CHAPTER IV

A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE SELF IN LATER BUDDHISM
The later Buddhist thought, which represents the third phase in the development of Buddhism (the first and the second phases are represented by, (1) doctrines of the Buddhism as described in canonical and (2) in semi-canonical and other texts like the Milindapañha), belongs mostly to the Mahāyāna tradition of Buddhism. The Mahāyāna itself may be said to have branched out of Hīnayāna Buddhism. As is well-known, the Mahāyāna (which literally means the Great Vehicle) represents a profound humanism marked by a spirit of brotherhood and liberal outlook, whereas the Hīnayāna (or the Smaller Vehicle) is characterised by stringency of rules, narrowness of outlook and strictness and rigidity in the interpretation of early Buddhist texts. The Mahāyāna paved the way towards constructing a philosophical outlook full of deeper insights into the structure of the universe and of dharma, and a speculative side of the Mahāyāna can rightly be accorded recognition as representing the highest aim of metaphysics. The subtlety of the Mahāyāna thought is compared very often with similar tendencies in other systems of Indian and Western thought, like the Advaita
The process of transition from the Hinayana to the Mahayana may be said to have been initiated just after the Mahaparinirvāṇa of the Buddha and continued during the first six centuries of the Christian era. The transition from the narrow self-enclosed doctrine of the Hinayana to a logical and systematic exposition of the metaphysical implications of the original ideas of the Buddha, is quite unique in the history of Indian thought and comparable only to the transition from the Vedas to the Vedānta in orthodox Indian philosophy. E.J. Thomas speaks of two impulses preparing the favourable ground for the evolution of Mahāyāna:

"One impulse came from the religious enthusiasm of the bodhisattva ideal. Another lay in the new treatment of the ontological doctrines latent in the dogmas of impermanence and of the non-existence of a self."  

During the course of its growth and development many changes crept into the Mahāyāna doctrine, but the

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1 For instance, Murti and Raju compare Nāgārjuna with Śāṅkara and Radhakrishnan compared him with David Hume. Vijnānavāda is compared to the thought of William James and Bergson by Radhakrishnan.

three main tenets of early Buddhism as found in the
dialogues of the Buddha (viz., i. that all is transitory,
ii. that every thing is suffering and iii. that there is
no self) were also to be found in later Buddhism in a
more thorough and systematic form. The doctrine of
causality is also developed to a greater degree of
consistency in the metaphysical schools of Mahāyāna. It
may, therefore, be said that most of the ideas of the
doctrine of Mahāyāna are traceable to early Buddhism of
the dialogues of the Buddha, where they are found in an
organised and consistent manner. It may be recalled that
the Buddha himself was silent on many of these basic
questions, thus suggesting many possible interpretations
of his views. The Mahāyāna, therefore, sought to integrate
some of these ideas in a well-knit system. The Hīnayāna
does not go into the logical and metaphysical implications
of the doctrine of the Buddha to such an extent as the
Mahāyāna. Four important views support this contention.
Poussin remarks:

"The theories of the Mahāyāna are only adaptations
of the Hīnayāna and that there is really no
Protestantism in the history of Buddhism."³

Radhakrishnan declares:

³Quoted by N. Dutt in Aspects of Mahāyāna Buddhism
"The philosophical atheism of the Hinayana is the skeleton in the box, the diseased worm in the beautiful flower. The wronged sides of human nature asserted their rights and rebelled against the cold understanding with an imperious violence which was as tyrannical and exclusive as that of understanding had been."\(^4\)

Raju observes:

"The doctrines of the Mahayana are all found in the Hinayana; but they are found scattered, some in one school, some in another. It has to be admitted that the Hinayanaists did not see the full significance of these doctrines and their inter-relations. But the schools of the Mahayana had deeper insights into them and built them up into an organic whole."\(^5\)

Murti is also of the same opinion:

"It was a revolution in Buddhism, and is in a sense the re-affirming of the oldest and central teaching of Buddha."\(^6\)

\(^4\) S. Radhakrishnan, op. cit., p. 589.


Mahāyāna being humanistic, is not the belief of a few individuals, not just the elite or the intelligentsia; nevertheless it represents a profound and high degree of conceptualization. In other words, on the one hand, the Mahāyāna is firm in its appeal to the masses and still on the other hand, it develops metaphysical doctrines which could only be regarded as expressions of a very acute intellect.

The literature of later Buddhism is very vast and in this modest work it would not be possible to give an account of the different facets of the Mahāyāna doctrine. Therefore, in order only to give a consistent and historical account of the doctrine of the self, we shall only consider the main Mahāyāna texts.

The Ratnakūṭa is commonly regarded as the earliest Mahāyāna text, which consists of 49 sūtras. Most of the sūtras of this important text have been lost, but four fragments are known to us in Sanskrit. The Kāśyapa Parivarta is one of them and it deals with the doctrine of Śūnyatā, ideal of bodhisattva and the nature of the anitya (the impermanent), Ātmā or the self and nairatmya or not-self. The sūtra says:

7"The Chinese and Tibetan books agree in giving the Kāśyapa Parivarta as section 43 of Ratnakūṭa." Winternitz, op. cit., p. 329.
"That every thing is permanent" is one extreme; 
'that everything is transitory' is another....
'that ātman is' (ātmeti) is one end (antaḥ);
'that the ātman is not' is another; but the 
middle between the ātma and nairātmya views 
is the Inexpressible.... It is the reflective 
review of things (dharmāṇām, bhūta-pratyavekṣā)."8

The doctrine of the self found in the Kāśyapa
Parivarta (Ratnakūta) is likely to recall the account of 
the same doctrine in canonical and semi-canonical literature. 
The attitude to the self is not so extreme as that of the 
Milindapañha or of the later Mādhyamika Kārikā. A.K. 
Warder confirms this:

"The main innovation to note is that 'soul' 
seems here to be no more (and no less) false 
a conception than 'non-soul': the question of 
the soul or self or person is apparently 
placed on the same level as the existence of 
'phenomena' (dharmas)."9

In Mahāyāna Buddhism Prajñāpāramitā sūtras10 can

Originally from the Kāśyapa Parivarta (Ed. by Baron A. 


10"Prajñāpāramitā means both the perfection of 
"Wisdom" and "the writings treating of it". Winternitz, 
idem p. 313 n.
be regarded as the most important texts. The six pāramitās (virtues) of the bodhisattva are, charity (dana), morality (śīla), tolerance (kṣānti), intrepidity (vīrya), meditation (dhyāna) and wisdom (prajñā). As in Advaita school of Vedānta which regards jñāna as the highest path towards liberation, the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras also regard prajñā or wisdom as the highest of all the pāramitās leading to the true knowledge of the ultimate which is described as Śūnya, denying both being as well as not-being. It is this aspect of Prajñāpāramitā that is developed by Nāgārjuna into a system of dialectics. In this respect the Mādhyamika doctrine comes nearer to


\[\text{\footnotesize 13The popular Prajñāpāramitā literature consists of Śatasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā, Āṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā, Saptasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā, the larger Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya sūtra, the smaller Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya sūtra, and the Vaijračchedikā. Of these, Āṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā is considered to be the oldest and other Prajñāpāramitās are based on it.}\]
Prajñāpāramitās than the Vijnānavāda. In fact, Haribhadra
who comments on Abhisamayālaṅkāra and the Aṣṭasāhasrikāpra-
jñāpāramitā, even criticises Vijnānavāda as akin to the
Māya\textsuperscript{14} doctrine of Advaitins. This may be a little far-
fetched, because Vijnānavāda in Yogācāra Buddhism is not
a negative concept like Māya. Moreover, Māya represents
the objective in experience whereas, Vijnānavāda represents
the subjective. But it is true that Prajñāpāramitā\textsuperscript{15} are
only remotely, if at all, connected with Vijnānavāda.

