

Moral Practice in Nagarjuna's Philosophy: The Issue of the Other

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Abstract

This research paper proposes to investigate the ethical aspect of the philosophy of Nāgārjuna, focusing on the issue of the 'other' in the arena of Mādhyamaka school of Buddhism. *Emptiness* (*śūnyatā*) and *Dependent Origination* (*pratītyasamutpāda*), the two cruxes of Nāgārjuna's philosophy, nullify the reality of all. While we refer to the term 'other' in morality, it indicates the one towards whom a moral agent exercises his or her morality. The denial of the reality of all by the philosophy of Nagarjuna invalidates the reality of 'other'. Apparently, this radical denial calls into question the very grounds of moral practice and moral responsibility. The paper tries to show that Nagarjuna's philosophy of *Emptiness* (*śūnyatā*) and *Dependent Origination* (*pratītyasamutpāda*) offer a unified framework for moral practice and moral responsibility by redefining the sense of morality in the context of relational existence and interdependence. In doing so, the paper justifies that it does not entail contradiction in the philosophy of Nāgārjuna when it promotes moral practice, and at the same time denies the true existence of the 'other'-especially the real existence of the moral agent.

Through a minute study of the meaning of morality and 'the other' in the speculative thoughts of Nāgārjuna, the paper illustrates that the relevance of moral practice and moral responsibility within the philosophical framework of Dharmakīrti and Ratnakīrti are also taken for discussion.

Keywords: Nāgārjuna, Morality, Moral agent, Dependent Origination, Emptiness, the Other, Dharmakīrti, Ratnakīrti

Introduction

Buddhism occupies the most revered position in the field of philosophy. Nāgārjuna, the key figure of the Madhyamika philosophy of Buddhism, is highly recognized for his concept of *Emptiness* (*Śūnyata*) and the method of *Dialectic* (*Catuṣkoṭi*). Most of the study

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related to Nāgārjuna revolves around his method of *Dialectic* and the notion of *Emptiness*. From this standpoint, the current paper can claim its novelty, as it has taken into consideration the notion of 'other' in the sphere of Nāgārjuna's morality. The value of this research work lies in its novel approach, where it tries to unveil the fact that Nāgārjuna's idea of *Emptiness* is compatible with his notion of morality. The current work aims to explore the ethical dimension of the thoughts of Nāgārjuna by dealing with the query of how one is related to other sentient beings in a philosophical system that rejects the inherent existence of all. This represents the core objective of the present paper.

Nāgārjuna, through his philosophy of *Emptiness* (*śūnyatā*) and *Dependent Origination* (*pratītyasamutpāda*), subverts the inherent existence of all, incorporating 'other'. The negation of 'other' rests on the denial of 'I'. Within moral discourse, the term 'I' represents the moral agent. So, this search attempts to encompass how Nāgārjuna has negated the inherent existence of 'other' by the denial of 'I' (moral agent). The denial of the real existence of 'other' raises a contradiction by presenting the issue of how a philosophy that defies all the fixed identities can still refer to ethical engagement and moral responsibility. The research problem addressed in the current work is evident in the above line.

The paper, employing its analytical method, will demonstrate that Nāgārjuna's insistence on moral practices and responsibility aligns with his thesis, despite his denial of the 'other' in his philosophy. Rather, Nāgārjuna's philosophy provides a unique way to interpret morality and moral agent, 'I' and 'other' in a non-substantial, alternatively stated, in the sphere of relational world. Thus, this research work proves that in the framework of Nāgārjuna's morality, one can perform moral action without having inherent existence.

