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LIFE AND WORKS OF NAGARJUNA

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Abstract: Buddhist Nagarjuna, a follower of Mahayana sect is famed as “The second Buddha”. He is the founder of Madhyamika School. Like Sri Buddha, he advised his pupils to adopt a ‘middle path’ between the luxuries and austerities. He believed that can help one to lead perfect life. The word ‘Madhyamika’ is derived from the word ‘madhyama’ which means middle. This system advocates neither the reality, nor the unreality of the world. But they accept mere relativity. They uphold ‘Sunyata’ or voidness to the central idea of their Philosophy. So they known as ‘Sunyavadins’. The Madhyamika karika by Nagarjuna, Madhyamaka vritti by Buddhapalita, Hastabalaprakarana by Arya Deva, Madhyamaka- hrdaya -karika by Krisna, Madhyamakavatara-tika by Jayanta are principal works. Among these, Mula-madhyamika-karika of Nagarjuna adorns prominent place. He laid the foundation to logical topics in his philosophical works. He developed the philosophy of ‘voidness’ or ‘Sunyavada’ through his works. He was one of the founder Father of university of Nalanda.. His works are really valuable and need to rebuild our past culture. He advocated not only a set of doctrines or dogmas but a rational scheme of spiritual development. His firm commitment to the principles of Buddhist thought enshrined in UNIVERSAL WELFARE.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nagarjuna(250-320A.D) often referred to as the second Buddha, laid the foundation to logical topics in his philosophical works¹. At the time of Nagarjuna, Buddhism was scattered by schism. The literary productions of them fell into two main divisions viz., Hinayana and Mahayana. Gradually four sub divisions arose Among them according to their varied approaches and interpretations of Buddhist Teachings. They were Vaibhasika, Sautrantika, Yogacara and Madhyamaka. The first two belonged to Hinayana and the last two belonged to Mahayana.

Nagarjuna, the follower of Mahayana sect is considered as the founder of Madhyamika school of Buddhism. 'Madhyamika' is derived from the word 'Madhyama', which means 'middle'. This school advocates neither the theory of reality, nor the unreality of the world. But they accept mere relativity. They uphold the ‘Sunyata’ to be the central idea of their philosophy. So they are known as Sunyavadins. This school is divided as two viz., Prasangika and Svatantra. Nagarjuna's Madhyamika-karika is the Basic text of Madhyamika School.

His Time:

Winternitz in his work History of Indian Literature’ records that Nagarjuna lived as a contemporary of Andhra King named Gautamiputra Yajnasree, who lived around 166-196.A.D. Rahul Samkrtyayana also admits that the date mentioned above is exactly correct as the period of Nagarjuna. So he fixes the time of Nagarjuna is around 175.A.D². Lama Taranatha opines that Nagarjuna was a contemporary of King Nemi Candra in Aparantaka. His biography was translated into Chinese by Kumarajiva in 405.A.D³. Dr S.C. Vidyashushana, states that Nagarjuna lived around 250-320.A.D⁴. H.Nakamura states that Nagarjuna’s time can be fixed around 150-250 A.D. Considering all these observations we can fix his time as around to the first half of 3rd century A.D.

Nagarjuna was born in a Brahmin family of South India at Vidarbha. He was the pupil of Saraha in Kalacakra. He studied all the sciences *Vedas* and *Vedangas*. But he was not satisfied with the mere knowledge of these *Sastras*. He was also attracted by Buddhist doctrines, he began to study and became an expert in that philosophy. It is said that within ninety days he studied all the three *Pitakas* and mastered their meaning, but he was not satisfied

with the same and continued to search for other sources to fulfill his ambition. Finally he could accept the *Mahayana sutra* from a venerable hermit who lived in the Himalayas.

He went there to receive the studentship directly from him. Thus he became an expert in all philosophies. He energetically propagated Buddhism in Southern India. He succeeded in converting a powerful King named Bhoja Deva to Buddhism⁵. He promoted the doctrine, viz, *Sunyata* and which can be established through the assumption of two truths, viz, *Samvrti satya* (conventional truth) and *Paramartha satya* (supreme truth). This state of *Sunyata* is also called '*Nirvana*'. He became famous as the one among the founders of the University of Nalanda⁶. He became known as the founder of 'eight sects' in Japan. Many works were ascribed to him. Many scholars have different opinions about his authorship. They opine that several Nagarjunas might have flourished at various periods.