Thus the main purpose of Prajñāpāramitā literature
may be said to be the exposition and popularisation of
the theories of Śūnyatā (translated as the 'void') and
niḥsvabhāvatā (devoid of real nature). The treatment of
the theory of no-self\textsuperscript{16} (nairātmyavāda) has been done on
the basis of niḥsvabhāvatā (devoid of real nature). The
self is regarded as an appearance, devoid of any true
nature of its own and thus comes at the doctrine of
the non-existence of all dharmas (conceptual objects).

\textsuperscript{14} "... Māyopamādvaya vijñānamātraprabandhamāsādayanti

\textsuperscript{15} Unfortunately a critical study of the
Prajñāpāramitās has not yet been made. It is, therefore,
difficult to say exactly what the main import of these
works is.

\textsuperscript{16} Cf. "One should not perceive a 'self', 'a being,
a living soul, or a person'." Edward Conze (ed. and tr.),
The Prajñāpāramitā disputes the reality of both the subjective and objective spheres of existence. Worldly phenomena are declared as relative, conditional and dependent. And being conditional they are devoid of absolute reality and hence regarded as Śūnya. Reality, therefore, is above annihilation, change, production and cessation. None of these categories of characterisation is applicable to the worldly phenomena. The ontological existence of skandhas (aggregates), dhātus (elements) and āyatanas (sense-data) is not only challenged but also refuted. They fall within the ken of empirical truth (saṃvṛti), but from the transcendental (paramārtha) viewpoint they are non-existent. The Prajñāpāramitās discuss the two aspects of truth: Saṃvṛti (empirical or relative) and Paramārtha (absolute) which the Mādhyāmikas developed in their system as one of the central doctrines.

17"There are the five skandhas, and these he considered as by their nature empty (phenomenal)." F. Max Müller (tr.), The Larger Prajñāpāramitāpradīpa, Buddhist Mahāyāna Texts, S.B.E. Vol. 49 (Reprint, Delhi, 1968), p. 147.

18"... saṃvṛti paramārtha satyāśreyena..." G. Tucci (ed.), op. cit., p. 5.

19Nāgārjuna says categorically that those who cannot distinguish between these truths cannot grasp the significance of Buddhist thought:

"ye'nauorna vijñānanti vibhāgāṃ satyayor dvayoḥ; te tattvam na vijñānanti gambhīram buddhaśāsane." MŚ, XXIV, 9, p. 215.
On this point we postpone the discussion to later pages.

In short, the *Prajñāparamitā* paves the way for the development of the later doctrine of Mādhyamikavāda. The opinions of scholars confirms this. C.H.S. Ward remarks:

"They were written with the express purpose of establishing the dogma of Śūnyatā, and of winning over the Hīnayānists to Mahāyānists."\(^\text{20}\)

Murti confirms this:

"With the *Prajñāparamitās* an entirely new phase of Buddhism begins. A severe type of Absolutism established by the dialectic, by the negation (Śūnyatā) of all empirical notions and speculative theories, replaces the pluralism and dogmatism of the earlier Buddhism. The *Prajñāparamitās* revolutionised Buddhism, in all aspects of philosophy and religion, by the basic concept of Śūnyatā."\(^\text{21}\)

There are other texts of Mahāyāna Buddhism (e.g. *Gaṇḍavyūha, Daśabhūmikāsūtra, Smādhirāja, Laṅkāvatāra, Saddharmapuṇḍarīka, Tathāgataaguhyaka, Lalitavistara* and *Suvarnaprabhāsa*) which echo the views of the *Prajñāparamitās*, regarding Śūnyatā, the insubstantiality of the world of experience, the unreality of the soul and other allied

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\(^{21}\) T.P.V. Murti, *Buddhism in India*, p. 83.
doctrines. It may not be necessary to consider them in detail in this short work. Moreover, an account of this doctrine as described by these texts would be a repetition of what we have already stated. But in an account of later Buddhism, we must discuss the views of the great philosopher Aśvaghosa.

Aśvaghosa was a great poet, dramatist and philosopher. He presented a systematic exposition of the Mahāyāna doctrine. Many works have been ascribed to him. But we shall take only three of his important works into consideration, as relevant to our main purpose i.e. the Buddhacarita, the Saundarananda Kāvya and the Mahāyānaśraddhotpāda. The authenticity of some of his works is disputed, but not of the Buddhacarita and the Saundarananda Kāvya.

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22 The other famous works ascribed to Aśvaghosa are: Vajrasūci, Gandistotragāthā, Śāriputraprakārṇa and Sūtrālaṅkāra.

23 Winternitz doubts the authenticity of this work and remarks: "It is attributed to Aśvaghosa, but cannot possibly have been written by the poet of the Buddhacarita. It must remain an open question whether it was attributed to the great poet with a view to securing a greater reputation for the book, or whether there was an Aśvaghosa II in about 5th century A.D., who wrote this philosophical work, which gives evidence of an advanced stage of development of Mahāyāna philosophy." Winternitz, op. cit., p. 361. Aneski is also of opinion that the author of the Buddhacarita and that of the Awakening of the Faith were two different persons. M. Aneski, "Aśvaghosa", E.R.E. Vol. 2, ed. James Hastings (Latest Imp. Edinburgh, 1971), p. 159.
The Buddhacarita is a complete biographical account of the life-history of the Buddha. Though its Chinese and Tibetan versions consist of 28 cantos, the original Sanskrit text contains only 17 cantos out of which only 13 are considered the work of Aśvaghoṣa. The Nepalese author Amritānanda confesses to adding the remaining four. The Buddhacarita is a Mahākāvyā or an epic poem written in the very ornate style. Apart from its biographical importance, Aśvaghoṣa's work Buddhacarita has also dealt with some of the major doctrines of Mahāyāna. The important doctrines of skandhas (aggregates), pratityasamutpāda (causation or dependent origination) and anātman (denial of the self) have been discussed in the sixteenth canto of this text. Regarding skandhas, Buddha's views are put in the form of an address to the assembly of Maitreyas.

"This body composed of the five skandhas, and produced from the five elements, is all empty and without soul, and arises from the action of the chain of causation."  

So also the doctrine of causation:

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"This chain of causation is the cause of coming into existence, and the cessation of the series thereof is the cause of the state of cessation." 26

Similarly, every worldly phenomenon governed by the doctrine of causation is merely an illusion, a phantom, a mirage, a dream, an echo or like the reflection of the moon seen in the water, which has impermanent and non-eternal existence. 27

Having described the unreality of human existence full of sufferings and misery, Buddha while addressing a congregation of Maitreys, tells the ways and means of producing the cessations of being. One of these consists in realising the truth of the doctrine of skandhas, pratityasamutpāda and anatmavāda (doctrine of no-self). In order to achieve liberation from temporal existence one should realise the importance of the virtue of self-denial:

"Let him embrace the vow of self-denial for

26 Ibid., XVI-29, p. 177.

27 Ibid., XVI-57, p. 131. Cf. "Like a mirage in the air, so is a variety of things mere appearance; they are seen in diversity of forms, but are like a child in a barren woman's dream." D.T. Suzuki (tr.), The Lankāvatāra Sūtra (Reprint, London, 1956), p. 84.
the sake of wisdom, and practise the four perfections, and go through existence always doing good to all beings."\(^{28}\)

Self-denial is also self-culture and cultivation of stoic virtues of equanimity, generosity, compassion and sympathy.