First, the paper has introduced the issue of *other* within the philosophical framework of Dharmakīrti and Ratnakīrti to offer an overview of the notion of *other* in Mahāyāna Buddhism and also to explicate the uniqueness of Nāgārjuna's understanding of *other* in the section '*The Problem of Other and Mahāyāna Buddhism: Dharmakīrti and Ratnakīrti on Existence of Other Mind*'. A brief account of the idea of morality as contained in Mahāyāna Buddhism has been narrated in the segment, highlighted with the heading '*Morality: A Brief Analysis in Mahāyāna Buddhism*'. The section '*Tracing Morality: In the Philosophy of Nāgārjuna*' will interpret the meaning of Nāgārjuna's analysis of morality from different angles. The paper has approached the notion of 'other' in relation to Nāgārjuna's concept of morality in its subsequent part- '*Approaching the Concept of Other in the Backdrop of Nāgārjuna's Morality*'. Before considering Nāgārjuna's philosophy, the study takes a special initiative by adding a separate section with the title '*Existence in the Philosophical Framework of Nāgārjuna: A Quick Look*' on the meaning of existence with respect to Nāgārjuna's philosophy, with the intention of clarifying the technical sense of 'existence' applied by Nāgārjuna in his speculation of Emptiness. In the final section, '*Reframing the Concept of Morality and the Issue of 'Other' In the Light of Nāgārjuna's Philosophical Insight*', the current work has sought to reframe the idea of morality and the issue of 'other' within

the philosophical framework of Nāgārjuna. Key findings are outlined in the conclusion section of the paper.

The Problem of *other* and Mahāyāna Buddhism: Dharmakīrti and Ratnakīrti on Existence of other Mind

Without being conscious of the notion of *other* in the purview of Mahāyāna Buddhism, it is difficult to comprehend the uniqueness of Nāgārjuna's sense of '*other*'. So, in this section, the paper explores the notion of the other through the eyes of Dharmakīrti (7th Century AD) and Ratnakīrti (11th Century AD), the two renowned scholars of Buddhist Philosophy.

Dharmakīrti, a leading philosopher of the Yogācāra school of Buddhism and of Buddhist epistemology, addressing the issue of '*other*' from the epistemological standpoint in his book '*Santānāntarasiddhi*', opines that we cannot go into others' mental states through direct perception (*pratyakṣa*). It is the analogical inference (*anumāna*), as maintained by Dharmakīrti, with the help of which we can discern the existence of others' minds. "The realist will agree with the idealist that we have no direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) of others' mental states, and thus that any knowledge we can have must come by means of inference (*anumāna*)". (Henkel 65)

Dharmakīrti argues that the actions and changes that we notice in our bodies are caused by our mind. This observation helps us to draw a causal relationship between bodily action and the mind. On this ground, it is acknowledged by us that we possess a mind. Dharmakīrti extends his argument to demonstrate the existence of other minds, and, through the analogy, he notes that the bodily actions which we notice in others also must be caused by minds; those minds cannot be ours but theirs. It proves that, like us, others also have minds. On this ground of analogical argument, Dharmakīrti has recognized the existence of other minds. "We see the bodily actions of other persons and by analogical inference on the basis of similarity with our own case we become sure about the existence of other minds. Without this, our practical life in the phenomenal worldⁱ, which is conditionally true (*saṃvṛtisatya*), would have been impossible. The cognition of the existence of our mind as the cause of our bodily actions is intuitively evident (*sva-saṃvedya*) whereas the cognition of the existence of other minds is evident to us through inference, though it is intuitively evident (*sva-saṃvedya*) to the others" (Mahanta 9). As analyzed by Dharmakīrti, we can know the other mind not in particular with its specific quality but in general. Because the bodily actions we have experienced in us can make us conscious of the particularity of our own mind, but the specific characters of the minds of other individuals remains unfeasible. Whatever we are conscious of is only the mind in general. "In Dharmakīrti's epistemology, inference cannot reveal the unique characteristics of objects. It is concerned only with the universal. He reaffirms this in the *Santānāntarasiddhi*.....The inference of other minds is concerned only with the universal." (Sharma 467)

By standing on the opposite pole to Dharmakīrti, Ratnakīrti, the other distinguished Vijñānavādin, in his book *Santānāntaradūṣaṇa*, rejects the reality of other minds. Being a true Vijñānavādin, Ratnakīrti holds that the things external to our consciousness are not real but only appearances. So, the reality of other minds cannot be conclusively asserted. As explained by Inami, Ratnakīrti has denied not only the conventional existence of other minds but also the ultimate existence of other minds. (473)

Ratnakīrti states that people acknowledge the existence of other minds in general by observing the bodily actions as the result of wishful minds. By offering his statement, Ratnakīrti raises his query whether the wishful mind, which is considered as the root of the bodily action of others, is perceptible to him who has inferred the existence of other minds. He further argues that if one can perceive it, only its absence will be demonstrated through the non-perception of a perceptible object. "While inferring, we do not perceive the intention and therefore we will establish its absence by the non-perception of a perceptible object (*dr̥śyānupalabdhi*)....."(Inami 469). Ratnakīrti adds that if the perception of the intention is possible, we do not need to infer it.

