

## SUNYATA AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN BUDDHISM

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The concept of Sunyata is one of the main topics in Buddhism. Its early reference has been found in the *Majjhimanikaya*, III, p. 104 in connection with the elucidation of Sunyata-vihara (सून्यताविहार). It is stated there that the monastery is *Sunna*, devoid of elephants, cows and horses, etc. but not devoid, *asunna* of monks and their common characteristics. One dwelling in the forest may be devoid of the village and its men, but not devoid of the forest existence. In the same way when a meditator meditates on the earth as one object without its rivers and mountains, etc. he remains devoid of men, forest or hills, etc. but not devoid of the earth-ness. When the meditator rises up to the fifth meditation concentrating his mind on infinite space, this much remains in his mind as a real object, *asunna*. Similarly in his subsequent higher meditations on infinite consciousness, on the state of nothingness, *akincanya*, and on the state of neither consciousness nor no-consciousness his meditations become devoid of every other object but not devoid of the meditated objects. In his last meditation on the absence of any object *animittaceto-samadhi*, he finds that even this concept is not everlasting and permanent and thus he gets rid of his three *asavas* of thirst, rebirth and ignorance. Even though the meditator in this last concentration is freed from the three impurities, *asavas*, he, however, retains the sense of his body as constituted of the six organs up to the end of his life. Thus we find explained in this Discourse the internal voidness *Sunnata* and the external voidness, *Sunnata*, viz. the former is the deliverance of one's mind from the said impurities, whereas the latter is the absence of something else in a particular place or object, e.g. monastery, etc. It is most likely that this internal *Sunnata* is conveyed in such passages like: *Suttanta gambhira Sunnata-patisunyutta*, "Discourses are very deep... and concerned with *Sunnata*, internal purification" *Samyutta*, II, p. 267.

A new interpretation of the term may be traced in *S.m.* IV p. 54. Ananda makes a query to Buddha on the meaning of the world empty and Buddha's answer is that it is empty because of the absence in it of the self and of anything of the self. This new interpretation is kept up throughout the later Pali texts like the *Suttanipata* and other Sanskrit texts as well.

A new expression has been formed in *S.m.* I, p. 135 to convey the absence of soul in man in a stanza attributed to Arya Bhikṣini. It

reads: "To conceive a permanent living being in this body is a wrong view coming from the god of death, Mara. For, this body is pure collocation of the manifest elements, and there is not found a permanent living being, Sattva" *Suddhasamkhara-punjo'yam nac'eha Sattva upalabhyati*/The same expression in the Theragatha, 719: *Suddham Samkhara-samtatim*/The idea that *Suddha* stands in lieu of *Sunya* has been suggested from the Sanskrit counterpart of the cited Pali stanza found in the *Abhidharmakosa-bhasya* of Vasubandhu, p. 466:

शून्यः संस्कारपुण्डरीकं न हि सत्त्वोऽन्न विद्यते

Thus the term, *Sunya* assumed a new definite significance which fact will be more and more confirmed in the subsequent citations.

*Sunyata-Samadhi* is mentioned along with *animitta* and *apranihita* in *Vinaya IV.93. Digh.III, 219, Sam.IV, 360, Ang.I. 299* (Lamotte, *Histoire*, p. 47).

The above three *Samadhis* occur sometimes under three *Vimoksas* (emancipation) and sometimes under *Vimoksa-mukhas* (channel of emancipation). *Sunyata-vimoksa* (शून्यताविमोक्ष) is when one's mind is completely from the three impurities (*Dhammapada*, Sect.7, ver. 4). *Dhammapada* has only two *vimokkhas*, viz. *Sunnata* and *animitta* as in the *Cula-Sunnata-sutta* of *Majjhima-nikaya*.