Regarding the agencies or the origin of actions Aśvaghosha poses a problem which is sometimes seen as the difficulty both of the doctrine of karma as well as of anatmavāda (denial of self):

"If karman is said to be the cause of our actions, who would imagine cogency in this assumption? If all the world is produced spontaneously, who then would talk of the ownership of actions?"\(^{29}\)

Aśvaghosha’s description of the wheel of Law has also been linked with the doctrine of the self:

"The wheel of the Law is described as without end or middle, existing apart from "it is" or "it is not", separated from soul or soullessness."\(^{30}\)


\(^{29}\)Ibid., XVI-21, p. 176.

\(^{30}\)Ibid., XVI-59, p. 181.
The events in the world then have an order of their own. They are ends in themselves, there is no need to ask for the agent of events or happenings. Thus the reality of God as the prime mover of the world or of the self as the agent of the moral actions is denied categorically. The realisation that Dharma or the Wheel of Law as ultimate reality is, therefore, inseparably connected with the central doctrines of Buddhism: denial of the reality of God and of the soul.

Aśvaghosa's *Saundarāṇanda Kāvyā* is somewhat like *Buddhacarita* and is written in ornate poetic style. It is a story of handsome Nanda, the step-brother of the Buddha who was too involved in temporal life and was persuaded by the Buddha to become a monk.

In cantos 13 and 17 of this work, the popular doctrines of Mahāyāna Buddhism are expounded. Nanda here is presented as full of insuperable compassion and he probes into the unfathomable depths of his heart to find out some means to get other fellow beings liberated from the sufferings and misery of the empirical world, where everything is transient, impermanent, ūṇya (devoid of reality), full of suffering and soulless.

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32 Ibid., XVII, 16-17, pp. 126-27.
The doctrine of impermanence of the world and the doctrine of the unreality of the self as expounded in this work resembles the ideas of canonical Buddhism.

Without going into the controversy regarding its authenticity, we shall next consider Mahāyānaśraddhotpāda Śāstra attributed to Aśvaghoṣa. Only the Chinese version of this text is now available, the original Sanskrit version being lost. D.T. Suzuki has translated the Chinese text into English under the title "The Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna". As the title indicates, the great metaphysical doctrines of Mahāyāna are expounded in this text. The doctrine of 'Bhūtatathatā' is explained here. Reality is regarded as Tathā or "Suchness". Only thus can reality be characterised. It is identical with the ultimate truth of the Śūnyatā as opposite to the relative truth of empirical existence. Yamakami Sogen in trying to explain the concept of Bhūtatathatā, remarks:

"Bhūtatathatā literally signifies "suchness of existence", which is synonymous with paramārtha satya or 'transcendental truth' from the ontological point of view. In this school of Buddhist philosophy, noumenon and phenomenon are considered closely related and inseparable, bearing the same relation to each other as
In Mahāyānaśraddhotpāda itself, the following definition is given of the Bhūtatathatā:

"Bhūtatathatā implies oneness of the totality of things or dharmadhātu — the great all-including whole, the quintessence of the doctrine. For the essential nature of the soul is uncreated and eternal."

So in the form of ultimate existence the reality is regarded as Bhūtatathatā, in the form of Spirit it is called Bodhi, prajñā, or as Yogācāra philosophy characterises it, ālayavijñāna — a homogenous organised whole of consciousness. It is called Dharmakāya or Dharmadhātu when it expresses the ultimate coherent order of reality and it is Tathāgatagarbha when it possesses the infinite qualities of beatitude. Thus all these names for one and the same thing — Nirvāṇa, Bodhi, Dharmakāya, Tathāgatagarbha, paramārtha satya etc., they all represent the transcendental truth as opposed to the empirical worldly phenomena constituted by births, deaths and suffering. In the transcendental state, the self is

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33 Yamakami Sogen, Systems of Buddhistic Thought (Calcutta, 1912), p. 252.

34 D.T. Suzuki (tr.), Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna (Chicago, 1900), pp. 55-56. (Also quoted by Sogen, op. cit., p. 255).
naturally dissolved into nothingness — to the focal point of existence or to transcendence. The notion of \( \text{Bhūtatathatā} \) is beyond all determinations and limitations of space and time. Thus the soul which represents the quintessence of the phenomenal world must also be distinguished. But Yamakami Sogen, however, thinks that the ultimate state of \( \text{Bhūtatathatā} \) (suchness) is itself the quintessence of the soul, which in phenomenal existence appears to separate itself into separate existent individuals:

"We must not search for it in heaven, nor in far away places, for it is within us. For the essential nature of our mind is the soul as such (bhūtatathatā), though it appears to have a separate individuality on account of our confused mentality."\(^{35}\)

At this point, it may be necessary to remark that the interpretations of Buddhism are even more confusing than the texts themselves. Sometimes scholars try to read their own ideas into the texts; thus Yamakami Sogen is a typical instance of such scholars. For instance he makes the following astonishing remark:

"The fundamental thought of Mahāyāna consists of the idea of the identity between the real

\[^{35}\text{Yamakami Sogen, } \text{Systems of Buddhistic Thought} \text{ (Calcutta, 1912), p. 256.} \]
and the unreal. To speak in more philosophical terms, the phenomenal and the noumenal are the same and identical."\(^{36}\)

A reading of the text carefully does not reveal any such identity between the phenomenal and the noumenal. Similarly, B.\(^{3}\). Oberlin makes the following astounding comparison in his famous work *The Buddhist Sects of Japan*:

"The Bhūtatathatā of Buddhism is, after all, almost identical with the substance of Spinoza, the absolute idea of Hegel, the will of Schopenhauer and the non-conscient of Hartmann."\(^{37}\)

Here many different views as that of Spinoza, Schopenhauer, Hegel and Hartmann are bundled together without realising the basic differences between the viewpoints. This only proves that scholars are to be careful not only in the study of the text, but also in making comparisons with the notable thinkers of Western thought.

According to *Mahāyānaśraddhāpāda Sūtra*, ignorant mentality leads to many pernicious results. It is only due to our mental ignorance that the phenomena seem to have independent existences. As soon as this ignorance is removed, all marks of separate and individual existence

\(^{36}\)Ibid., p. 270.

\(^{37}\)Quoted by P.T. Raju, op. cit., p. 237.
would vanish. Hence the distinction between empirical truth (ṣamvṛṭī satya) and ultimate truth (paramārtha satya) is quite rarely made out in this text.

In fact, almost all the important theories of Mahāyāna can be traced to Aśvaghoṣa. The doctrine of Śunya which is developed by the Mādhyamika school to its logical conclusion and the doctrine of Vijñāna or consciousness which forms the main theme of the Yogācāra school may also be said to be derived from Aśvaghoṣa's doctrine. In the first case, Aśvaghoṣa's characterisation of reality as indescribable can either be called Śunya or aŚunya (void or non-void) nor both, nor neither. The doctrine of reality in Yogācāra is more positive. It is difficult to say, however, which of the two schools comes first in the chronological order, since both the doctrines seem to have developed out of Aśvaghoṣa's works, so they may be regarded as contemporaneous, mutually acting and re-acting upon each other during the course of their development. But for the purpose of this dissertation we might take up the doctrine of the self according to Vijñānavāda, in the first instance, as there is a definite advance in Vijñānavāda from scepticism of early Buddhism to a positive theory of conscious states.