His Works:

Th.Stcherbatsky remarks that Nagarjuna had the authorship of more than one hundred works⁷. Unfortunately the originals of these Sanskrit works were not available. But Tibetan translations exist. Rahul Samkrtyayana writes in the journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, Patna records that Nagarjuna had the authorship of five texts which includes *Yuktisastika*⁸. K. Venkata Raman opines that Nagarjuna has written six books, viz., 1) *Madhyamika Sastra* or *Madhyamika karika*, 2) *Vigrahavyavartani* 3) *Maha Prajna paramita Sastra*, 4) *Dasabhumi Vibhasa Sastra*, 5) *Suhrlekha* and *Ratnavali*. Dr. S.C. Vidyabhusana, a states that Nagarjuna had the authorship of only four works such as 1) *Madhyamika karika*, 2) *Vigraha vyavartani karika* 3) *Pramana vihetana* and 4) *Upaya kausalya hrdaya Sastra*⁹.

Madhyamika Karika- The name *Madhyamika* is derived from '*Madhyama*' which means 'the middle'. One who follows the middle path is called '*Madhyamika*' because they avoid the two extremes and adopt the middle path. The text *Madhyamikakarika* is written in verses. Rahul Samkrtyayana observes that Nagarjuna was the first man who used '*karikas*' in textual writings¹⁰. *Madhyamika karika* is the first regular work on *Madhyamika* philosophy. '*Sunyata*' is remarked as the ultimate reality in this work. Creating a new philosophy in this work, Nagarjuna created a revolution in Buddhist teachings. According to Nagarjuna's *Mula-madhyamika-karika* is the comprehended form of four aspects. They are in contradistinction to oneness, as the abnegation of oneness, as unity in plurality and in the sense of absolute truth. In this text, he defines some logical terms given by him such as *Punarukta* (repetition), *Siddhasadhana* (demonstration of what has already been established) and *Sadhyasama* (petetio principi) and *Parihara* (avoidance)¹¹.

Eight commentaries on this *Mula-madhyamika-karika* were written. Unfortunately except Chanadrakirti's *Prasannapada* all other works seemed to be lost from its original language. In Chinese and Tibetan language translation of all these texts are available now.

Mulamadhyamakakarika translated as *The Philosophy of the Middle Way* by Dvid J. Kalapuhana, SUNY Press, Albany, 1986 is also available .

Vigrahavyavartani Karika - Dr.S.C.Vidyabhusana states that the Sanskrit original of this text was not available to him. Tibetan and Chinese versions were available. This work in Tibetan is called '*Rt-sod-pa-bzlog-pahi-tshig-lehur byas-pa*' signifying "*Memorial verses on quelling disputes*". In this work he defines *Sunyata*, as *pratityasamutpada* and he criticizes the *Nyaya* theory of *Pramana* given by Aksapada as "*Like a lamp illumines itself and other objects, so does a pramana establish itself and other objects*". Nagarjuna puts forward his opinion to criticize that "*a lamp cannot illuminate itself as there is no darkness in it. If a lamp could remove darkness even coming in conduct with it, why could it not stand here, remove the darkness of the entire universe*"¹².

Vigrahavyavartani-Karika translated as *The Dialectical Method of Nagarjuna* by Kamaleswar Bhattacharya, Motilal Manoharlal Publishers Delhi, 1978 is also available.

Pramana-Vihetana or Pramana Vidvamsana *Pramana vihetana* literally signifies “the quelling of *pramana*”. Dr.S.C. Vidyabhusana opines that the original Sanskrit of this work is not seen by him. Tibetan version of a commentary on this work named *Pramana-vihetana-teppitaka-vrtti or Pramana - vidhvamsana- sambhasita-vrtti* exists even now. It extends over folios 415 -418 of the *Bstan- hgyur, mdo- ha*. This is called in Tibetan *Tshad- ma-rnam-pa-hjoms-pa mdor-bsad-pahi-hgrel*, which literally means that “a magic stick commentary on *Pramana-vihetana or Pramana Vidvamsanasana*”¹³.

The name of the commentator is not mentioned this work. He pays obedience to Manju -sri-kumara bhuta and introduces this work as follows;“To please the learned people,I gives an exposition of the *Vihetana or Vidhvamsana*”.

He also observes that the instructions on *Nyaya* delivered by Nagarjuna are put together to constitute *Pramana-vihetana*. A legend also about Nagarjuna also narrated in it is as follows. Nagarjuna was a man of greatness and proceeded once for the dissemination of culture to the region of the *Nagas*. They exhibited their magical powers which could not overcome him. Beholding his super human greatness Upendra, King of the *Nagas*, offered him his daughter, while the other *Nagas* worshipped him in a befitting manner. They took orders and coming to the region of men practiced the austerities of monks.