Hence, as pointed out by Ratnakīrti, an inevitable concomitance (*vyāpti*) is necessary to form an inference. To infer the existence of others' minds from the observation of behavior or bodily action, there must be an inevitable concomitance (*vyāpti*) relation between bodily and mental states. According to Ratnakīrti, the causal relation we have established between bodily actions and the mental states is grounded in our subjective experience. Interestingly, this subjective experience cannot verify the universal relation between behaviour and mental states. "True, Ratnakīrti begins by rejecting an analogical argument for other minds that looks a lot like Dharmakīrti's. His objection to this argument is that in order to establish its conclusion it requires an inevitable concomitance (*vyāpti*) between mental states and behaviour, but no such concomitance can be established in the case of others." (Perrett 66)

Though Nāgārjuna, precedes Dharmakīrti and Ratnakīrti, their reflection on the existence of other minds clearly addresses the issue of 'other', and this elaboration assists in the understanding of 'other' in the field of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Morality: A Brief Analysis in Mahāyāna Buddhism

Śīla or morality occupies a key place in the ethics of Buddhism. In the *nikāyas* and *āgamas*, the term 'morality', (*Śīla*) denotes precepts (both *pañcaśīla* and *daśaśīla*); a set of prohibitions to be observed by both lay people and monks. The term 'morality', (*Śīla*) in early Buddhist philosophy symbolizes the moral conduct of people, lay people, and monks. "In early Buddhist texts like the *nikāyas* and *āgamas*, *śīla* primarily refers to moral discipline, encompassing rules for both laypeople and monastics....." (Zhang 182) Gradually, the meaning of *Śīla* alters from moral conduct to perfection (*pāramitā*) of morality in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Clearly stated, Mahāyāna Buddhist morality has identified some core practices, such as generosity (*dāna*), morality (*śīla*), patience (*kṣānti*),

effort (*vīrya*), concentration (*dhyāna*), and wisdom (*prajñā*), which are often referred to as *Pāramitās* or Six Perfections. "The major ethical practices of Mahayana are the six perfections (paramita), viz. the perfection of giving or generosity, the perfection of morality, the perfection of fortitude, the perfection of effort, the perfection of concentration, and the perfection of wisdom" (Dorjey 176). Six perfections represent six principal virtues which are expected to be cultivated by the subject who is on the way to Buddhahood. Perfect cultivation of these *pāramitā* makes a bodhisattva capable of practicing his commitment to release people from the web of suffering.

Besides this concept of six perfections, morality, in Mahāyāna Buddhism, emerged with an emphasis on several key concepts, such as compassion, Bodhisattva, enlightenment, etc. The Bodhisattva is recognized as the moral archetype in Mahāyāna Buddhism. The term 'Bodhisattva' literally denotes a being who is enlightened. Historically, the term 'Bodhisattva' stands to mean the being who has embarked on the way of perfect knowledge yet not received it; popularly, it refers to a future Buddha. '..... Bodhisattva literally means 'one whose essence is perfect knowledge.... historically it means "one who is on the way to the attainment of perfect knowledge, a future Buddha"' (Radhakrishnan 515). The universal salvation is the core aim of the Bodhisattva ideal, and it is enlightenment that grows a deep sense of mercy and compassion for all living beings in the thought of the Bodhisattva, which inspires him to act for the removal of suffering and for universal salvation. A Bodhisattva intentionally pauses his Nirvāṇa and acts for the salvation of all other beings. Mahāyāna morality is characterized by ethical humanism and universalism on the basis that it believes in the feasibility of Bodhisattva by all, irrespective of caste and creed. The reflection on the concept of Bodhisattva reveals that enlightenment and compassion cruxes of Mahāyāna Buddhist morality.

Tracing Morality in the Philosophy of Nāgārjuna

Nāgārjuna, being a supreme supporter of the middle way, does not directly interpret what morality is. Nāgārjuna, as mentioned earlier, was acclaimed for his dialectical approach or deconstruction and the idea of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), through the application of which, he challenges conventional metaphysical and epistemological standpoints. His philosophy of emptiness is opposed to the inherent existence of all, which stands against the fixed definition of morality. Still this study has endeavoured to determine the possible meaning of Nāgārjuna's idea of morality from different angles in the following analysis.