The basic doctrine of Vijñānavāda is that

38 D.T. Suzuki (tr.), *Awakening of Faith in Mahāyāna* (Chicago, 1900), p. 56.

39 The founder of Vijñānavāda or Yogācāra school is Asaṅga (or Āryasaṅga). It was systematically expounded
nothing exists beyond vijñāna or consciousness. The objective world is not real at all. It is merely an imposition of consciousness. The objects of the phenomenal world are regarded as merely states of consciousness—they are either perceived or thought of. The most important idea of Vijnānavāda is its conception of ālayavijñāna, translated by various interpreters as 'absolute consciousness', 'storehouse of ideas', 'stream of consciousness' and even 'universal mind'.

The Lankāvatāra Sūtra is the basic text of the Yogācāra school. Here is expounded the doctrine of citta or consciousness; nothing exists in universe except consciousness. Citta and vijñāna seem to be identical. It is regarded as the ultimate reality and is given the status of an Absolute Truth, this is the reason why

by Maitreyanātha and the system reached its climax in Vasubandhu (Asaṅga's younger brother). The school is called Yogācāra, since it lays stress on practising Yoga by observing mental discipline through ten stages or bhūmis for the realisation of Bodhi or Absolute Knowledge. It is called Vijnānavāda as it propounded the theory, "sarvam buddhimayam jagat" i.e. the whole universe is vijñāna or consciousness.


Cf. "In Buddhist Psychology, the same word is variously termed as "Cittam", "Manas", "Vijñāna". The three are the same in their origin, but are used differently to denote the three different aspects of cittam." Yamakami Sogen, op. cit., p. 218.
ālayavijnāna is translated as Absolute Consciousness and Universal Mind. The external objective world is a creation of the subjective reality of consciousness. Thus even consciousness has a phenomenal aspect, in as much as it creates the phenomenal world. Absolute consciousness or ālayavijnāna is purely subjective, a totality of sense impressions which may also be called Tathāgatagarbha. It must be remembered here that Vijñānavāda never deviates from the original empiricist position of Buddhism. Therefore, the translation of ālayavijnāna as a storehouse of thought impressions and its comparison with the Hegelian Absolute (which represents a rational system) or with Śaṅkara's conception of the Brahman is entirely off the mark. Ālayavijnāna, therefore, is a stream of consciousness in the sense that it is a continuous ever-changing stream of sense-impressions.

In Āṅgikavatara Sūtra, are considered not only psychological doctrines and their value to the general Buddhist theory of metaphysics and ethics, but terms like citta, vijñāna etc., are also considered with their

42Cf. "The Ālaya Vijñāna is like the Elan de Vie of Bergson, the Energy of Leibnitz, or the Unconscious of Von Hartmann." W.M. McGovern, An Introduction to Mahāyāna Buddhism (Varanasi, 1966), p. 15. Cf. also "But the Ālayavijnāna of the Yogācāra is not the same as that of Laṅkā and the Awakening of Faith. The former conceives the Ālaya to be purity itself with nothing defiled in it, whereas the Laṅkā and the Awakening make it the cause of purity and defilement." D.T. Suzuki (tr.), The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra (Reprint, London, 1956), p. xl.
ontological relevance. The doctrine of egolessness occupies an eminent place in the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra. In the very beginning of the Sūtra the negation of the ego is emphasised. "Here is carefully written down the Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra in which the Lord of Dharma discourses on the egolessness of all things."43 The unreality of personal ego and of individual objects is explained by the Buddha in chapter II of the Laṅkāvatāra, while replying to 108 questions raised by Mahāmati. The Blessed One explained the nature of two-fold egolessness: 'ego-lessness of person' (Pudgalanairatmya) i.e. there is no ego in the aggregates of skandhas, dhātus and āyatanas; 'ego-lessness of things' (Dharmanairatmya) i.e. no object contains citta, manas, manovijñāna and dharma or any ego substance.44 The denial of the selfhood of the worldly phenomena as explained in the Laṅkāvatāra is:

"That all things are devoid of self-nature means that there is a constant and uninterrupted becoming, a momentary change from one stage of existence to another,..."45

In a discourse on the Tathāgatagarbha and the ego, the

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43Ibid., p. 3.
44Ibid., pp. 60-62.
45Ibid., p. 67; cf. Ibid., pp. 77, 100.
Buddha refused outright to accept any similarity between the two, and he proclaimed that the doctrine of Tathāgata-garbha preached by him, is not the doctrine of ego, having a permanent character as erringly taught by the philosophers. The Tathāgatagarbha, being unoriginated and devoid of any qualities is beyond all limitations and determinations, and hence leads to bliss and enlightenment, which helps the ignorant beings to cast off the false notion of ego (considering it having a permanent reality). It is again emphasised that the doctrine of the Tathāgatagarbha is preached to awake the thinkers from the slumbers of wrong speculations regarding the ego and its liberation. Thus, Mahāmati is advised to make strenuous efforts to follow the teachings of the doctrines of egolessness and the Tathāgatagarbha.

In 'Sagāthakam' section (the authenticity of which is doubted by Suzuki) also the doctrine of the unreality of the self is expounded. Some of the passages may be quoted here:

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46 Ibid., p. 69.
47 Loc. cit.
48 Ibid., p. 70.
49 "It is probable that it was added later on into the text." Ibid., p. 226 foot note.
"The ego (atma) characterised with purity is the state of self-realisation; this is the Tathāgata's womb (garbha) which does not belong to the realm of the theorisers."

"Imagining that a melodious sound obtains in a lute, a conch-shell, or in a kettle-drum, the unintelligent thus seek something of an ego-soul within the skandhas."

"Those who hold the theory of non-ego are injurers of the Buddhist doctrines, they are given up to the dualistic views of being and non-being; ...."

"The doctrine of an ego-soul shines brilliantly like the rising of the world-end fire, wiping away the faults of the philosophers, burning up the forest of egolessness."

"Trying to seek in five ways for an ego-soul in the accumulation of the Skandhas, the unintelligent fail to see it, but the wise seeing it are liberated."

50 Ibid., Verse 746, p. 282.
51 Ibid., V. 757, p. 283.
52 Ibid., V. 765, p. 284.
53 Ibid., V. 766, p. 284.
54 Ibid., V. 768, p. 284.
The latter three stanzas clearly contradict the earlier two and make it obvious that they are interpolations. In so far as the views on the self in these three stanzas are concerned, they may be regarded as deviations from the general trend of Buddhist thought. Suzuki's views are considered by P.T. Raju to explain this contradiction of the passages quoted above:

"... that there was a trend developing within the thought of the Lāṅkāvatāra, namely, that, as the reality is Cittamātratā, it is somehow identical with the soul or self in essence. And probably the doctrine of self-realization is also connected with this view."\(^{55}\)

In our view, Suzuki's opinion that they are interpolations may be correct and Raju only confirms that during the course of development, the basic doctrine of the Lāṅkāvatāra is that reality is regarded as Cittamātrā. The Buddhist thinkers were influenced by the doctrine of the orthodox schools like the Sāmkhya and Vedānta\(^ {56}\) and hence this contradiction. In fact the gradual

\(^{55}\)P.T. Raju, op. cit., p. 261.

\(^{56}\)Cf. "The teaching is Vijnānavādin, yet in some points it seems to go beyond Asaṅga and to draw very near the teaching of the Vedānta, that human soul is God." J.N. Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India (Reprint, Delhi, 1967), p. 161.
assimilation of the Vedántic thought into Buddhism and vice versa may have even killed the conceptual uniqueness of Buddhist thought in the history of Indian philosophy.

