

Book Reviews

Mādhyamika Śūnyatā, A Reappraisal: A Reappraisal of Mādhyamika Philosophical Enterprise with Special Reference to Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti

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Well-known is the Brahminical attitude towards the Buddhists in general and the Mādhyamikas in particular who were, unless the Hindu methodology of inclusivism was applied, considered Vaināśikas or nihilists (cf., for instance, G.C. Pande, *Life and Thought of Śāṅkarācārya*, Delhi, 1994, p. 259). As for Western professional philosophers who are non-indologists, it is to be appreciated that some of them have begun to take notice of Nagarjunian thought. On the whole, it can be said that their interpretation of Madhyamaka corresponds to that of Brahminical philosophers as mentioned above. Thus, for example, in his *Concise World History of Philosophy (Kleine Weltgeschichte der Philosophie*, Stuttgart, 1950, p. 69), H.J. STÖRIG refers to 'Nāgārjuna's nihilistic system'. Similarly, in the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* by Simon BLACKBURN (Oxford, 1994) it reads under the brief entry 'Nagarjuna': 'The rejection of all oppositions (...) leaves real truth lying only in emptiness, or in a world characterized entirely negatively.' Furthermore, there is the book by the buddhologist David BURTON, entitled *Emptiness Appraised. A Critical Study of Nāgārjuna's Philosophy*, Delhi, 1999, who thinks to have demonstrated that Nāgārjuna's philosophy of emptiness entails nihilism. (For very useful bibliographical remarks on the topic 'nihilist and non-nihilist interpretations of Madhyamaka' see Eli FRANCO's "Buddhist

Studies in Germany and Austria 1971-1996", in *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (1999), p. 427.) To this reviewer's mind, Chr. LINDTNER has appositely responded to nihilistic interpretations of Madhyamaka. In his review of Burton's book (see *Buddhist Studies Review* 16, 2 (1999), p. 241) he writes:

Unable to make sense of such an unconceptualisable reality (= *paramārthasatya*) or of the non-conceptual knowledge of it, Burton argues that Nāgārjuna's philosophy, understood as an assertion of universal absence of *svabhāva*, is tantamount to nihilism... The question for us is whether it is fair to appraise (assess) the meaning(s) of Nāgārjuna's philosophy of emptiness from a somewhat narrow 'rationalistic' perspective of scepticism or nihilism, as proposed by Burton. To be fair to Nāgārjuna we must, in my opinion, try to understand him from his own presuppositions.

Lindtner's methodology corresponds to that which, many years ago, W. Cantwell Smith had proposed with regard to Religious Studies and J.W. de Jong concerning Buddhology. As for Professor Nayak's book under review, it meets the methodological requirements as formulated by the above scholars and thus is a most welcome contribution to Nagarjunian studies. Since, as it says in the blurb, the Mādhyamikas' *śūnyatā* has been subjected to much misunderstanding and misinterpretation through the ages, the author of the present book seeks to arrive at an adequate understanding of Nāgārjuna's thought and to give 'a fair deal to what he considers to be a unique philosophical enterprise which has received an unfair treatment all along for no apparent fault of its own.'

In his introduction, Nayak adumbrates buddhological problems such as the question of the original teachings of the historical Buddha or the claims of orthodoxy that occasioned so many interschool debates. He draws the borderline for the area of his investigation, confining himself to an 'attempt at understanding the exact significance and implications of the Mādhyamika thought, with special reference to Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti' (p. 5), whose philosophy he regards as one of the most brilliant developments in Buddhist thought. He expressly excludes from his deliberations a discussion in how far Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti are faithful to *buddhavacana*. On the other hand, the author is certainly right when he does not see any reason why Nāgārjuna and his Mādhyamika successors should be considered less authentic in their understanding of the Buddha's Dharma than the representatives of other Buddhist schools belonging either to the Śrāvaka- or Mahāyāna. Nayak is well aware of a great variety of approaches to Nāgārjuna taken by authors who, deliberately or unwittingly, almost invariably tend towards some sort of nihilistic interpretation or of 'philosophical absolutism which is not very much different from Advaita Vedānta' (p. 7). Modestly he says he cannot assume any sanctity of his approach in which he wishes to avoid the extremes of both the 'nihilistic line' and the 'absolutistic line of thought'. Still enlightening are J.W. DE JONG's remarks in his *Cinq chapitres de la Prasannapadā* (Leiden, 1949), p. xiv, where he states that the reality envisaged by Nāgārjuna is 'une réalité d'ordre mystique' and that his dialectic has the sole aim of bringing home the impossibility to experience that reality by knowledge based on discursive and discriminative thinking. Transcending all extremes, the world of duality, is 'd'ordre gnoseologique et non d'ordre ontologique'.

