chapters which embraces of 450 critical verses in total. These stanzas have been preserved in the form of twenty-seven short chapters, each stanza dealing with one topic. The chapter arrangement in which the text is preserved is possibly a later formalization, most likely by Candrakirti.\(^2\)

The stanzas are written in an precise manner metered from which was the primary of classical Sanskrit composition. Each stanza consists of

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\(^2\) Ibid., pp 23.
two lines of exactly sixteen syllables each which, while not rhyming, are very poetic and rhythmic when read aloud or chanted. Nagarjuna was not merely a thoughtful philosopher. He was a monk, and the purpose of monasticism was to expedite meditation and traveling the path to enlightenment. This work was surely proposed to be an assistance in meditation. One could memorize the karika and meditation it by contemplating one stanza at a time. The stanza were not intended to be straightforward elucidations of a philosophical position, but rather were meant to lighten, in a concise and often aphoristic manner, certain accurate aspects of the Buddha’s teaching about the nature of reality and the appropriate path. Though the meaning of the stanza is usually flawless, there are many that challenge the interpretation, some stanzas apparently make no effort to explicate a philosophical theory but instead target to incite an immediate transcendence of conceptual limitations.

The early chapters of the Mulamadhyamakakarika (Chapter 1-12), deal mostly with basic metaphysical categories like causation, time, and agency. In general, they are relating to questions regarding the basic categories of Indian philosophy, trying to establish what are the conditions necessary for these concepts to be coherent and non-contradictory.
In the later chapters (Chapter 13-27), Nagarjuna begins to move slowly away from simply negating others' concepts and beings to put forward some assertions of his own. In these chapters, Nagarjuna puts forth his boldest reasoning, including such assertions as the emptiness of all things, the identity of pratityasamutpada with sunyata, the indifferentiability of nirvana from samsara and the tentative or merely conventional nature of all truth. These chapters are as follows:

1. Analysis of conditions
2. Analysis of going and not going
3. Analysis of the eye and the other sense-organs
4. Analysis of the skandhas (mental aggregates)
5. Analysis of the dhatus (constituents or strata the sense of metaphysical substrata)
6. Analysis of passion and the impassioned
7. Analysis of the conditioned
8. Analysis of action and actor
9. Analysis of the past
10. Analysis of fire and fuel
11. Analysis of past and future limits
12. Analysis of suffering
13. Analysis of disposition
14. Analysis of admixture
15. Analysis of being or essence
16. Analysis of bondage and liberation
17. Analysis of action and its fruit
18. Analysis of the soul.
19. Analysis of time
20. Analysis of holism
21. Analysis of becoming and un-becoming
22. Analysis of the Tathagata
23. Analysis of Error
24. Analysis of the Noble Truths
25. Analysis of nirvana
26. Analysis of the twelvefold chain (of dependent origination)
27. Analysis of views

Chapterization

The thesis consists of eight chapters. The inceptioal and the second chapters are purely introductory. It states the Buddha and His Teaching in the early Buddhism context. It also deals with early Buddhist Metaphysics. The aim of this chapter is to critically examine the metaphysical concept from Buddhistic perspective.
The third chapter aims to expound the philosophy of Madhyamika School of Buddhism as the philosophical background to the study of Mulamadhyamakakarika.

The fourth chapter focuses on Nagarjuna’s cardinal philosophical concepts and his philosophical positions. Here the study aims to expound the Buddhistic metaphysical standpoint presented by Nagarjuna.

The fifth, sixth and seventh chapters are the metaphysical analysis of the Mulamadhyamakakarika. Their aim is to systematically expound the Buddhist Metaphysics presented in the text.

The concluding chapter aims to state the finding of this study.