The further development of the doctrine of the self is traceable to Asaṅga's celebrated work Mahāyānasūtrālāṃkāra. According to Asaṅga also, the absolute wisdom (bodhi) is the supreme reality, all other phenomena being illusory and relative are merely our conceptual impositions and hence are momentary by nature. Such an absolute wisdom is achievable only by the Buddhas. All the worldly manifestations are traceable to the citta (mind). In the awareness of the phenomenal character of the world and in the awareness that it is merely an appearance of name and form, one makes oneself stand on this sound footing of Cittamātrā or the absolute mind.

Winternitz doubts the authorship of the Mahāyānasūtrālāṃkāra and remarks: "In all probability, the text of the Mahāyāna-Sūtrālāṃkāra, which is composed of memorial verses (Kārikās), which was discovered by S. Levi and attributed to Asaṅga by the same scholar, is also the work of Maitreyanātha." Winternitz, op. cit., pp. 353-54.


Ibid., pp. 67, 149 f.

Ibid., p. 24.
Asaṅga makes use of the word Śūnya\textsuperscript{61} (perhaps he means by the word the unreality of the empirical world and not as the Mādhyamika philosophers hold, the unreality of every experience). He also mentions 'śuddhātmalābha'\textsuperscript{62} (realisation of one's pure self). This view can be reconciled with the view of pudgala

\textit{airātmya} (the theory of the unreality or insubstantiality of the ego), which is a fundamental doctrine of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Śuddhātman is the ego \textit{i.e.} above all defilements and limitations — this is the self to be realised. Śūnya here just means devoid of these limitations, which defile the self.

Another famous philosopher of this school is Vasubandhu, the younger brother of Asaṅga, a versatile genius coupled with his profound knowledge of all aspects of Buddhism and of the various schools of Indian philosophy, who has won admiration from all interpreters. His \textit{Abhidharmakośa} is a work of the early period of his development when he was influenced by Sautrāntikas. This outstanding work expounds the basic concepts of Buddhist philosophy, psychology and ethics. Sogen calls it a “stepping stone from the Hīnayāna to the Mahāyāna.”\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Abhidharmakośa}avvākhyā is a commentary on \textit{Abhidharmakośa} by Yaśomitra, which is the only text extent in Sanskrit.

\textsuperscript{61}Ibid., p. 37.
\textsuperscript{62}Loc. cit.
\textsuperscript{63}Yamakami Sogen, op. cit., p. 120.
and not the original Abhidharmakośa.

The basic idea regarding the doctrine of the self is that there is no ultimate reality and permanent soul. In this context there is a counter attack on Puggalavādins or those who believe in the permanent self. It is in the appendix (entitled pudgalaviniścayaḥ) to chapter VIII of the work that the doctrine of the unreality of the self has been expounded by a refutation of the other viewpoints. The heresy of the Vātsīputriya to consider the existence of the self either as identical or different from the body is denied by Vasubandhu. He has emphatically advocated the Buddhist denial of the existence of the self, which may be summed up in the following passage:

"Mere Elements exist! There is no Soul!
This stainless doctrine of the Buddhas,
In perfect argument exposed,
The Saint perceives in pure intuition.


Wrong, stubborn dogma he rejects,
Professed by blind heretics.
In perfect clearness of his sight,
He calmly wanders through these worlds
T'w'ards life's Repose Eternal.
Like a broad way in broad daylight
By rays of sun illuminated,
So is this Soullessness disclosed
By words of sunlike Buddhas....
The path is open to the wise,
T'is trodden by saints in thousands.
But simple people nonetheless,
Their sight obstructed by delusion
Do not perceive the glorious path,
Cannot conceive that there's no Soul."  

In Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi, which has two parts —
Vimśatikā and Triṃśikā, the doctrine of Vijñāna-mātrā
(pure consciousness) has been supported, but the existent
character of the objective world is denied. In Vimśatikā,
Vasubandhu tries to prove that the ultimate reality is
pure consciousness; 68 this he does by refuting the
arguments of his opponents. His doctrine of pure
consciousness (Vijñapti) has been elaborated further in

67 T. Stcherbatsky (tr.), op. cit., pp. 85-86.
68 S. Levi (ed.), Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi Vimśatikā
with Vasubandhu's own commentary (Paris, 1925), Kārikās
6-7.
Vijñaptimatratāsiddhi Trimsikā which deals with the evolution of the universe and the notion of Buddhi. It has also been emphasised in this work that the ātmā (or permanent soul), and dharma (objective phenomena) are merely the pariñāma (change) of consciousness (Vijñapti). The fundamental aim of the Viṃśatikā is to prove with the help of illustrations that consciousness which is sometimes equated with the enlightened wisdom (jñāna) is the only reality. This consciousness manifests itself in the pudgala — the subject, and the dharma — the object. Vasubandhu explains it metaphorically when he says that consciousness manifests itself in the outer worldly phenomena when it grows up out of its seed.

It is by this consciousness or the enlightened wisdom (jñāna) that one comes to know that there is neither personal ego, nor external worldly phenomena, since they are merely manifestations of Vijñapti or consciousness. Consciousness is, therefore, not identical with the self or the ego; it represents only a field where the subjective and the objective experiences are found as content. And consciousness, therefore, is not hypostatized into the self.


This view finds further support in a commentary on *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi* by Sthiramati, which explains that the main idea of Vasubandhu in writing *Trimśikā* was to give an exposition of pudgala-nairatmya and dharma-nairatmya, i.e., the exposition of the unreality of both the self and as well as that of the objective world.  

For the Yogācāra school vijnāna or consciousness is above all the determinations of subject and object. External physical phenomena have no existence apart from consciousness. The apparent objective world is merely a modification or manipulation of vijnāna and consists of perceptual data in a series. The Vijnānavādin analyses also dream perception like the Advaitins and on the analogy of dream perception where the objects are purely illusory, they regard also the objective world of consciousness as the projection of the perceptual processes.

Very often the Yogācāra point of view is compared with Berkeley's subjective idealism (among others also by Radhakrishnan). This is a mistake as the self of Berkeley is a hypostatized perceptual experience, for the Vijnānavādins it is not the self which is the ultimate reality but consciousness which is in series like a stream.

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72 Radhakrishnan, op. cit., p. 625.
and has sense aggregates. As Sarvasiddhāntasārasaṁgraha
says:

"What is the nature of consciousness is indeed indivisible, but by those whose vision is confused it seems to be, as it were, differentiated into the perceived object, the perceiving subject and the perception itself."

Again, "there exists in reality only one thing, and that is of the nature of the intelligent principle of consciousness, and its oneness is not destroyed by the varied character of its manifestation."

Thus the Yogācāra thought while making ālayavijñāna ultimate reality does not identify it with the self. Hence the Vijnānavādins do not deviate from one of the central doctrines of Buddhism that is the anātmavāda. In fact the ālayavijñāna is contrasted with the immutable Ātman which is non-existent. But the ālayavijñāna is continuous and ever-changing.

The analogy between the Upaniṣadic self and ālayavijñāna, therefore, appears to be far-fetched.

73 Quoted by Radhakrishnan, op. cit., p. 630.
74 As even in Kant the synthetic unity of consciousness is kept apart from the hypostatized self.
The Upaniṣadic self is an eternal, changeless, whereas the ālayavijñāna is ever-changing and there is nothing fixed about consciousness. The Lāṅkāvatāra Sūtra is of course confusing; there are portions of the work which suggest views similar to that of the Advaita, especially in its definition of ālayavijñāna\textsuperscript{75} and Tathatā\textsuperscript{76}. But as we have seen earlier the authenticity of some portions of the Lāṅkāvatāra can be doubted and many passages may have

\textsuperscript{75}The ālayavijñāna is described as immortal and permanent, which is above the duality of subject and object. D.T. Suzuki (tr.), op. cit., p. 38.