*S. vimoksa-mukha* results from the contemplation on the non-soul-conception (*Compendium*, p. 216, *Abh. San. IX, 39*) The *Vimuttimaggā* of *Upatissa*, (p. 313) also makes clear how the void-emancipation is fulfilled through penetration into no-soul-thought. One dwelling on the no-soul-thought obtains *Sunnata-vimokkha-mukha*, says the *Pati-sambhida* (cited in *Abh. Dipa*, p. 424, n.3). This specified import of *Sunyata* has been much amplified by other Pali authors like *Nagesena* and *Buddhaghosa*. The former comments: "the self-character of all the manifest elements, the supreme voidness, i.e. absence of any living being and intention the extreme voidness should be made bright" *Samkharanam Sabhavam parama-Sunatam niraha-nijjivitam accantam Sunnatam adiyitabbam*<sup>2</sup> (*Milinda*, *Bombay Univ. Series*, p. 404); while the latter remark: Just as a wooden mill is void, i.e. free of any living being and intention. (*nijjivam niriham*) and yet it acts as if it walks and

1. Note it is *sunya* (शून्य) because there is no *Sattva*, a sentient being in it.

2. संखारानं सभावं परमसुठअतं विरीहं निज्जीनवं ।  
अन्नन्तसुञ्जतं आदियितव्वं ।

stand, just so is *Nama-rupa*, man; he is void, i.e. free from any living being and intention (*nijjivam niriham*), yet he looks as if he has a self and intention and discharges duties, etc. (*Vis. magga*, ch. 18).

Even certain Mahayana Sutras have favoured the idea that the Sunyata concept counteracts *Satkaya-drsti*, belief in soul (Lamotte, *Vimalakirti*, p. 148, n. 16 and *Surangamasamadhi*, p. 22) as against the Samadhiraja-Sutra's saying:

“Voidness does neither arise nor die as all these things are devoid of their self-characters”

न शून्यता जायति नो च म्रियते ।

स्वभावशून्या इमि सर्वधर्माः ॥

(ch. 7. Ver. 28 cited in *Buddhagama-Sangraha*, p. 239).

Let us see now what Nagarjuna, the great champion of the Sunyata thesis says. He makes several statements on different occasions rendering the problem rather mystified than clarified. However it should be noted that he is a *Prasangika*, that is a *Prasajya-pratisedhin*, viz. he would combat strongly and ridicule every proposition relating to any metaphysical topic put forward by his opponent. When, e.g. the proposition is presented, viz. certain cause produces certain result, he finds fault with every part of the proposition asking whether the cause and the result are existent or non-existent and concludes ultimately that both the cause and the result are Sunya, void. This conclusion he makes eloquently in this stanza:—

“This world is a mere continuity of causes and effects; there is no *Sattva*, a sentient being (except in the empirical talk). For mere void things come out of void things”.

Void - *Sunya* - *atmetmya-rehita* (अत्मात्मयिवरहित), bereft of the Self and of anything of the Self. (*Pratitya-Samutpada-hrdaya*, Ver. 4 in *Bulletin, Tibology, Gangtok*, Vol. V, 2, p. 16).

The idea implied here that the process of causes and results continues for ever without the aid of any conscious agent is the fundamental topic of the *Slistambas-Sutra*. Note the causation formula stated in the *Sutra*:

“The seed while producing the sprout does not think ‘I am producing it’; the sprout also, while being produced does not think ‘I am produced by the seed’; etc.” (p.4). Thus the entire process of causation is free from any conscious agent, *cjiven nirjivam* (p.3). Compare the Theragatha: *Suddham dhanna-samuppadam Suddham samklara-*

*samtatim* 1 "Pure is production of things and pure is the continuity of the manifest elements" substituting an old terminology *Suddha*, pure for Sunna, void, (Adhimutta-thera's ver. 12) and note his another saying : *Suddham anissaram etam*, "This is all pure and without an verlord" Ibid.9).

We can now see that the comments on Sunyata (शून्यता) made by Nagasena and Buddha-ghosa as noted above (p.18) are quite in keeping with the traditional thinking of the early Buddhists.

Thus the cause, effect and the act of production being void, Nagarjuna declares :

"What is the dependent origination,  
We call it voidness" (Madh. Sastra, ch. 24, Ver.18).