Moral life as depicted in the thought of Nāgārjuna implies one's participation in *kuśalakarma*. *Kuśala* or wholesome karma refers to actions which are beneficial for *others* and have been practiced by the agent in a self-restricted manner. Straightforwardly speaking, by the phrase '*wholesome deed*', what Nāgārjuna wishes to denote is a virtuous deed. To convey the meaning of morality or morally good life, Nāgārjuna has invoked the term '*Dharma*' in various contexts.

Speaking of the morally good life, Nāgārjuna uses the term *dharma*, instead of *karma*,

and this may have confounded the modern interpreters. The term dharma, as explained earlier in the discussion of the Buddha's philosophy, was used both in an ontological sense and in an ethical context. Nāgārjuna himself followed this practice, as indicated in the annotation of the Kārikā [see xxiv.36]. Thus, in the present context too, dharma means good karma and these are identified as (i) self-restraint, and (ii) benefiting others. Nāgārjuna's selection of these two types of action as the foundation of moral behaviour is significant. (Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārika of Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy* 90)

As outlined above, the very definition of 'kuśala karma' or 'virtuous action' in Nāgārjuna's philosophy implies one's participation in the self-disciplined actions free from *rāga*, *desa*, *moha* (greed, hatred, and delusion). In a way, the performance of virtuous actions depends on the controlled behavior of the moral agent. Morality, in this sense, can be traced as a skill or guidance that enables us to deal with *others* in a gentle way, which incorporates the well-being of *others*. To put it differently, morality, as illustrated in the thought of Nāgārjuna, is a practice that brings a transformation in the inner nature and outward behaviour of beings.

It is maintained in our Indian Philosophy that one cannot have insight unless one performs morality and duties. This is so because the idea of reality is inherent in the morals prescribed in that philosophy. It entails that morality is intimately connected with metaphysics in Indian philosophy; i.e., the study of reality. That is why adherence to moral practices is recognized as the assured way to the insight of reality in the philosophy of India. "Again, and again do we meet with the declaration that man does not attain clarity of understanding without performing the duties of his station, and that whosoever eschews the obligations of life is destined to lose vision of absolute truth" 8 (Bhattacharyya 622). Similarly, the core purpose of Nāgārjuna's morality is to guide people to the path of liberation or *Nirvāṇa*. Nāgārjuna affirms this integration through the following verse:

"With discipline and concentration, wisdom too,
Attain nirvana....." [105]
(*Letter to a Friend* 69).

From this perspective, Nāgārjuna's account of morality can be elucidated in terms of that which leads to liberation. For this reason, Nāgārjuna holds that one should be involved in the practices of giving, ethics, and patience until the moment one cannot build the proper knowledge of Dharmaⁱⁱ that can remove the false notion of I. It implies that the practice of morality generates *Prajñā* (wisdom) and *Karuṇā* (compassion), two chief pillars of *Nirvāṇa*.

"Therefore, as long as the doctrine removing.....Of giving, ethics, and patience" [125] (*Precious Garland* 112)

Hence, the understanding of reality, i.e., the interdependence of phenomena or the emptiness of phenomena, rests on the moral practice in the perspective of Nāgārjuna, as justified in the above lines. This section has sought to reflect on the connotation of

morality as contained in the understanding of Nāgārjuna through different perspectives. To clarify the query- is Nāgārjuna's notion of morality compatible with his philosophy of Dependent Origination and Emptiness? - this paper will revisit and reformulate his concept of morality while addressing his philosophy a little bit later.

Approaching the Other in the Backdrop of Nāgārjuna's Morality

This part has attempted to bring to the surface the account of 'other' as embedded in the notion of Nāgārjuna's morality. In the above section, too, it is observed that the notion of 'other' is grounded in the very meaning of morality.ⁱⁱⁱ It should be mentioned here that when we apply the term 'other' in the context of Nāgārjuna's morality, it refers to the one towards whom a moral agent extends his moral responsibility. Let us look intensively at the implication of 'other' emerging from the morality of Nāgārjuna through the consideration of his moral injunction.