Chapter 1 is entitled 'Śūnyatā – Avoiding Extremes of Nihilism and Absolutism'. What the author has to say in this and in the following chapters, to some extent,

gives the impression of repetitiveness. In all likelihood, he will have felt the need to be repetitive because, as he remarks, the key word *śūnyatā* employed by the Mādhyamikas easily lends itself to producing prejudices 'that have their origin in our long and hoary as well as deep-rooted tradition' (p. 9). In his praiseworthy attempt to rectify endemic misunderstanding and misrepresentation, while seeing a 'revival even in the modern times in different forms' (*ibid.*) of that age-old prejudice, it is perhaps unavoidable to be repetitive. To illustrate ancient cases of misrepresentation of Madhyamaka, Nayak refers to Śaṅkara's and Madhva's reaction to and rejection of Nagarjunian thought, and amongst modern Indian critics he, in particular, cites Harsh Narain who, in a full-length venture, goes of his way to present 'philosophical śūnyavāda' as 'a form of illusionism and nihilism' and 'absolute ontological nihilism' (p. 12). As the best way to deal with ancient and modern critics, Nayak lets the Mādhyamika masters speak for themselves by quoting a number of key passages in which Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti unmistakably guard against all possible misunderstanding of *śūnyatā*. As for *paramārthasatya*, de Jong has described the means – avowedly being *upāyas* only – employed by the Mādhyamikas in order indirectly to designate ultimate reality. But it is impossible exclusively by any scholarly approach or any philosophical analysis to reach that reality whose true nature can only be realised by direct experience. These insightful remarks by de Jong (*loc. cit.*), it seems, find an echo in Nayak's introduction, whereas on p. 17 the author apparently overdoes his insisting on avoiding the extremes of nihilism and absolutism when he declares: "Even to admit that there is a transcendental Reality which is beyond thought-constructions and is therefore indescribable is to subscribe to a metaphysical view which is not acceptable to Nāgārjuna." If by using the words 'transcendental' and 'metaphysical' Nayak has in mind Western philosophical diction, his statement is no doubt plausible. However, 'reality beyond thought-

constructions and being indescribable' can, in fact, be seen as a reference to *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* xviii, 9 (*aparapratyayaṃ... aprapañcitam... nirvikalpam... tattvasya lakṣaṇam*). Provided that the Mādhyamika has **realised** *paramārthasatya*, what is wrong about him to speak of it as *tattva*, *advayañāna* etc.? On the other hand, simply to believe in the existence of a 'transcendental Absolute' without actually having realised *paramārtha* just because of one's subscribing/ clinging to metaphysical views pertains, of course, to everyone's still being in the grip of the world of duality.

In chapter 2 on the Significance of Mādhyamika Dialectic, the question is asked if the Mādhyamika's method of *reductio ad absurdum* could be considered a way of *vitaṇḍā*, of frivolously carping at someone's arguments or assertions. In this context, Nayak refers to an article by Fukuhara who praises Vasubandhu for criticising Vaibhāṣika points of doctrine but, on his part, offers 'another faultless theory' to replace what he deems faulty. Fukuhara finds it improper that the Mādhyamikas simply reject theories without putting forward counter-theories. The charge of *vitaṇḍā* and of lacking 'constructive' counter-theses is, according to Nayak, based on 'a gross misunderstanding' of Madhyamaka (p. 25). The Mādhyamikas, as he explains, 'were interested in pointing to Nirvāṇa' which is, devoid of all mental proliferation, 'free from thought-constructions', and in order to realise it, the Mādhyamika seeks to get rid of and help others get rid of 'the essentialist delusion, the essentialist thought-construction' (p. 30). Dialectic is one of the tools to this end and pertains to the level of conventional truth. Dialectic in its proper perspective, as understood by the Mādhyamika, is employed by him to treat both Buddhist and non-Buddhist concepts that come – for therapeutic reasons, as it were – under uncompromising scrutiny; so the charge of *vitaṇḍā* does not hold water.

