

IMPACT OF NĀGĀRJUNA'S ŚŪNYATĀ ON PRESENT SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

This paper tries to explore the impact of Nagarjuna's *śūnyatā* to lead healthy and peaceful life. It is obviously true that violence cannot be eliminated by violence. Lacking peace in society human beings cannot secure real happiness and freedom. The main crux of Madhyamaka philosophy is *śūnyatā* or emptiness. By way of explaining, the doctrine of Dependent Origination (*pratītyasapudpāda*) and Middle Path (*madhyamāpratipada*) Nāgārjuna does not establish any metaphysical thesis of his own. It rather reveals the relative nature of everything worldly and the ultimate meaning of Reality. Therefore, he rejects all views about transcendental metaphysics and rejects all absolute theories about Reality regarding supportive to the *catuṣkoṭivivirmukta* position. According to Nāgārjuna, *śūnyatā* is the ultimate reality, which is indescribable (*avācya*) and it can be realized through meditation. In addition, *śūnyatā*, *nīrvāna*, *saṃsāra*, *madhyamāpratipada* (middle path), *tathatā* (suchness), *prajñā*, and *pratītyasamutpāda* are identical term. Moreover, in Buddhism the understanding of the highest wisdom or *prajñā* depends on the realization of *śūnyatā*. According to Mādhyamika philosophy, *prajñāpāramitā* is a highest kind of knowledge, which is free from everything, non-dual, transcendental knowledge like space or *ākāśa* and it can be realized through *vipāssanā* meditation that controls our mind and indicates self-observation or insight perception. It is a key for remove all kinds of mental disease and suffering. Through realization of *śūnyatā*, one can achieve self-actualization, self-observation, and self-restrain. It will help us to remove our all kinds of sufferings, pain, sorrow, anger, hatred etc. and through removing it; one can achieve mental peace, happiness.

Keywords : Emptiness (*śūnyatā*), Dependent Origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), suchness (*tathatā*), *prajñā* (wisdom).

Introduction

Now a days Buddhism is more significant for create better living conditions of society. In present scenario, the world is cover by various crises like covid 19, violence, political hazard, economic and social exploitation etc. It is true that violence cannot eliminated by violence activities. Now human beings are facing always depression and anxiety. Modern developed technology produces many things for the physically and mentally easy life living but still now the condition of human beings is not wealthy and peaceful. Buddhism can remove this unhealthy condition because Buddhism is very rational and applicable in daily life. As an ethical teacher, Lord Buddha teaches us the path of life to give more suitable situation for better living. In this aspect we can quote from *Anguttara Nikāya* "A unique being, an extraordinary Man arises in this world for the benefit of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion, for the world, for the good, benefit, and happiness of gods and men. Who is this Unique Being? It is the Tathāgata, the Exalted, and Fully Enlightened One." Buddha's ideology emphasizes on the growth of fresh environment and universal unity. It is true that all form of troubles can be termed as three types i.e. i) self-centred tendencies, selfish desire for pleasure and possession (*tanhā*), ii) egoistic lust for dominance and power (*mana*), iii) clinging to view; faith or ideology. These defilements existing in people's mind make widely their behavior to be dangerous to themselves in any society. Only the *Dharma* or ethical conduct (*Dhammacariyya*-derive of righteousness) is necessary that will be essential ingredient in harmonies. Therefore, the Buddhist value system can provide a potent remedy for this

malady because global ethics will determine the framework of future global governance as it is a guideline for companies in their worldwide relation and it connects the relation between man and nature.