The 'other' resides in the sphere of moral instructions set by Nāgārjuna. For instance, in one of his moral injunctions, Nāgārjuna, in moral prescription, has suggested that the ruler should have compassion for the ill, the unsafe people, the people who are afflicted by suffering, the people who are subjugated, and the impoverished people, and extend tenderness towards them accordingly.

"Always care compassionately And take special care to nourish them." (*Precious Garland* 243)

The moral instruction put forth by Nāgārjuna in the referred verse motivates people not to make others alienated but rather to approach them with thoughtful care and compassion. Though, morality in Nāgārjuna's philosophy is directly related with the spiritual elevation of the moral agent, indirectly, it suggests to take care of other as documented in the verse referred above. According to the moral advice, as contained in the verse 332 of Nāgārjuna's *Precious Garland* (Ratnāvalī), a king should exercise special compassion to those who are who have committed grave offences such as murder. In the verse discussed the above, we find that the morality of Nāgārjuna is such that one should not consider others as a person who needs to be abandoned or shunned (although someone is making a mistake in his or her life). From this standpoint, Nāgārjuna's morality can be characterized as all inclusive. It is because of this that he advises us to accept the criminals with compassion rather than isolating them as criminals. The development of compassion implied in the morality of Nāgārjuna promises that the people in the world can humanely treat the criminal. Nāgārjuna, with the help of his moral insights, inspires people to be ethically engaged with others.

Nāgārjuna's emphasis on the practice of compassion is intimately connected with the Bodhisattva ideal. Bodhisattva is an ethical ideal of Mahāyāna Buddhism; altruistic practice is an integral part of this moral ideal. Consequently, the well-being of others becomes the prime concern of a Bodhisattva. If we analyze the Bodhisattva ideal, we will discover the fact that the other is integrated in this ideal as it gives the scope for the

practice of compassion, the crux virtue of the Bodhisattva ideal. Furthermore, in the treatise, '*Nagarjuna's Letter to a Friend (Suhṛllekha)*', verse 119 (abc) suggests that one should engross in the joy generated from virtuous deeds performed by '*other*'.

Besides this, the cultivation of the four the boundless qualities, i.e., Brahmavihāras (which are love (Mettā), compassion (Karuṇā), joy (Muditā), and impartiality (Upekṣā)) receives the utmost importance in the work '*Nāgārjuna's Letter to King Gautamīputra*' (*Suhṛllekha*) worded by Nāgārjuna. Among these four virtues, Loving kindness means goodwill, friendliness, one should develop towards others. By promoting the moral practice -Loving kindness, Nāgārjuna stirs our unconditional love, kindness to others, irrespective of what others have responded to us. Karuṇā awakens one to abstain from harming others and to remove the afflictions of others. The nurturing of compassion alters the way we used to perceive others. Muditā, the sympathetic joy, the cultivation of which teaches people to be gladdened by the joy of *others*.

It is disclosed here that almost all the moral injunctions set by Nāgārjuna incorporate the notion of '*other*'. Does the '*other*' embedded in the notion of morality or the moral injunctions formulated by Nāgārjuna refer to an ontologically independent subject? Will it not be contradictory to Nāgārjuna's notion of *Emptiness*? This will be clarified at the end of this study, where the account of '*other*' has been re-examined in relation to Nāgārjuna's philosophy of *Emptiness* and *Dependent Origination*. Before venturing into the issue of '*other*' from Nāgārjuna's perspective, it is significant to comprehend the implication of existence in Nāgārjuna's philosophy. Let us have a preliminary overview of existence as depicted in the philosophical thought of Nāgārjuna.