\textsuperscript{76}Tathatā or suchness is characterised as truth, reality, exact knowledge, self-substance, eternal and the unattainable. D.T. Suzuki (tr.), op. cit., p. 198. Radhakrishnan (op. cit., p. 643) rightly remarks that Yogācāra philosophers are too indefinite about the nature of the term ālayavijñāna. Sometimes the ālayavijñāna is identified with the sum-total of our sense perception and sometimes with the series of conscious states. It is also true that sometimes it is identified with hypothesized universal consciousness. But it appears that Radhakrishnan interprets the doctrine more like an Advaitin looking at Vijnānavāda from his own perspective. While it is true that vijnāna is essentially a psychological concept, the transition from the psychological to the logical self (which we find in Advaita) is not found in Vijnānavāda. The ālayavijñāna thus cannot be identified with the metaphysical Absolute as Radhakrishnan does. The Buddhist logicians Dīṇḍāgā and to a greater extent Dharmakīrti attempt, however, to make a transition from the psychological to the logical. Their speculations are more concerned with the problems of logic (specially their criticism of logical doctrines of the Nyāya school of realism). The underlying assumptions of Dharmakīrti's logic, however, are the basic doctrines of kṣaṇikavāda and anātma-vāda. On this controversy please see D.N. Shastri, Critique of Indian Realism (Agra, 1963), and J.N. Sinha, Indian Realism (London, 1939).
been influenced by the later Advaita doctrine. However, one wishes that the Yogācāra philosophers were not clear about ālayavijñāna and its distinction from the empirical self. No doubt Asaṅga and Vasubandhu clearly declared the unreality of the empirical self. It will be neither correct to identify vijñāna with consciousness which is neither subjective nor objective, neither self nor not-self, but a neutral ever-changing field of empirical content. Thus Buddhism as a philosophy of change finds its fullest metaphysical expression in the doctrine of ālayavijñāna and in Śūnyavāda, which we will consider now.

The Vijñānavāda declared that all external objects and the apparent worldly phenomena have no reality, vijñāna being the only reality; nothing exists except consciousness. This position leads naturally to a self-contradiction because consciousness is a fixed element; it is never experienced in reality. It is an abstraction out of the series of momentary experiences, without logically justifiable links. These paradoxes in such abstractions have been exposed both in Indian and Western thought, in the latter by Zeno, Hume, Kant etc. This is the starting point of the Mādhyamika system, which may

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be regarded as the highest development of the Mahāyāna thought. In many respects, the Mādhyamika system is true to the original spirit of the Buddha’s teachings, for the doctrine of momentariness is central to all his thought: the universe is devoid of any permanent character and there is no absolute whatsoever; everything is essenceless; all is void (sarvam śūnyam).

Nāgārjuna the main exponent of Śūnyavāda was a great Buddhist dialectician. He is regarded by almost every student of Indian thought as a systematizer and as one of the most outstanding philosophers of India. In the spirit of the Buddha who had characterised himself as an exponent mainly of ethical teachings — called the Middle Way (the Madhyamāpratipad) because of its metaphysically neutral position, Nāgārjuna also adopted an intermediary course between extreme metaphysical affirmation and extreme metaphysical negation and gave the name Mādhyamika to his system. His most important

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80 Numerous works are attributed to Nagarjuna, but according to Bostun’s History of Buddhism, Vol. I (tr. from the Tibetan by Dr. E. Obermiller, Heidelberg, 1931, pp. 50 f), six main texts are ascribed to him: 1. Prājñāmūla, 2. Śūnyatāsaptati, 3. Yuktisāstikā, 4. Vīgrahavārvāntari, 5. Vaidalyasūtra and Prakaraṇa, and 6. Vyavahārasiddhi. Other works ascribed to Nāgārjuna by tradition are: Suhrlekha, Ratnāvali, Catuhstava, etc. Nāgārjuna also wrote a commentary on his Mulamadhyamaka Kārikā which is preserved in Tibetan only.
work Mūlamadhyamaka Kārikā also known as the Mādhyamika Kārikā or the Madhyamakaśāstra, is an authoritative work of this school. At the very beginning of the Madhyamakaśāstra, there is a description of eight negations. There is no annihilation, no origination, no negation, no eternality, no similarity to itself, no differentiation, no going in and no going out. These negations are applied by him to all the empirical phenomena which are Śūnya (or void) by virtue of their relative character. His dialectic reminds us of the English philosopher F.H. Bradley, who like him was a successor to the empiricist tradition, and at the same time employed a dialectic to refute all empirical reality. Nāgārjuna too, distinguishes between the empirical (samvṛti) and the transcendental (paramārtha). The idea of something produced from nothing is rejected by him:

"There absolutely are no things, Nowhere and none, that arise (anew), Neither out of themselves, nor out of non-self, Nor out of both, nor at random."  

\[81\] Th. Stcherbatsky, The Conception of Buddhist Nirvāṇa along with the Sanskrit text and English translation of chapters I and XXV of the Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna (Revised ed. Varanasi, n.d.), p. 110.

\[82\] P.L. Vaidya (ed.) Madhyamakaśāstra of Nāgārjuna with the commentary Prasannapadā by Candrakīrtī, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts No., 10 (Darbhanga, 1960), XXIV-8, p. 215 (Abbreviated as MS).

\[83\] Th. Stcherbatsky, op. cit., p. 111.
Of the so-called produced things there can only be four conditions of existences, and no self-existence of empirical objects can be found:

"Four can be the conditions
(Of everything produced),
Its cause, its object, its foregoing moment,
Its most decisive factor."\(^\text{84}\)

Whatever is conditional or relative, is devoid of self existence. Whatever we perceive, therefore, is illusory. The whole world of experience is a mere phantom.\(^\text{85}\) Worldly things are mutually dependent on one another and their existence is relative.\(^\text{86}\) The process of causes and effects goes on up to limitless series, without beginning and end. In this universe there is nothing mental or non-mental, material or non-material, which can be termed as absolute or real. The world is void or Śūnya.\(^\text{87}\) Nothing exists any time which is not dependent and relative. The permanent exists nowhere.\(^\text{88}\) The five

\(^{84}\text{Loc. cit.}\)

\(^{85}\text{MS, XVIII-10, p. 160.}\)

\(^{86}\text{Ibid., XIV-3, p. 110; Le de la Vallée Poussin (ed.) Mādhyaṃka Kārikā Vṛtti - Prasannapadā by Candrakīrti (Bib. Bud. IV, St. Petersbourg, 1903), p. 159 (Abbreviated as MKV).}\)

\(^{87}\text{MKV, p. 504; MS, p. 219.}\)

\(^{88}\text{MS, XXIV-19, p. 220; cf. Catuḥśataka of Ārya Deva, IX-2-3, quoted in MKV, p. 505.}\)
elements, the Four Noble Truths, even the Tathāgata, suffering and misery, karma and the agent of karma (karta) are all unreal. No criterion of truth can properly be employed to test them.