The heart of the Buddha's teaching is four noble truth i.e. *Duḥkha*, *Duḥkha -samudaya*, *Duḥkha-nirodha*, *Duḥkha -nirodhmārga* (*aṣṭāṅgikamārga*). The four noble truths show the path to overcome suffering caused by the wheel of *saṃsāra*. For him desire (*tanhā*) is the root cause of sufferings. For the attainment of this state and removal of ignorance, the Buddha expresses the eight -fold path, which is known as the middle path because its purpose is to show a path of non-extreme performance for attaining the state of noble peace. This path avoids two extremes i.e. i) the search for happiness through the pleasure of the senses, which is low, common unprofitable and the way of the ordinary people' ii) the search for happiness through self-mortification in different forms of asceticism, which is 'painful, unworthy and unprofitable'. This path leads the three essential pillar of Buddhist training and disciplines i.e. ethical conduct (*śīla*), mental discipline (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*prajñā*). This three pillar (*prajñā*, *śīla* and *samādhi*) are the three broad ways through which one can achieve final salvation. Right action generally consists in observance of five fundamental canons of conduct (*pañcaśīla*). After his *Mahāparinirvāṇa* (about 483 BC), his disciples felt to collect his sublime teachings, which was contained in the *Tiṭṭaka*, namely, *Vinay piṭak Sutta piṭak*, and *Abhidhamma piṭak*. Firstly, in Buddhism, the four schools are focused like Ārya-sarvāstivāda, Ārya-smmāṭīya, mahāsa ghika and Ārya-sthavira and in the era of Ashok period, they are divided in



eighteen schools. Philosophically, Buddhism has divided into four branches or schools i.e., Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, Madhyamaka, Vijñānavāda. First two schools are realist (Hīnayāna) and another two are known as idealist (Mahāyāna). According to another view, there are mainly three phases of Buddhism i.e. i) the Ābhīdhārmika phase from the Buddha's death to 1st century A.D., ii) Development of Esoteric Teaching iii) Development of Tantra. The main Trantic schools are divided into four schools like Mantrayāna, Vajrayāna, Sahajyāna and Kālacakrayāna. In this way the development of the different sects of Buddhism are emerge. All Buddhist schools maintain belief the four noble truths and eightfold path as expounded but differ in how they choose to follow that path. The Theravada or Hīnayāna Buddhist scholars believe their own liberation (*mukti*), and element (*dharma*) but Mahayanists focus on liberation of all human beings avoiding all kinds of *dharma*. Hīnayāna schools believe that *pratītyasamutpāda* is conditioned nature of all kind of phenomenon and it shows how birth, old age, death, and all the miseries of phenomenal existence arise in dependence conditionally. According to Hīnayāna, *nirvā* is inexpressible, peace and it has to be realized within oneself. For them middle path (*madhyamāpratipada*) is used in the ethical sense, in that sense of neither taking too much food nor too little, neither sleeping too much, nor too little. On the other hand, in Mahāyana Buddhism, *pratītyasamutpāda* is the principle of relativity and relativity connotes *śūnyatā* (emptiness). They believe that all human beings retain a Buddha nature and can attain transcendent awareness, becoming a *Bodhisattva* ("essence of enlightenment") who can then guide others on the same path. According to them, the Absolute and empirical, the Noumenon and the Phenomenon, *sa sāra* and *nirvā* are not separate set. In this regard, it can be noted that the Theravada school is sometimes referred to as *Hīnayāna* ("little vehicle") by Mahāyāna Buddhists in insulting view and Mahāyāna Buddhists named themselves the "Great Vehicle." Because they claimed that, they retained the true teachings and could convey the most people to enlightenment.

Nāgārjuna is the first systematic presenter of Madhyamaka philosophy and the sects of these schools are known as *Mādhyamika*. Empty or void is the core matter of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Nāgārjuna emphasizes middle view, which means avoiding all extreme views (i.e. nihilism and eternalism). Moreover, he expresses that *pratītyasamutpāda* lies that everything in this world are depend on another. From the point of view of empirical or phenomenal reality everything is depend on something. Therefore, according to his view, they have no own essence (*svabhāva*) and in this sense, it is called *śūnya*. In this regard Nāgārjuna says, '*yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ śūnyatām tām pracakṣmahe*. Moreover, he claims that *śūnyatā* and *pratītyasamutpāda* are same in that sense that *pratītyasamutpāda* has no own nature because it is relative concept. It advocates the law of dependable origination of thing, which means *svabhāva śūnya*. The term '*Śūnya*' has come from the root *śvī*, which means 'to swell or to expand',