The same idea he spells out in another context :

"Dependent origination is nothing but voidness, and (so) accepted by you"

यः मतीत्यसमुत्पादः शून्यता संव ते मता

Cited in Bodh-Panjika, p. 414 from his Lokatita-stava 20).

In all these passages the original idea of *nissattva*, self-lessness intended in the term must not be overlooked by us. So the premises made by the Madhyamika authors as dharmas are Sunya, void and *nissva-bhava*, non-substantial are quite sensible and suggestive. Although one may plead with Bhavaviveka (Karatala. p 36) that these two terms are synonyms, they have their own primary ideas and significances.

Some early Buddhists raise objection to such a wide application of Sunyata on the plea that Buddha preached it as a means to gain insight into no-soul-idea, (अनत्ता). Nagarjuna replies in this celebrated stanza :

"Sunyata has been preached by Buddhas with a view to removing all wrong speculations. But those who resort to it as an ultimate end are to be declared as incorrigible fellows". (Madh-Sastra, XIII, 8).

The above introductory statement by Candrakirti in his Prasanna-pada makes clear that it was Nagarjuna who widened the application of Sunyata to the entire field of philosophical speculation. However, the

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१. सुद्ध धम्मसमुत्पाद सुद्ध संखासंनति ।

fact that the Sunyata-doctrine must be viewed as a suitable weapon to check all the wrong views and opinions has also been well stressed by Nagasena, a predecessor of Nagarjuna (See Milinda, p. 404).

Doctrine of Sunyata (शून्यता) is a fundamental topic of the Satyasiddhi which adopted it as an antidote against the reality-notions of separate elements including the concepts of *Usmagate*, etc. Sunyata is not applied to prajnapiti dharmas, empirical things like chariot, house, etc. reality of which is negated by means of studies of the scripture. Sunyata-concept is not an end by itself, it is also put a stop to at the Nirvanic state (Ch. 141).

The S. Siddhi employs the term Sunya along with other three terms with reference to the elements in this order: *anitya*, *duhkha*, *Sunya* and *anatman*. Sunya has been made into 'selfless' in keeping with its early usage. Now the idea of *anatman*, 'selfless' becomes redundant; hence the term is treated as conveying the idea of non-substantial (chs. 189, 190, 192). The Siddhi presumably implies thereby the theory of two-fold soullessness, *nairatnya* of the Maha-Yanists.

We may now try to find out whether we have any early authority employing all the four terms in parallel as in the S. Siddhi. The Theragatha (Talaputa's ver. 27). refers to them thus:

अनिच्चं दुक्खंति विपस्स योनिस्सो  
सुञ्जं अनत्तेति भघं वधति च

We have here two more characteristics, *agham*, sinful and *vadham*, destructive. The Thera addresses his mind to be watchful of things in their true characteristics in order that it may remain aloof from them.

The mind's watchfulness over the separate personality elements is one of the four ways of mindfulness, *Satipatthana*. It is explained in the Nikayas as to keep watch over the fact that dharmas like the removal of the hindrance, *nivarana*, seven factors of Bodhi and four noble truth, etc. are elized and so on. But *Vasubandhu* gives a different meaning of *Dharmasmriti*. "The person engaged in it penetrates into the elements under four aspects: *anitya*, impermanent, *duhkha*, sorrowful, *Sunya*, void and *anatman*, selfless" (Abh. Kosa, VI. 19). This interpretation should not be viewed as *Vasubandhu*'s own, but it is, in fact, based on that of the early Sarvastivadin authors as many other topics of the Kosa are. Cfr. the same interpretation in the Abh. dipa with Vitti, p. 316-17. We have the same four aspects stated in another context. The Sarvastivadins' *Abhidharma*, e.g. *Panca-vastuka*, p. 10, insists that the comprehension of the four Aryan truths must be effected

under four aspects each. The first truth, *dukkha-Satya* is characterized as *anitya*, *dukkha*, *Sunya* and *anatman*. Since *Dukkha-satya* covers the entire Universe (S. Siddhi, ch. 17) the authors of Euddhism made a great capital of such topics and proved their ontological outlook well founded. It was probably Nagarjuna and his followers who picked up one important aspect of the elements, dharmas, i.e. *Sunya* and built out of it a stupendous philosophy of their own (v. my paper on Gaudapada, Bulletin, Tibetology, Vol. VIII, 1, pp. 28ff. and *Prajnaparamita* in my forthcoming Buddhist Idealism).