Samvṛti, *paramārtha* and Nirvāṇa are discussed in the 3rd chapter. The teaching of two levels of truth, as Nayak aptly puts it, does not admit of 'a distinction between a transcendental reality and the world' (p. 33). Although, with reference to *paramārtha*, he speaks of 'the highest or the ultimate truth, the highest good, the final goal to be realized', (*ibid.*), the absolute – no matter how it is spelt, with a small 'a' or a capital – as a translation of *paramārtha* as given, for example, by Stcherbatsky, does not meet with his approval. Nayak's disapproval conforms to the Mādhyamika statement that the enlightened ones are not assertive. Conventional or pragmatic truth is not to be depreciated; it is an indispensable means to gain access to *paramārthasatya* which Candrakīrti characterises as the silence (*tūṣṇīmbhāva*) of the *āryas*. This silence of the enlightened ones, says Nayak, 'is to be meticulously distinguished from the silence so loudly spoken about in the Vedāntic literature' (p. 37). On p. 39, he speaks of Nirvāṇa as 'philosophical enlightenment' which some may think to be an inadequate designation. All the same, *vyavahārataḥ*, I think, the author shows his skill in means, explaining how the Mādhyamika's *prasaṅga* is meant to lead to 'freedom from contending metaphysical theories', being 'one of the significant features of Nirvāṇa', and to a freedom which is also synonymous with ultimate peace and the cessation of all suffering. In this context, the author also emphasises the relevance of Madhyamaka to the present world as a global village:

Convictions, it is true, can lend colour and charm to our lives and are useful so far as they go; it is only when they are intolerantly adhered to in an authoritative manner as absolute and unchangeable truths, that they turn out to be dogmas, delude and create problems for us. The most important contribution of Buddhism to the world of thought lies in its exhortation to get rid of dogmas of all sorts... (p. 41).

Chapter 4 treats 'The Problem of Morality and Religion in the Mādhyamika Framework - Śūnyatā and Mahākaruṇā'. Again Harsh Narain is mentioned who condemns 'the entire Indian thought for its inability to reconcile the empirical with the ultimate' (p. 48) and claims that in Mādhyamika nihilism 'no religious fervour' be possible. Also the well-known scholar Ninian Smart is quoted not as sharing Narain's sweeping statements but, nevertheless, as seeing an insuperable problem of reconciling 'śūnyatā with mahākaruṇā for the simple reason that for him 'emptiness' is 'nothing but void in the literal sense' (p. 52). Smart is given as saying in one of his later works that 'the emptiness of individuality is disturbing' (*ibid.*), since one cannot really have *maitrī* and *mahākaruṇā* for empty beings. As Nayak makes it clear, dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) which is identified with *śūnyatā* and which is the dependent origination – in common usage – of beings and of individuality, is not at all denied; *pratītyasamutpāda* is empty in the sense of *niḥsvabhāvatā* without which, as the Mādhyamika stresses, the dynamism of dependent origination is impossible. Compassion in its purest form (the attributive *mahā-* in the compound *mahākaruṇā*) spontaneously arises in the enlightened mind and is the outcome of the realisation of non-self and *niḥsvabhāvatā*, factually the very opposite of what Smart surmises. The motivation for all Madhyamaka teaching by the Buddha, as Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti underline, is Great Compassion, and Nayak clearly shows his sympathy for the Mādhyamikas when he writes:

True human welfare and world-peace, to my mind, can be better understood in the background of *mahākaruṇā* of such rare souls who are not addicted to delusions of permanence or essence in any form... (p. 53).

In the 5th chapter, the author explores how *mahākaruṇā* prompts the entire conduct of a bodhisattva (*bodhisattvacaryā*), and in doing so he compares the bodhisattva ideal with that of the Vedāntic *jīvanmukti*. In

treating this final topic, Nayak takes the opportunity to substantiate as to how enlightened ones are 'in a definitely advantageous position to do good to the society... and... can thus be conducive to the social welfare' (p. 63).

The concluding chapter consists of a résumé of what the author has discussed in the preceding chapters. Apart from that, he refers to D. Kalupahana's translation and interpretation of the *Mūlamadhyamakārikās*, who considers Nāgārjuna to be true to the Buddha and Candrakīrti to have 'more of Vedāntic leanings' (p. 81). Having taken pains in chapter 5 to distinguish between Madhyamaka and Vedānta, Nayak regards Kalupahana's stance on Nāgārjuna's chief Prāsaṅgika commentator as 'a serious, albeit a baseless, charge against Candrakīrti' (*ibid.*).