and it has various signification like ontological, soteriological, axiological etc. Ontologically, it means void, which indicates fullness. In axiological view, it indicates that the worldly things are *anitya* (impermanence). But once the realization of *śūnyata* happen all the ignorance are vanish. Soteriological significance of *śūnyatā* means the realization of *śūnyatā*, which leads one to the wisdom of *prajñā*. The word '*śūnyatā*' does not mean nihilism and it does not negate all reality but it shows that reality is *catuṣko ivinirmukta*. The word *Śūnya* or *śūnyata* does not mean itself as a theory but it is the real knowledge of the understanding of truth. According to *Mādhyamika* philosophers, *śūnyata* are interpreted into two senses like *svabhāva śūnya* and *prapañca śūnya*. In literary meaning *svabhāva* means 'own being' and another meaning is opposite of *parabhāva* (other being). Candrakīrti says, " *svo bhāva itiṣya paddrthasya yadātmiya rūpam tat tasya svabhāva* (Prasannapadā p 115)". For example, heat is *svabhāva* (special property) of fire. Actually, in *Mādhyamika* philosophy, *svabhāva* is the absolute reality, *parabhāva* is relative, and so all phenomena are relative. In this context, *pratītyasamutpaanna* (dependent origination) is *svabhāva śūnya* and it is realm of relativity. From the standpoint of *prapañca śūnya*, *śūnyatā* is inexpressible in human language and it may be explained in six ways in 18th verse of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*:

*ya pratītyasamutpāda śūnyatā tām pracakṣmahe/
sā prajñaptirupādāyā pratīpat saiva madyamā//*

According to the *pañcaviṃśati* (one of the important *sūtras* of *prajñā parāmitā*) and T.R.V Murti 'The Central Philosophy of Buddhism'(P. 351), the two kinds of truth is to be understood by twenty types of *śūnyatā*. They are- i) *adhyātma śūnyatā* 2) *bahirdhāsūnyatā* 3) *adhyātma bahirdhāsūnyatā* 4) *śūnyatā śūnyatā* 5) *mahā śūnyatā* 6) *paramārthasūnyatā* 7) *samskr̥tasūnyatā* 8) *asamskr̥tasūnyatā* 9) *atyanta śūnyatā* 10) *anavarāgra śūnyatā* 11) *aravakārasūnyatā* 12) *Prakṛti śūnyatā* 13) *Sarvadharmasūnyatā* 14) *lakṣaṇasūnyatā* 15) *anupalambhasūnyatā* 16) *abhavāśvabhāvasūnyatā* 17) *bhāvasūnyatā* 18) *abhāvasūnyatā* 19) *Svabhāvasūnyatā* 20) *parabhāvasūnyatā*. Nāgārjuna says that if one is not aware of these truths, he cannot be able to go through the understanding of what the Buddha said (*Buddhavacana*) and only through the understanding of two truths reveals the true nature of *śūnyatā*. However, for Nāgārjunas *śūnyatā* is indescribable (*avācya*). In the first verse of *Mūlamadhyamaka Kārikā* he explains that *śūnyatā* is

*Anirodham anutpādam anucchedam aśāsvatam/
Anekārtham anānārtham anāgamam anirgamam //*

It is beyond destruction, beyond production, beyond dissolution, beyond eternity, beyond oneness, beyond plurality, beyond ingress, beyond egress. Actually, it means that reality is inexpressible. This kind of realization is to be possible by the stage of highest wisdom or *prajñāpāramitā*, which means 'perfection of wisdom'. It is six types of *pāramitās* and *prajñā* is the highest knowledge. By the meditation of *śūnyatā* the seeker received the truth. *Śūnyatā* leads one to the highest