The Ratnagotra probably refers to the four characteristics (*laksana*) of dharma: *anitya*, *dukkha*, *anatman* and *santanirvana* (IV. 32) and in its comment to four aspects (*akera*) under *nairyanika*: *anitya*, *dukkha*, *sunya* and *anatman*. Though these four are not spoken of here under *dukkhasatya* the context implies that they are described as characteristics of things under that truth (p. 103). Four perversions ( *वियसि* ) are mentioned as related to the phenomenal things: pain-attraction towards impermanent things, happy-rotation towards unhappy things. Self-notion towards selfless things and suspicious-rotation towards ugly things. Since the noble body of Tathagata is freed from the said perversions, converse of them are attributed to the noble body, viz. *nitya-paramita*, permanent-climax, *sukhap*, happy-climax, *atnap*, self-climax and *subhaparamita*, auspicious-climax.

According to Vasubandhu these four perversions are to be checked by their four antidotes (*pratipaksa*), viz. four ways of mindfulness thus: The mindfulness on the body checks the pure-perversion, *Suci-viparyasa*, on the feeling, happy-perversion, *Sukha-vi*, on the mind, permanent-perversion, *nitya-vi* and on the separate personality-elements the soul-perversion, *आत्म वियसि* (Kosa, VI, 15 with Bhasya and Abh. Dipa, p. 316). By exercising the fourth mindfulness the said four aspects are to be observed in order to check the soul-idea, a perversion. The poet Asvaghosa who preceded the Satyasiddhi employs the terms in parallel and explains thus: The elements are *sunya*, void because there is neither producer nor enjoyer in them; they are *anatman*, (soul-less) because the universe is desireless and independent (Saurdara, XVII, 20-21. It becomes now evident that the S. Siddhi and Asvaghosa have faithfully kept up the earlier tradition in interpreting *sunya* into soulless or selfless; but in respect of *anatman*, the S. Siddhi made it into *nissvabhava*, non-substantial, presumably following Nagarjuna and his school whereas Asvaghosa put it into desireless. The above four characteristics of things are also mentioned by Nagarjuna in his Pra. hrdaya without explaining them (op. cit. p. 16).

## A CONTROVERSY BETWEEN THE YOGACARA AND THE MADHYAMIKA

The Yogacara Idealists maintain that the objective world that we experience is a false reflection of our mind. It is unreal because it does not stand our critical and logical test as Dignaga has proved (Alambana-pariksa). It is one phase of the store-consciousness which is an accumulation of beotic forces from immemorial time (अनादिकाल वासना). The store-consciousness must be checked and substituted by a pure ultra-mundan knowledge. To do away with it is to acquire *somnum bonum* (v. तत्क्षयान्मुक्तिरिष्यते, M. Vibhaga, I, 5, तस्य व्यावृत्तिरहत्वे Trimsika, 5).

Maitreyanatha calls it Sunyata, voidness on the ground that it is cleansed of all defiling forces which generate illusive appearance of the external things as well as attachment to them. Voidness is not an absolute non-entity but something more. His plea is that the liberation is secured as a result of cleansing one's own mind of its misconceptions and perversions.<sup>1</sup> Because our consciousness presents an illusive show before us, we cannot deny its existence altogether. We deny its illusive characters; its self-substance remains there. The illusive characters are graspable and grasping aspects (ग्राह्यग्राहक भाग). Its self-substance is beyond the reach of the ordinary mind, hence it can hardly be denied (v. m. Vibh. Tika, p. 16, 10-13).