The commentator also reproduced Nagarjuna’s definition of categories as follows: (1) *tshad - ma (pramana)* (2) *gshal-bya (prameya)*, (3) *the-tshom (samsaya)* (4) *dgos -pa (prayojana)* (5)*dpe (drstanta)*, (6) *grub-pahi-mthah (siddhanta)* (7) *Cha’sas (avayava)* (8) *rtog-ge (tarka)*, (9) *gtan-la-phab-pa (nirnaya)* (10) *smra-wahi-mthah (vada)* (11) *rtsod-pahi-mthah (jalpa)*, (12) *rnam-par-rtstod-pahi-mthah (vitanda)* (13) *gtan-tshigs-tar-snan-wa (hetvabhasa)* (14) *tshig-dor (chala)*, *ltas-gcod (jati)* and (16) *tshar-gcod-pa nigrasthanana*.

A syllogism (*avayava*) is shown to consist of three members, viz., a proposition, a reason and an example. It may be put in the affirmative or negative way.

The reasons (*hetu*) may appear in one of the following relations viz., (1) An effect (*karya*) (2) An identity (*svabhava*) and (3) *Non-perception (anupalabdhi)*.

An example (*dristanta*) is defined as the place in which is decisively shown the connection between the reason (middle term) and its universal companion the predicate (major term).

Upaya kausalya hrdaya Sastra- This work is stated to be a work on ‘art of debate’. The name of the work implements the meaning that “*The Essence of skill in the accomplishment of action*”. Dr. S.C. Vidyabhusana, records that the original work in Sanskrit was not available to him. This work is in Chinese known as ‘*Fan-pien-sin-lun*’. This was translated in 472 A.D. by ‘*Ci-cia-ye*’ and ‘*Than-Yao*’. It has four chapter viz., an elucidation of debate (*Vada visadikarana*), an explanation of the point of defeat (*Nigrasthanana*) an explanation of the truths (*Tattva-vyakhyana*), the analogue or farfetched analogy (*Jati*). This work is available now through its English translation¹⁴.

I. The first cha

pter consists of eight sections which treat respectively of (1) An example (*udaharana*), (2) A tenet, truth or conclusion (*siddhanta*) (3) Excellence of speech (*vakya prasamsa*) (4) The defect of speech (*vakya-dosa*) (5) The knowledge of inference (*anumana or hetu-jnana*), (6) The appropriate or opportune speech (*samayocita-vakya*) (7) the fallacy (*hetvabhasa*), and (8) the adoption of a fallacious reason (*dusta-vakyanusarana*).

(1) The *example* is of two kinds: the affirmative or homogeneous example (*anvayi udaharana*) and the negative or heterogeneous example (*vyatireki udaharana*).

(2) The *conclusion* is of four kinds, viz., (1) That accepted by all the schools (*sarvatantra siddhanta*), (2) that accepted by a particular school (*pratitantra siddhanta*) (3) that accepted hypothetically (*adhikarana siddhanta*) and (4) that which is implied or accepted on assumption (*abhyupagama siddhanta*).

Conclusions are established through the *Pramanas* (the source of valid knowledge). They are of four kinds, viz., perception (*pratyaksa*) inference (*anumana*), comparison (*upamana*) and scripture (*agama*).

(3) A *speech is said to be excellent* if its words are neither inadequate nor redundant, and its reason and example well expressed.

(4) A *speech is said to be defective* if its words are inadequate, or redundant, or if it employs the same word to convey different meanings or different words to convey the same meaning.

(5) The *inference* is of three kinds, viz., a priori (*purvavat*), a posteriori (*sesavat*), and commonly, seen (*samanyato drsta*). The respective examples are on seeing a cloud one infers that there will be rain; on seeing a swollen river one infers that there was a rain; on seeing a man move from one place to another, one infers that the sun, which rises in the east and sets in the west, must have moved.

(6) The *appropriate or opportune speech* consists in its being pertinent to the subject and occasion, e.g. in the discussion as to whether there will be rain tomorrow, one may appropriately speak of the condition of the sky of the previous day.

(7) The *fallacies* signify reasons which are derived from an imperfect perception, inference, or comparison, or which derive from the scripture. They are respectively as follows.

(a) The *quibble in respect of a term (vak-cchala)*, e.g. a man possesses 'navakambala' while uses the term *nava-kambala* in the sense of nine blankets while he really means a new blanket.