Our interest here is mainly with the problem of the self. In all sceptical systems of philosophy (e.g. also in Hume, Bradley) the problem of the self or of personal identity is taken up for critical examination and given a prominent place: so also in Nāgārjuna. After all, the refutation of the reality of the self occupies one of the central positions in Buddhist thought and hence Nāgārjuna also makes it an important topic for discussion. First he refutes the various viewpoints explaining the status of the self. Nāgārjuna is of the view that the self cannot be identified with any of the states that produce and stop, and if the self is absolutely different from the psychical states then it should have been understood separately from them. But it is not

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89MS, IV-7, p. 49; Ibid., V-7, p. 53; MKV, p. 123.
90MS, XXIV-1, p. 209.
91Ibid., XXII, 1, 3, 16, pp. 187, 189, 195.
92Ibid., XII-1, p. 100.
93Ibid., VIII-2, p. 75; Ibid; XVII-33, p. 143.
done because the self can never be talked about without reference to its states. Nāgārjuna says:

"The self is neither different from the states nor similar to them; neither it is without the states not it may be regarded as insubstantial." 95

Hence, those who consider the skandhas and states identical and those who treat them dissimilar are not in a position to follow the true nature of the Buddha’s teaching. 96

In fact the teaching of the Buddha is entirely based on the doctrine of pratītyasamutpāda (dependent origination) and Nāgārjuna’s notion of Śūnyatā is merely an outcome of it. 97 For in causality, interpreted in terms of a series of conscious states of experience, there is nothing to link experience of one event with the other. As is well-known, David Hume enunciated the principles of contiguity, succession, and necessary connection to explain causality. But these are subjective beliefs and have no proof to support them. Similarly, Nāgārjuna takes the whole principle of causality in Buddhist philosophy (pratītyasamutpāda) and interprets this in terms of series of a psychical states. He takes

95 MS, XXVII-8, p. 252.
96 Ibid., X-16, p. 92.
97 "Yah pratītyasamutpādaḥ Śūnyatām tām praṇaṣṭhāmahe." MS, XXIV-18, p. 219.
the principle of anitya (impermanent) and anâtman (no-self) as the main theme of his doctrine. To give his ideas ethical and religious support, to save himself from the charge of nihilist, Nâgârjuna enunciated two types of truths samvrti satya (empirical or conventional truth) meant for the ordinary human beings in pursuit of ordinary every day life and paramârtha satya (transcendental truth) which is beyond the reach of ordinary men. Empirical truth can serve practical purposes, the deeper thoughts remain concealed from this truth, but the realisation of the paramârtha satya is essential for liberating oneself from samsâra or temporal life. This differentiation between the transcendental and empirical appears in many idealistic systems of the East and the West like Śâmkara, Plato, Kant, Hegel, Bradley etc. Nâgârjuna emphatically remarks that those who do not understand the distinction between these two truths cannot follow the deep significant value of the supreme doctrine of the Buddha.  


99MS, XXIV-9, p. 215.
From this standpoint the problem of the self can also be understood. The denial of the reality of the self has no meaning for the ordinary men in pursuit of their daily activities. The critical and the transcendental standpoint questions the basis for all beliefs; from this standpoint the self is neither real nor unreal nor neither since it transcends all empirical determinations and thinking. According to Nāgārjuna the importance of these two truths determines the affirmation and negation of the existence of the self. On some occasions the reality of the existence of the self is affirmed, on other occasions the reality of the self is denied, but ultimately it is declared that there is neither self nor not-self.  

The fundamental metaphysical doctrines of the Mahāyāna school as the Mādhyamikavādins interpreted, have further been expounded in the other important works attributed to Nāgārjuna — Vīgrahavyāvartanī, Catuhstava and Ratnāvalī. In particular, chapter IV of Ratnāvalī touches upon the doctrine of the self. Nāgārjuna remarks in Ratnāvalī that the capacity of the disciples of the Buddha was like those learning the alphabets for first time and that just as learned grammarian teaches the alphabets to the beginners, similarly Buddha taught his disciples, keeping in view their limited capacity. To

100 MS, XVIII-6, p. 152.
the ordinary people, therefore, Buddha's teachings seem to affirm the reality of the world in the self so that they may avoid all evil deeds. In fact in some of the Buddhist texts, there are references to the gods to men of mediocre intelligence; the Buddha taught principles of negation in order that the unreality of the ego may be gradually comprehended by them. But at this stage also understanding the contradiction based on duality remained beyond their capacity. Therefore, to the most intelligent men the Buddha taught about Śūnya — the beatitude, the truth of which is of immense depth which is frightening to the fools, but soft to the wise.¹⁰¹ Many deep philosophical truths are, therefore, unintelligible to the common men. This is why, we find in Nāgārjuna's philosophy also such obscurities of thought, which on careful reading reveal the acuteness of Nāgārjuna's dialectic. We sometimes find it irreconcilable that the Buddhist should maintain the two doctrines of Nirvāṇa (liberation of the self) and anatmavāda (denial of the self) side by side. But on careful reading the meaning becomes somewhat clear, though Buddhist texts resort to myth and metaphor in order to explain some of the ideas which are beyond expression or description in ordinary language.

Before concluding this chapter outlining the doctrine of the self in the later Buddhist schools, we have to consider a few other important thinkers of the Mādhyamika school. Ārya Deva wrote at a period when Mahāyāna Buddhism and in particular, the Mādhyamikavāda had reached the highest level of popularity in intellectual circles. His famous work Catuḥśataka gives clear exposition of the doctrines of Nāgārjuna. In fact not only in subject-matter, but even in style this work is somewhat similar to Mādhyamika Kārikā. Here the dogmatic assertions of the Ābhidharmika school are criticised along with the refutation of the doctrines of the Sāṃkhya and Vaiśeṣika schools. All these systems are favourable to the dogmatic affirmations of the reality of the self. There are passing references and indirect hints to the nature of the universe and to the unreality of the self. On the whole the Mādhyamika line of thought is maintained by establishing the doctrine of Śūnyatā in this text.

102 "Worldly things are dependent, nowhere and at no time does the permanent exist." V. Bhattacharya (ed.), The Catuḥśataka of Ārya Deva, Part II (Calcutta, 1931), IX-2, p. 33; also Ibid., IX, 3, 4, 11, 19, pp. 34, 35, 45, 55.

103 Ibid., X, 3, 8, 17, pp. 71, 78, 87.

104 Other works attributed to Ārya Deva are: Cittaviśuddhiprakaraṇa and Hastavālaprakaraṇa.
The phenomenal world is an illusion, a mirage, a reflection, a dream, a moving cloud, or a phantom. These analogies are familiar to all serious students of Indian philosophy. Like Nāgārjuna, Ārya Deva also maintains the empirical reality and independent existence of the cosmic world. From this point of view, egoism is better than the negation of the ego. Nihilistic attitude is even harmful to philosophical speculations and to the maintenance of moral values. So it is no wonder that Ārya Deva is afraid of the name of nihilism. The nairūtmyavāda is to be understood from the higher point of view — this truth is beyond the grasp of the empirical self.

Like Ārya Deva, Buddhapālita and Bhāvaviveka also elaborated Mādhyamika doctrines like Śūnyatā, and in particular, the latter has attempted to prove that the real ultimate nature of the worldly objects, which we call tathatā is essenceless. What he denies is the ultimate reality of the empirical phenomena and not the possibility of experience itself. Thus at the level

106 Ibid., XII, 12, 14, pp. 150, 152.
108 Ibid., pp. 35 f.
of the ordinary experience the objects are conditioned by relative point of view (and even the self might be regarded as real), but at the level of higher experience one realises the ultimate unreality of the self.

Candrakīrtti in his works has presented a very developed exposition of Nāgārjuna’s thought. But a vehement criticism against Vijñānavādins and against his predecessor Bhāvaviveka for his inconsistencies is found in his works.