An index of 7 pp. concludes the book. There is no separate bibliography in it; however, some bits of bibliographical information are offered in the endnotes to each chapter. For indologists also working with Romanized Sanskrit texts, the way the numerous Sanskrit quotations are Romanized must appear rather awkward – just as though text in Nāgarī characters had been transliterated quite mechanically without observing any rules for separating words. Omitting such separation can result even in breaking rules of Sanskrit grammar; see p. 40, l. 27: *madhyamāpratīpat* (sic). As for the references, the bibliographical information is incomplete. On p. 8, for instance, a Zen master is quoted, but no source is given whatsoever, and the references to the Sanskrit sources provide the chapter and verse numbers only (in some cases even they are omitted). The indologically interested reader will need the information from which particular edition of an original Sanskrit text the quotations have been excerpted. Furthermore, some Sanskrit quotations appearing in the text are just paraphrased in lieu of being translated, and some of the paraphrases are too brief so that the non-Sanskritist reader is left in the

lurch. On p. 47, 'the triple gem' is mentioned, and the translation of the second gem, viz. 'the Law', should be substituted by 'the Teaching'. There are a number of misprints in the Sanskrit quotations, for example on pp. 14, 1. 3 (for *tathopāda tathā* read *tathopādas...*), 21, 1. 12 (for *dharmata* read *dharmatā*), 64, 1. 23 (cf. *Bodhicaryāvatāra* viii, 19, Vaidya ed., p. 140: for *icchet icchato* read *icched icchāto*). Misprints of English words are quite rare; such errors are self-evident.

In spite of the mentioned shortcomings, Prof. Nayak deserves praise for his reappraisal which goes a long way towards rectifying the said misinterpretations and misrepresentations.

– Bhikkhu Pāsādika

Das Ewige Rad: Religion und Kultur des Buddhismus (The Eternal Wheel: Religion and Culture of Buddhism)

By Manfred Hutter

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Like many before him, including scholars of religion such as Karl-Heinz Golzio (*Wer den Bogen beherrscht. Der Buddhismus*, 1995), the Austrian Manfred Hutter, who holds the chair in comparative religion at the University of Bonn, has set out alone to attempt a complete presentation of Buddhism. The title and table of contents of his book lay claim to comprehensiveness. Historically, Hutter aims to inform the reader about the development of Buddhism down to the present, and geographically to take into account the Asian nations shaped by Buddhism as well as Buddhism in Europe, which for him means primarily Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Perhaps this comprehensive claim is a requirement of the series *Religionen und Kulturen* (Religions and Cultures), within which the book appears. Be this as it may, it is from the very outset

unsatisfactory that each of his points can only be dealt with briefly, so that only superficial knowledge is conveyed.

The book is divided into three main parts: A. History and Doctrine, B. Buddhists in the Everyday World, and C. The Current State of Buddhism. The first part is conceived mainly as the basis for the following two, which are intended to make up the actual core of the book. The author claims no originality of content or presentation for this survey of the life and teaching of the Buddha or of the subsequent development and spread of the doctrine (p. 9). Even so, he requires a good third of the book for this first part, but the sources for his presentation are only occasionally clear, as when, e.g., he explicitly bases his placement of the Buddha in the "Shramana Tradition" upon Johannes Bronkhorst (p. 14). To discover this, the reader would have to pick through the entire list of secondary literature for the pertinent chapter in the appendix.

The second part is the longest (117 pp.) and clearly, to judge from its four chapters—1. *Images of Man*, 2. *Images of the World*, 3. *Piety and Forms of Worship*, 4. *Life Styles*—the one closest to the author's heart. Here we have neither chronological and geographical principles, nor a systematic procedure, which are generally ignored in favour of aspects of religious practice portrayed for the most part as timeless, without any historical background. We not only find the old rules from the *Vinaya-Pitaka* of the Theravādin quoted in translation, but also reports of how presentday Buddhistic Thai nuns provide help with the problems of prostitution, such as abortion or rape (p. 221). The currently and universally popular topic of women, specifically nuns, in Buddhism receives special attention throughout the chapter on Images of Man. One reason for this might be that the author has already issued one publication on this topic (Manfred Hutter, Ed., *Die Rolle des Weiblichen in der indischen und buddhistischen Kulturgeschichte* [The