This conception of Sunyata differentiates them from the Madhyamikas. For Nagarjuna, propounder of the Madhyamika School, Sunyata, voidness conveys the idea of non-substantiality (*ni svabhava*) and serves as an antidote against all misconception and false notions. It has also been equated with the idea of relativity, i.e. some contingent existence of things. Nagarjuna says: whichever is brought about by causal relations is not really produced, and hence non-existent. He sometime raises

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1. Cfr. Majh. III, pp. 104ff; Culasunnata-Sutta. The purport of this Sutra is summed up thus: "The true solitude is not to be found in forest-dwelling nor in the Concentration of heart from all ideas, but from in attaining to the deliverance from asavas."

Malala Sekhara, Pali Proper Names, p. 904-5.

the concept of Sunyata to the status of the Absolute Truth, which he defines as free of four categorical attributes, *ens.* etc. (v. M. Vrtti. pp. 176, 491 & 375); but he never says that Sunyata by itself is the Truth.

The Idealists do not agree with Nagarjuna's line of thinking. Maitreya, leader of the school has presented convincingly his case and shown how the concept of Sunyata should be viewed in order to accomplish the cherished purpose. He asks: How is voidness to be viewed? His reply is:—

When something is absent in a place, that place is devoid (शून्य) of that something; what is left out there over and above that something, exists there forever. Perceiving it in this manner

one is said to have grasped voidness in a true perceptivity. Grasping this, one is said to have penetrated deep into voidness. This point is further illustrated as follow :

Suppose, we have here some object (*vastu*) specified as Rupa. etc. When its aspect coming under category of designation does not at all exist as it is imposed thereon, that object is devoid of the aspect that is designated as rupa, etc. What is seen there is the object designated as rupa, etc., and what serves as the basis of the designation : this *rupadi* (रूपादि) (serving simply as accessory to such designation) is something real. When one understands truly well these two: the basic object and the designation, he does not impose anything that is not there, does not negate the basic truth (भूत), neither exaggerates nor belittles, neither removes nor imposes, but understands the truth well; that is the Tathata (तथता) which is indiscrible in its nature: This is known as well grasped voidness.

The fact that every element is indiscrible in its nature is to be ascertained from the scripture also. Buddha says in the Bhava-Sankrantisutra :

Whichever thing is designated with whichever designation (नामन्) that (designated) thing does not at all exist in them : this is true law of elements (धर्मता). (v. 1. 5. ver. 5)

1. The same idea is expressed in M.jh. III, p. 106 :

यं हि बो तत्थ न हो ति । तेन तं सुञ्जं समनुपस्सति । यं पन तत्थ अवसिट्ठं हो ति । तं सतं इदं अत्थीति पजानाति । एवं पिस्स एसा आनन्द यथाभच्च अविपल्लत्था सुपरिसुद्धा सुञ्जतावक्कंति भवति ।



Dharmata according to Kamalasila is *prakṛti*, true characteristic of all elements that remains outside of all discursive talks :  
 सर्ववाद्यपयानीस्तुत्वं वतनां स्वाम'व :- Panjika.

How one is said to have ill-grasped voidness is also elucidated by Maitreya thus : If any ascetic or Brahmana does not wish to concede that what is devoid of something that something is non-existent and what is left out there is existent, then voidness becomes ill-understood. Why so? Because it is proper to say that when there is something absent, that something is non-existent; wherein it is absent, that basic element is existent. If every thing (i.e. both) is non-existent, how will it be ? What is it that is devoid? Of what it is devoid? Nor is it proper to say that it is devoid of itself. Therefore the concept of voidness in this manner becomes ill grasped (IF.Q. IV, 161, ff, L.V. Pous.in: Note on Sunyata with an extract from Bodhisattva-bhumi).