The main works ascribed to Candrakīrtti are: (1) Madhyamakāvataṭāra, (2) Prasannapadā or Mādhyamika Kārikā Vṛtti (Commentary on the Mādhyamika Kārikā of Nāgārjuna), and (3) Catuḥśatāta Vṛtti (Commentary on the Catuḥśatāta of Ārya Deva). Besides these works of Candrakīrtti, a few more works of the other Mādhyamikāvādins may be mentioned here. Śīksāsamuccaya and Bodhicaryavatāra of Śānti Deva form an important series in the chain of the Mādhyamika. The subject-matter of both the works is almost similar, but the style differs. They are helpful to understand ethical and metaphysical ideal of the Mādhyamika. The six pāramīs of the Bodhicaryavatāra suggest the ways and means to realise the bodhisattva ideal. The last chapter of this work is important to understand the doctrines of Sunyata, and the self. The highest wisdom lies in the knowledge of Sunyata. The self is as non-existent as the other worldly objects are. Santaraksita in his Tattvasamgrah has refuted the various Buddhist and non-Buddhist sects. Kamalaśīla, a disciple of Santaraksita wrote a commentary on it. As regards empirical reality, both Santaraksita and Kamalaśīla are nearer to Vijñānavāda, but so far as ultimate reality is concerned, they are full supporters of the Mādhyamikas. Almost all the important doctrines of the Mādhyamika school have been dealt with in Tattvasamgrah. The highest wisdom, according to this text too, lies in the knowledge of Sunya or void. Empirical reality and the objective experience are denied.

In Madhyamakāvatāra, Candrakirti refutes the validity of vijñāna on the grounds that without the existence of the objective phenomenal world consciousness or vijñāna has no meaning. It amounts to saying that consciousness cannot stand alone and that consciousness implies consciousness of something. Without the objective world, consciousness cannot function, for the objects are contents for consciousness and without the former the latter would be a mere form. Citta does not know itself. Murti has remarked in this context:

"The Mādhyamika criticism of Vijnānavāda reminds one of the Refutation of Idealism by Kant in the Critique at several places. Both very explicitly deny that we can have self-knowledge without knowledge of objects; mere categories or even the Transcendental 'I' are quite empty. With regard to empirical things, they are even prepared to accept the realistic outlook. They hold the view that idealism upsets the ordinary modes of understanding objective existence without any compensatory advantage. The Kantian or the Mādhyamika position can be characterised as Transcendental or Critical Idealism which accepts the empirical reality

of things (object and the knowing subject) with their transcendental or ultimate unreality.\textsuperscript{112}

The Buddhist successors of Nāgārjuna, as a whole, have tried to interpret the Madhyamika Kārikā as carefully as possible. They take up the important doctrines of Nāgārjuna—Śūnyatā, nature of the ultimate reality, the self, and the external world, and explain them on the same lines as Nāgārjuna's dialectic.

So far in this chapter, we have given a brief account of the development of the doctrine of the self in the Yogācāra and the Madhyamika schools of later Buddhism, and it would be necessary to point out why an account of the realistic approach of the Vaibhāṣikas and the Sautrāntikas has been left out. These two systems belong to the Hinayāna school and appear to be out of tune with the general trend of Buddhist thought from the early Buddhism of the pīṭakas to Candrakīrti. The account of the later phase of Buddhism has been given only to show the historical continuity of the problem. The results

\textsuperscript{112}T.R.V. Murti, op. cit., p. 318. The Vijñānavādins, in their turn criticise Śūnyavāda as extremism, on this point please see T.R.V. Murti, op. cit., p. 319. (Murti's own interpretation of the Madhyamika and the Vijñānavāda account is biased by his partiality for the Advaita school, which is sought to be reconciled with the Madhyamikavāda and the Vijñānavāda by analysing the features of what Murti calls Absolutism).
of our discussion in this chapter can now be given.

The general trend of anatmavāda— a denial which is sometimes absolute and categorical, is found in the schools succeeding the canonical and semi-canonical texts. In Yogācāra school, however, it appears at first sight that some concession to the opposite point of view is made in the assertion of the reality of consciousness. The objective world is denied and its phenomena are regarded only as manifestation or manipulation of vijñāna. The objective world is reduced to a series of sense impressions, having the character of a stream.

Vijñāna is given different names by different thinkers such as Vijñaptimātratā (Asaṅga and Vasubandhu), ālayavijñāna (in Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra) etc. Citta is another name for vijñāna and nothing lies beyond it. Vijñāna definitely cannot be identified with the self. The latter is a fixed entity, something which is eternal and never changing (as e.g. the Vedānta or the Sāmkhya regard), but the vijñāna of the Yogācāra school is just an aggregate of sense-perceptions arranged in a series. Thus the identification of the self with ālayavijñāna by the Vedāntins and those sympathetic to the Vedānta standpoint appears to be erroneous. To assign any empirical or absolute existence to the Yogācāra characterisation of the self is to misinterpret it. Vijñānavāda, therefore, cannot be regarded in any way as a deviation from the
general Buddhist line of regarding the self as unreal.

The main standpoint of the Mādhyamikas can be expressed in their brief statement, 'all is void'. Not only the self, but even the dharmas (discrete elements of experience) are also essenceless and without unity. Nothing has permanent existence; the universe is devoid of any reality and all are niḥsvabhava or without any real nature. Even the pratītyasmūtpāda is characterised as Śūnya. Reality is neither existent, nor non-existent, nor neither. The citta of the Vijnānavādins is also denied.

The Mādhyamikas criticised the Yogācāra philosophers for their inconsistencies, but like the Yogācāra thinkers, Nāgārjuna himself is inconsistent in his standpoint that there is neither the self nor the not-self. Similarly neither the individual nor the objective world can be regarded as ultimately real. The relative existence has no reality of its own.

113 MS, XXIV-18, p. 219.


115 MS, XVIII-6, p. 152.

In short, in later Buddhism in general, the reality of the self as well as of the dharmas (discrete elements) is denied. Later Buddhism also believes in 'sarva dharma śūnyatā' i.e. belief both in pudgalanairatmya (denial of the reality of the self) as well as dharmanairatmya (denial of the reality of discrete elements) since both the beliefs are regarded as essential for the attainment of final liberation — the Nirvāṇa.

To conclude, the entire development of the Buddhist thought may be regarded as an assertion and elaboration of the doctrine of anātman as thought by the Buddha himself. This is the reason why all the successors of the Buddha agree on the importance of one of the central conceptions of Buddhist metaphysics — the denial of the reality of the self. It may be erroneous to think that in later Buddhism, as T.R.V. Murti does, the doctrine of Śūnyatā is regarded as a disguised version of the Advaitic view of the absolute self. It is true that Śūnyatā represents the inexpressible and indescribable. It is avacya. It does not follow from this that the inexpressibility of Śūnyatā is the same as or similar to the

117 Cf. "The Buddhist schools differed among themselves to a great degree; they have, however, one thing in common — the denial of substance (ātman)." T.R.V. Murti, op. cit., p. 26; G.P. Malalasekera, "The Unique Doctrine of Buddhism", The Mahābodhi, Vol. LXXIV, No. 5-6 (Calcutta: May-June, 1956), pp. 63-69.

inexpressibility of the Ātman in the Advaita. There is no justification therefore to interpret the original Buddhist doctrine of anātmavāda in a manner that would arbitrary reconcile it with the doctrines of the orthodox schools of Indian philosophy.