(b) The *erratic reason or undistributed middle term (savyabhicara)*, e.g. to say that all external things are non- eternal is to employ an erratic reason, because the sky is an external thing which is eternal.

(c) *Balancing the doubt or false assumption (samsaya-sama)*, e.g. there is doubt as to a certain tall object being a post or a man, and yet if we proceed to act on the assumption that it is a man, we commit the fallacy of false assumption.

(d) The *mistimed (kalatita)*, e.g. we attempt to prove the eternity of Veda on the ground that the sound is eternal, when no proof has been given for the eternity of sound.

(e) *Balancing the point in dispute or begging the question (prakaranasama)*, e.g., the soul is eternal, because it is distinct from the body. (It is a matter of dispute if a thing which is distinct from the body is eternal or not.)

(f) *Balancing the predicate (sadhyasama)*, e.g. the sky is eternal, because it is intangible.

(g) *Showing absurdity (vyaghata pradarsana)*, e.g. the five objects are not eternal, because they are apprehended by the senses; the four elements being also so apprehended are non-eternal. If we say so it will follow that a tortoise possesses hair and salt possesses smell, because they are apprehended by the mind: this is absurd.

(h) The *contradictory (viruddha)* - either in respect of the example or in respect of the conclusion.

8. The *adoption of a fallacious reason* - If in the course of one's argument one commits fallacies, one will be thrown into difficulties and disgrace.

II "The points of defeat" are the following: (1) The unintelligible (*avijnatartha*) (2) non-identity (*apratibha*), (3) silence (*ananubhasana*), (4) saying too little (*nyuna*) (5) saying too much (*adhika*), (6) the meaningless (*nirarthaka*), (7) the inopportune (*aprapakala*), (8) the incoherent (*aparhaka*), (9) hurting the proposition (*pratijnahani*).

III. "An explanation of the truths" deals mainly with the admission of an opinion (*matanujna*)

IV. The "analogue" or farfetched analogy is of various kinds as follows: (1) balancing an excess (*utkarsasama*) (2) balancing a deficit (*apakarsa-sama*), (3) balancing an unquestionable (*avarnyasama*), (4) balancing a non - reason (*ahetu-sama*), (5) balancing the co-presence (*prapti-sama*), (6) balancing the mutual absence (*aprapti sama*), (7) balancing the doubt (*samsaya sama*), and (8) balancing the counter example (*pratidrstanta sama*).

Suhrlekha - It means the "Friendly epistle" or "friendly letter". Nagarjuna had a friendship with Satavahana King named Yajnasri Gautamiputra. This text is in the form of a letter which is written to this King is named as *Suhrlekha*. It exists in Tibetan language. U.K. Nariman states that one hundred and twenty three verses contain it. Content of this work is the basic principles of Buddhism. He addresses the King and advises him to follow the life of a true Buddhist. How a King should behave himself, how he should rule his kingdom, how solve the problems of his subject aims at social welfare and how show kindness towards human beings and animals in the kingdom of a Buddhist follower. It is recorded that three Chinese versions of this text are available¹⁵. Suhrlekha is translated by L Jampal, N S Chopel and Peter Della Santina, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1978 is also available.

Nagarjuna's writings and philosophical argument were adorned with an unwavering texture of Logic. With his firm commitment to the principles of Buddhist thought enshrined in UNIVERSAL WELFARE. Because of these worthwhile contributions he had been called "The founder of Eight Sects" among the Japanese even now.¹⁶

NOTES

1. Satish Chandra Vidyabhusana, A History of Indian Logic (HIL), Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, First Edition, Calcutta 1920, Reprint 1988, p. ²⁵¹.
2. Rahul Samkrtyayana, *Viswadarsanangal* (VD) Translated by P.M. Kumaran Nair, P.K. Brothers Kozhikode - I, 1956. p. ⁸⁰⁵.
3. JK Nariman, Literary History of Buddhism (LHSB), Motilal Banarsidas Publishers, Delhi, First Edition 1919. Reprint 1992. p.⁹².
4. HIL p. ²⁵¹.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. ²⁵².
7. Th. Stcherbatsky, *Conception of Buddhist Nirvana*, Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, Delhi, Revised Edition : 2001., p. ⁶.
8. VD. p. ⁸⁰⁵.
9. HIL, pp., ²⁵⁶⁻²⁵⁷.
10. VD, p. ⁸⁰⁸.
11. HIL., pp. ^{256 - 257}. 12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., pp. ²⁵⁷⁻²⁵⁹. 14. Ibid., p. ²⁵⁹. 15. LHSBp. ⁹¹.
16. HIL., p. ²⁵⁴.