'Existence' in the Philosophical Framework of Nāgārjuna

The Buddhist philosophy has analyzed the term '*existence*' within the framework of impermanence. The Buddha keeps himself away from analyzing metaphysical existence. According to the Buddha, the world has neither absolute existence nor does it absolutely decay. Rather, it is in a continuous process of becoming. In simple terms, everything in this universe is arising and destroying. Alternatively stated, Buddhism has deciphered the nature of existence in relation to momentariness.^{iv} In this series of becoming, the Buddha holds, everything in this universe exists depending on each other. Actually, nothing in the world exists absolutely and nothing perishes totally. By drawing the fact of arising to the attention of those who cling exclusively to non-being and the fact ceasing to the attention of those who cling exclusively to being, the Buddha reveals that things here are neither absolutely being nor absolutely non-being, but are arising and perishing, forming a continuity of becoming. (Venkata Raman 4)

Nāgārjuna radicalized this concept of *Dependent Origination* of the Buddha in his thought. Nāgārjuna's sense of existence evolves from his reformulation of *Dependent Origination*. In line with the Buddha, Nāgārjuna applies the term '*existent*' in his philosophy, implying that which is causally conditioned. "For Nāgārjuna, any existent is

a causally conditioned existent. Such an existent is clearly incompatible with a self-nature or substance, the latter being permanent and eternal by definition" (Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārika of Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy* 339). In a broad sense, an existent exists, as articulated by Nāgārjuna, but its existence is not absolute; rather, it is causally dependent on its causes, since everything in the universe lacks self-nature (*svabhāva*). "If you perceive the existence of the existence in terms of self-nature, then you will also perceive these existents as non-causal conditions" (Chapter-XXIV Verse 16) (Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārika of Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy* 339). The term 'self-nature' as deployed in Nāgārjuna's insight stands to signify absolute existence; simply, it can be taken in the terms of true existence. "Self-nature (*svabhāva*) implies absolute existence (*sad-bhāva*), not occurrence (*saṃbhava*, XXIV22)" (Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārika of Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy* 350). Contemplation on the idea of self-nature as presented of Nāgārjuna's philosophy allows us to draw out core points on the meaning of existence in his philosophy. The term 'existence' has been technically applied by Nāgārjuna in his philosophy. While Nāgārjuna says nothing exists, it means nothing has inherent existence, i.e., true existence, implying that nothing has possessed self-nature. Accordingly, he reasoned that all things are śūnya or empty of essence. When he states that a thing exists, it denotes that, things have conventional existence, i.e., non-inherent existence; in a more popular sense, it denotes the conditional existence. As stated by Bosworth, Nāgārjuna's notion of Śūnyata rejects the metaphysical gradation of being and non-being. Accordingly, the idea of degree of existence (in the substantial sense) is entirely lacking in the thought of Nāgārjuna. His philosophy affirms the reality of the infinite wisdom, technically speaking, the reality of prajñā-pāramitā (52). Further analysis will lead us to the crux of Nāgārjuna's philosophy in detail.

Reframing the Concept of Morality and the Issue of the Other in the Light of Nāgārjuna's Philosophical Insight

The account of morality and the issue of 'other' in Nāgārjuna's morality will be reconsidered and reformulated in this current section in the ambit of his philosophical insight, specifically mentioned in his notion of reality. Nāgārjuna has addressed the question of reality through the analysis of the concept of existence. Reality, as considered by Nāgārjuna, means lack of inherent existence of phenomena, which is technically signified by him as *dharma-nairātmya*. The notion of 'self-nature' or 'substance' and the concept of existent/ phenomena are mutually exclusive to each other so far as philosophy of Nāgārjuna is concerned, provided an existent cannot have self-nature or it cannot be singled out as a substance. Continuation of phenomena without having a self-nature or essence implies that they lack independent existence. In that sense, it is saying that phenomena are devoid of true existence. So, phenomena must be dependent on something else for their existence. "A thing that is not dependently arisen is not evident. For that reason, a thing that is non-empty is indeed not evident" [Chapter XXIV -Verse -

19] (Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārika of Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy* 341).ⁱⁱ In fact, all things of the world, according to Nagarjuna, are caught in a causal link. To denote this causal nexus, Nāgārjuna has used the terminology 'Dependent Origination'. The drift of Nāgārjuna's denial of the intrinsic nature of all phenomena is rooted in displaying the common factor that everything (all phenomena) is mutually dependent. Dependency is the very sign of unreality in the philosophy of Nāgārjuna. "Relativity or dependence is an invariable mark of the unreal" (Murti 229).ⁱⁱⁱ This awareness of dependent arising leads one to the reality of the absence of self-nature in existents, which in turn gives rise to the understanding of *Emptiness*. Within this frame of reference, Nāgārjuna has applied the phrase "dependent arising" of the phenomenal world non-differently with the term "emptiness". Nāgārjuna has introduced the technical term '*Emptiness*' or '*Śūnyata*' to indicate the essence less state or lack of *svabhāva*; i.e., phenomena are empty of *svabhāva* as stated by Nāgārjuna and *Emptiness* is reality. In this sense, the ultimate truth is regarded by Nāgārjuna as *Emptiness*. "To claim that the things that make up conventional reality lack existence is to claim that they are "empty", or, that they lack essence. The term in Sanskrit translated as "essence" is *svabhava*, and according to Garfield, may also be translated as "self-nature", or "own-being" (Allison, n.d.)