Speaking earlier of the Nihilists (Vainasika) who denies absolutely any fundamental basic principle underlying our talks and designations Maitreya observes: We shall disclose how a Nihilist who challenges the very basic principle hidden beneath the surface of things like rupa, etc. (matter) shall be fallen from this spiritual discipline (*dharmavinaya*). To the person who denies even the basic principle (*yastumatra*) in such things it is impossible to speak of the basic truth and the designations. For example, the talk of the soul (*pudgala*) is possible only in the presence of five aggregates of elements, matter etc. but not in their absence. Likewise in the presence of the basic truth underlying the matter, etc. the designations of such things are possible but not otherwise. In its absence one makes a baseless talk. When there is no basic principle, the baseless talk also will not be there. Thus there are certain people who on account of their ill understanding, having heard the discourses that are inclined to Mahayanic ideas and attached to the elucidation of voidness and intentional meanings, do not grasp the true meaning of what is preached there, speculate wrongfully, and with the help of improper and ill formulated logic conceive wrong ideas thus: Designation is only one principal truth; one who conceives in this manner conceives not well. For them the basic principle that serves as substratum of designation is absent and the designation also by no means is possible. How can there be the designation itself as the basic principle? In this manner they destroy both the principle as well as designation. The basic principle being denied, he is to be declared as a principal Nihilist (*Pradhana-nastika*). As such he deserves neither conversation nor co-existence with the wise men. He not only dupes himself but dupes others too. Buddha with

this idea in view says: Every thing is possible for certain person of the soul-view, but nothing is possible for him who mis-conceives the voidness. Why so? A man of soul-view may be deluded in respect of one knowable reality (*jneya*): but he does not dispute every knowable reality. Nor will he, due to that view, fall into unhappy state of life. He will neither dispute with any seeker of truth, nor will he dupe him. He may on the other hand, make the person secure a true dharma. But a man of misconceived voidness will be deluded in respect of knowable reality and neglect it. Due to that he will fall into unhappy state of life and destroy the seeker of truth and the end of misery. He will become finally negligent in his religious duties (*sikṣapade*). This person negating the truth (knowable reality) will fall from the spiritual discipline (*dharmavinaya*) (I bid.)

Prof. Louis de Vallee Poussin thinks that the absolute Nihilist (*Vainatika*) referred to in the passage cited above is perhaps Bhavaviveka of the Madhyamika school or the Madhyamika system itself which maintains the views similar to those expressed in the passage. It is most likely that the passage criticizes Nagarjuna's school which holds the view that every thing including Nirvana is absolutely void. Nagarjuna, too warns that voidness being ill grasped will destroy the seeker of the truth; e.g. the serpent when one catches it improperly destroys the person (M. Sastra, XXIV. II).

It is interesting to note that the above passage throws among other things a new light on the origin of the Idealistic thought is Buddhism. Maitreya makes absolutely clear that his school was started with a view to reinterpret the concept of Sunyata (शून्यता) which was elaborated in the Prajnaparamita Sutras and which was made again the subject matter of the Madhyamikasastra. It was the Madhyamika who upheld the view that Sunyata stands for an absolute negation of any conceivable thought about the ultimate truth. He never speaks of any fundamental principle (अधिष्ठान) underlying our daily experiences. The Idealist characterizes it as *sat*, existent whereas the Madhyamika keeps it clear from such characterization. For him the absolute is free of any attribute, existence or non-existence.

It is quite logical to plead with the Idealists that there ought to be some basic principle on which our illusory talk is founded. This point is well elucidated by Candrakirti in course of presenting the Idealistic position in his Madh. Avatara as follows:

“The relative existence (*paratantra*) ought to be upheld since it is considered to be the basis of entire chain of imaginations. The illusion of snake arises on the support of a rope. No such illusion would arise in the absence of rope. Likewise the idea of blue, etc.

arises on the support of some basic mind. If this basic fact is absent, what would be the basis of the idea of blue, etc.? Therefore we ought to uphold *paratantra*, the basic mind as basic cause of the blue-idea, etc. It is also causing agent of defiling elements as well as purifying ones. In this manner one realizes that what is absent in a place is non-existing truly. This (realization) is what is called truly entering into voidness. By realizing thiswise voidness becomes well conceived" (v. my S. skrit text. p. 42. f. publ. in JOR. M. Supplement, 1930).