goal of life, which is *prajñāpāramitā* and it is treated as a ladder to reach the roof of *prajña* through meditation. According to Mādhyamika, Bodhisattva (Pāli, *Bodhisatta*) tries to keeping a mind of great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*) adjoined with wisdom (*prajñā*) realizing the reality of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). By this type of lesson that the seeker will realize Buddhahood, the final goal of full awakening: an omniscient, blissful mind completely free from suffering and its causes. It focuses on the nature of enlightenment and *nirvāṇa* itself. Nāgārjuna's teaching understanding the emptiness and selflessness is known as perfect wisdom because he admits that *sa sāra, nirvana, prajñā, śūnyatā, madhyamā pratipada* (middle path), *dharma* and *pratītyasamutpāda* are same thing. Nāgārjuna says that if one is not aware of these truths, he cannot be able to go through the understanding of what the Buddha said (*Buddhavacana*) and only through the understanding of two truths reveals the true nature of *śūnyatā*. To attain this perfect wisdom one should follow the *Prajñāpāramitā*, understanding the reality or emptiness of *pudgala* and *dharma* (*pudgala nairātmya* and *dharma nairātmya*) without attachments. For Nāgārjuna perfect wisdom (*mahākaruṇā*) is an infinite perfection because it explains that entities (*dharma*) have no own-being. Rightly understood, the Mādhyamika philosophy is very free from dogmatism. By the practice of *vipasana* meditation, one can ensure the highest truth of Madhyamaka philosophy and in here the understanding of the highest wisdom or *prajña* is depends on the realization of *śūnyatā*. That's why *śūnyatā* and *prajñāpāramitā* is equally depends on one another. Mainly, meditation is divided into two divisions i.e. *samatha* and *vipaśyanā*. This meditation '*vipaśyanā*' specifies self-observation or insight perception and by this meditation, one seeker can understand the relative nature of all worldly things. It also helps to grow our mental power and this power helps to strained right concentration. Moreover, through meditation, it can be realize that all the things in this world are a combination of impermanence (*anitya*), sufferings (*dukkha*) and non-self (*anātma*). These are the law of impermanence and the law of dependent origination. For Tibetan Dharma guru Dalai Lama also believed that meditation is valuable for all of humanity because it involves looking inward. Moreover, according to northern Buddhist sects Zen, the practices of mediation can discover the real nature of absolute Reality. Once this realization is happens all of miseries, trouble. That's why D.T. Suzuki says in his book, 'An Introduction to Zen Meditation' that –“All these spiritual feats are accomplished without resorting to any doctrines but by simply asserting in the most direct way the truth that lies in our inner being.”

Conclusion : Nāgārjuna gives us warning that there is a possibility of miscomprehension of the nature of things if all states of things are taken to be real or unreal and there is a possibility of failure to comprehend what is proper. Mādhyamika philosophy helps us to be *free* of the essentialist delusion and thought construction. It can be said that his philosophy is the search light that illumines the darkest recesses of reason and makes us *aware* of philosophical theories. It is a unique way for the destruction of suffering, for the purification of mind, for the attainment of Wisdom, and for the realization of *nirvāṇa*. His tendency is to show the root-

cause of our inability to know the real in-itself through conceptual construction, *dṛṣṭi*. Every philosophical system picks up a particular way and possesses a view (*dṛṣṭi*) from a standpoint or a position. Through this *cetanā* (consciousness), Buddhism teaches us the principle of human behavior and at same time it teaches forgiveness (*kṣamā*). In this aspect, the Buddha says the story of mother-child relationship to explain this *bhavanā* that a mother always tries to protect her children even at the cost of her life. Therefore, it can be said that the Buddha teaches us the way of moral ideal of loving-caring behavior to all living creatures. His view is a species of spiritual revival. Therefore, every human being will follows this principle; there will be no anxiety, no fear, no crime, and no violence in our world. Society is ultimately dependent upon the life pattern of individual human being. By the practice of aforesaid principle one can realize the relative nature of human being and can to prevent hatred, greed, jealousy and delusion in our relations with human beings and also non-human being. In present situation, his view will help us to give the peaceful world. In this regard we quote from Lama Zopa Rinpoche, according to Buddhist philosophy:

“Real peace and happiness has to come from the heart, from within. So therefore, to eliminate wars and destroying each other; to eliminate famine, disease and earthquakes, and to eliminate all other disasters and unfavourable experiences, all this can be stopped by having loving kindness toward each other. From having a good heart with loving kindness, negative action cannot arise.” ~ Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

“Sabbe sattā skhitā hontu, aberā hontu.”

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