The assertion that all phenomena lack inherent existence demonstrates that neither '*I*' (self) i.e., *moral agent*, nor '*other*' has inherent existence. In the words of Nāgārjuna, '*I*' i.e., *a moral agent*, is only a juncture of name and form complexity (*nāma* and *rūpa*) consisting of five aggregates, none of which can exist separately. The presence of *a moral agent* is conditioned on the aggregates. In fact, '*I*' i.e., '*moral agent*', lacks independent existence; its existence is only conventional. (See Verse 32, Nāgārjuna's Precious Garland, p. 98). "An agent proceeds depending upon action and action proceeds depending upon the agent. We do not perceive any other way of establishing [them]". (Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārika of Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy* 186) The above referred lines justify that Nāgārjuna's perspective of morality admits the co-arising of action and moral agent; instead of recognizing their independent reality, it demonstrates that no self-sustaining agent exists apart from the acting. Similarly, no moral action can be performed independently without the existence of an agent. This reveals that Nāgārjuna's account of morality denies the idea of a fixed, self-contained metaphysical moral agent who acts as the ground of moral responsibility.

The unreality of '*I*' (moral agent) logically entails the unreality of '*other*'. As explained by Nāgārjuna, '*I*', i.e., *moral agent* and '*other*' have only nominal existence. Both are unreal, according to Nāgārjuna. Because both '*I*', i.e., *moral agent*, and '*other*' are dependent on and relational to each other, '*I*', i.e., *moral agent*, cannot be there if there is no '*other*', and vice versa. Anything which are relative to each other cannot have real existence as demonstrated in the philosophical framework of Nāgārjuna. In the Mādhyamika philosophy of Nāgārjuna, '*I*', i.e., *moral agent* or '*other*', is just a concept or creation of the mind, is without any essence or identity of its own. "There would be otherness only if

there were identity, and identity is acknowledged only if there is otherness. These two are established relative to each other, like the near and far shores" (Macor 161). '*I*', i.e., *moral agent* and '*other*', are conventional truths which have value in the relational world. It follows that Nāgārjuna's philosophy does not reject moral agency. What it has denied is the intrinsic reality of a moral agent and the *other* towards whom a moral agent extends his moral practices on the ground that it is empty of self-nature. In fact, according to Nāgārjuna, morality operates without a fixed *moral self (I)* and *other*.

The assertion that morality persists without a real *moral self (I)* and a real *other* suggests that the boundary between '*the subject*' and '*other*' is also not real. Demolition of this opposition is the mark of Nirvāna, a state which is free from any type of distinction – that is, moving beyond the duality of being and non-being. It is clear enough that, like all other philosophies, Nāgārjuna's philosophy aims at the attainment of liberation. The middle path, that is the state of non-duality, is the state of liberation. In the meditative equipoise on *Emptiness*, all the dichotomies, even the concept of virtue and non-virtue, will vanish.

Just like the concept of *I* or *moral agent* and *other* are unreal in the thought of Nāgārjuna, a little consideration of the moral practices recommended^v by Nāgārjuna in relation to his philosophy uncovers the fact that Nāgārjuna does not place moral practices/ behaviour out of the causes and conditions, suggesting that morality, as per Nāgārjuna's teachings, does not possess ultimate reality. Thus, Nāgārjuna's morality will also be part of the web of *Dependent Origination*. In fact, it has meaning only in the relational or conventional world. This research has shown that Nāgārjuna's morality cannot be practiced without its relation to *others*. So, morality cannot be thought of as non-dual. As outlined in Nāgārjuna's philosophy of *Emptiness*, all things are ultimately unreal, so also morality. "*Śūnyata* is neither Being nor Nothingness. It is beyond all dichotomies, beyond Being and Nothingness" (Mishra 53).