Candrakīrti earlier remarks that the advocate of God holds that He is creator of the universe; likewise the advocate of the store-consciousness pleads that it is the seat of seeds and hence it produces the appearance of the world. But there is one difference between these two schools, viz, God is permanent for the former and the store-consciousness is impermanent for the latter (I bid.).

This argument set forth by the Idealists in favour of one basic principle tallies remarkably with one presented by the Advaita Vedāntin. The universe for the Vedāntin is an illusion and imposed on the impersonal Brahman which is eternal and serves as basis of all illusions and illusory talks. The Buddhist Idealists agree with the Advaita Vedāntin in so far as one basic reality (अधिष्ठान) is concerned, but differ from the latter in viewing it as momentary. Since the basic store-consciousness is momentary and saturated with seeds, creative of universal consequences it is gradually to be eliminated and substituted finally or converted into a permanent ultramundane knowledge.

Vasubandhu's definition of the perfect knowledge is that when the basic consciousness, *paratantra* is made shorn of all imposed ideas (*parikalpa*), it becomes perfect knowledge (*pariniṣpanna*). Since the latter is evolved from the former, the former is considered as a real entity. In Maitreya's terminology *samala Tathata* (समला तथता) is *paratantra* and *Vimala Tathata* (विमला तथता) is *pariniṣpanna* or again *Tathagatagarbha* is *paratantra* and *Dharmakaya* is *pariniṣpanna*, or according to *Madhyanta-vibhanga Abhūtaparikalpa* (अभूतपरिकल्प) is *paratantra* and *Tatra Sunyata* (तत्र शून्यता) is *pariniṣpanna*.

Maitreya remarks that the Absolute is sometimes contaminated with impurities and sometimes freed from them. Owing to its contamination man strongly adheres to the idea of subject-object relations in his mind and entertains a misgiving about the concept of *Sunyata*, i.e. ideation alone, *cittamātrata*. When he gives up that idea and acquires the true knowledge, then the true concept of voidness dawns in his mind and he is said to be freed from impurities. Thus the pure or

impure state of mind is contingent (आपेक्षिक) or conditioned and does not affect its own nature; for it is forever shining in its nature (*praktiprabhaswaran*). The water or gold, e.g. is pure in its nature but becomes impure on account of its contamination with impure elements. Likewise is the mind. But the contaminated state is something actual and not our guess. Otherwise all people would become at once wise and noble (M. Vibh. Tika, p. 42-3). Its original purity also cannot be questioned; otherwise all our efforts for our spiritual betterment would be in vain and produce little effect. A Bodhisattva takes to the spiritual path in order that he should serve people and fulfil their desires. That is the primary purpose in his life.

Now let us note the Ratnagotra's comment on Sunyata. Tathagatadhatu is void of the accidental impurities which are of separable character, and non-void of the highest virtues of inseparable character (I. 153). There is nothing to be removed, nor is there anything to be imposed upon it (absolute). The absolute (भूत) should be viewed as such; one who views it in its true perspective gets released. In these statements the characteristic of Sunyata is elucidated as a middle path (*aparyanta*) since it has been denied of either imputation or amputation. The author further denounces the Madhyamikas and their mode of thinking; Those whose thought is distracted from the enuciated import of Sunyata or not composed or concentrated upon it are declared to be drifted from the Sunyata. In the absence of true comprehension of sunyata of the highest import (*paramartha*) the undiscriminated absolute element (धत्तु) cannot be comprehended or cognized introspectively. With this intention it is stated (by Buddha): Tathagatas' comprehension of Sunyata is no other than that of Tathagatagēbha which is unknown or unrealized by the Sravakas and Pratyekabuddhas, etc. (P. 76). The same treatise decries those who profess and adhere to the Sunyata-concept itself are maddened in the doctrine. Buddha declares towards such persons: Far better is the belief in soul (सत्कान्यदृष्टि) of Sumeru mountain dimension than an absessed sunyata-concept (p.28. I. II). Nagarjune too is not less emphatic in denouncing such obsession: Those who adhere to the Sunyata-concept by itself, we call them incorrigible (M. Sastra, XIII, 8). These two statements make it plain that each school holds its own interpretation *prima facie* correct and condemns other's one a fallacious. An interesting parallel to this idea of Sunyata, not ideal by itself can be traced in the Isopanisad, mantra 2.

Bone of contention between the Yogacara and the Madhyamika schools is the question of *Paratantra*. The Yogacara (Vijnnavadin) holds it as real and existing, because it serves as a basis of our designations and imputations. However Bhaviveka, a champion of Svatantrika Madhyamika school refuses to accept its reality. He has also

criticized the interpretation of Sunyata as has been shown in the above cited passage (of the Yogacarabhumi: येन शून्यं तदसत् etc. ), Read his Karatalaratna (Visvabharati pub 1949, pp 15-16 57-59). He has been accused by Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Hsuan Tsang and others that he has made Mahayana lacking in laksanas, paratantra, etc. (y. My Intro.p. XII-III, Karatala).

For the Vijnavadin, *paratantra*, relative entity may be unreal only in so far as its imposed aspect is concerned कल्पितरूपेण असत् but not absolutely unreal. It is an entity which consists of eight consciousness elements (अष्टविज्ञान वस्तुक परतन्त्रः) M. Vibh. Tika I, p. 15).

This point has been emphasized in the first stanza of his treatise by Maitreya:

There is a (foundation of) unreal imputations, but in it duality (of the subject-and-object-aspects) is not there. There is, however, Sunyata, voidness; in that voidness even there is imputation. (Madhyanta, I, 2).

Here the foundation of imputation is the mind and mental states (verse 9) ;; they continue by way of causes and conditions upto the time of Nirvana and cover the three spheres of existence (Madh. Tika, p. 12. L-10-11; also Trimsika, p. 41).

The later schools of Buddhism in Tibet and Mongolia which sprang from the Yogacara school have admitted the mind as the ultimate principle and viewed it as *sunya* with the implication of *advaya*, non-dual. Note, for example, Tibet's great Yogin Milarepa's statement (Lama Kazi Dawa Samdup's translation) "I understood the Samsara and Nirvana to be dependent and relative states and that the Universal cause is mind which is distinct from ideas of interestendness or partiality. This universal cause, when directed along the path of Disbelief (or selfishness) resulteth in the Samsara; while, if it be directed along the path of Altruism, it resulteth in Nirvana. I was perfectly convinced that the real source of both Samsara and Nirvana lay in the voidness (of the Supra-mundane Mind) '—p. 209. Previously Milarepa is said to be well versed in the exposition of the science of the clear void of mind, wherein all forms and substances have their course and origin. Here the mind is viewed as the void which however is not the void of nothingness, but the primordial uncreated, unformed, incapable of being described in terms of phenomenal experience (pp. 36-7). The primordial cause is pri-

mordial Mind, the one unity. All pairs of opposites being but concepts of mundane mind - when viewed by the supra-mundaneness of enlightenment merge in at-one-ment, and Duality is realized to be Illusion' (p.35. n. 1. v. Evans wentz, Milarepa, Oxford, 1958).

### Note

The term, Sunya in the following instances indicate the absence of people or some person :—

सुळजागार Dhp. XXV, 14, Milindap. Bombay edn. p. 360

सुळजागाम, Sam-Nikaya, IV, 192ff.

सुळजवन (= रहः) Jataka, Vol. III, No. 305.

शून्यं वासगृहम्, Amarusataka, Ver. 82.

Again let us note Vasubandhu's comments on these two terms, Sunya and Anatman :—

आःमीयदृष्टिविपक्षेण शून्यम् ।

आत्मदृष्टिविपक्षेण अनात्मा ।

.....

अन्तर्व्यापारपुष्परहितावात् शून्यम् ।

अकामकारित्वात् अनात्मा ।

.....

आत्मरहितात्वात् शून्यम् ।

स्वयमनात्मत्वात् अनात्मा ।

Kosabhasya, p 400.

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