The recognition Nāgārjuna gives to morality at the conventional level resolves the issue of the other in his morality. The conventional existence of morality necessitates the conventional existence of '*other*'. The conventional existence of '*other*' allows all the moral practices suggested in the morality of Nāgārjuna towards others, not as isolated, independent beings, but as interconnected beings who carry the potentiality of Buddhahood like us.

Conclusion

This investigation has reflected on the notion of '*other*' through the lenses of Dharmakīrti and Ratnakīrti in the beginning. This study assists us in discovering how the idea of '*other*' offered by Nāgārjuna is unique from other thinkers, and in turn helps us with the accurate understanding of the thought of Nāgārjuna on '*other*'. It is seen that all three thinkers have contemplated the issue of '*other*' from different backgrounds. Nāgārjuna never searches the issue of other explicitly, whether it may be in the periphery of morality, metaphysics or epistemology. In this work, we have examined the idea of '*other*' within the context of

Nāgārjuna's moral philosophy, drawing on his philosophical thought. While the issue of 'other mind' (instead of the issue of 'other') have been directly analysed by Dharmakīrti and Ratnakīrti in their philosophy from the epistemological standpoints. Undoubtedly, moral implication is contained in this epistemological search done by Dharmakīrti and Ratnakīrti on the existence of other mind. In the book *Santānantarasiddhi*, Dharmakīrti, with the help of the analogy of argument, has tried to prove the existence of other minds; obviously, that existence is not absolute existence but relative existence of mind. *Santānantaraduṣaṇa*, the book authored by Ratnakīrti, conversely, denies that the analogy of inference can prove the existence of other minds. Since the mind is private, nobody can enter into others mind on the grounds of the experience one has received from one's own mind. Accordingly, our own mind is accessible to us but not to others. Without asserting the existence of other minds certainly, Ratnakīrti holds that moral responsibility can be continued with others. Nāgārjuna is never concerned with the assertion of the existence or non-existence of other on the ground of inference. With his philosophical framework, Nāgārjuna has stated that 'other' is empty of inherent existence just like all other phenomena. It suggests that the existence 'other' is totally denied by Nāgārjuna. What he argues is that, like a moral agent (I), 'other' exists dependently, implying that its reality is relevant only to the conventional world. It proves that Nāgārjuna's philosophy of emptiness is the basis of his denial of 'other'.

It comes out in the present study that the practice of morality or moral agency has not been rejected in Nāgārjuna's thought of Emptiness; rather, it offers a greater scope to re-examine the meaning of morality in the light of the reality of interdependence. According to him, the function of morality is possible without fixed, absolute norms or ethics, but it depends on the understanding of the interdependence of phenomena, i.e., reality. It follows that Nāgārjuna's idea of morality runs without the separate ontological reality, namely, 'I', i.e., moral agent and 'other'. Nāgārjuna's sense of denial of the *other* is based on his rejection of 'I', i.e., moral agent. It means that Nāgārjuna has given an analysis of morality as Dependent Origination, i.e., relativity. Therefore, Nagarjuna revives the principle of morality by providing his own philosophical position. By his understanding of morality, it is demonstrated that moral practice and moral responsibility are not incompatible with his philosophy of emptiness.

Throughout the evaluation, it has been noted that the philosophy of Nāgārjuna broadens the potential of moral activity and moral responsibility without realizing the intrinsic reality of the moral agent and other. This scope spares Nāgārjuna's accentuation of the practice of morality of logical inconsistency and clears up the problem of the other, in line with the views of Nāgārjuna that there are things

Notes

- [1] This line explicitly proves that Dharmakīrti recognizes the existence of others' minds only in the phenomenal level, not in the absolute level.

[ii] Dharma, which has been used in an ontological sense here, represents the principle, truth.

[iii] In this context, one may take a glance at the meaning of morality as identified with Dharma in the section Tracing Morality In The Philosophy of Nāgārjuna of this paper.

[iv] The Buddha himself does not refer to the theory of momentariness; it was developed later on in the Abhidharma school of Buddhism.

[v] In this regard, we may review the section –‘Existence’ In The Philosophical Framework of Nāgārjuna ‘ of the present study.

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