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# Asaṅga's *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra*: A Move Towards a Buddhist Hermeneutics

*M. R. Chinchore*

*University of Poona, Pune, India*

**Abstract:** Knowledge is not merely for the sake of knowledge, but it is to be used, practised and lived actually, is a mark of unity of Indian Civilisation. Naturally, various sages and seers have spoken out their own revelations of truth/s, but their comprehensions and visions not being the same, interpretative varieties have emerged. Further, due to differences in the modes of thinking and living truth, traditions of interpretation, reinterpretation and understanding surfaced. Thus, cultural diversity which is lived/ experienced actually has been a fact.

Within the fold of Indian Civilisation, Gautama the Buddha in the 5<sup>th</sup> cen B.C. attempted to discover the truth and excelled the then prevalent modes of thoughts and practices. He, after his enlightenment, initially kept silence, and was hesitant to respond to the questions posed by the then people, but after repeated requests from humans and supernatural entities and beings, he attempted to speak about his revelation/realisation of the truth; and delivered the first discourse known as the *Dhamma-cakka-pabattana-sutta*. After his *Bodhi* till his *Mahāparinirvāṇa* — i.e. almost for 50 years — he expressed his views and thoughts at different places and times, and in response to various issues of the numerous individuals. It is his understanding and comprehension about himself, others, and the world at large consisting of the four basic truths viz. the *ārya-satyas* (Four Noble Truths). Although he was clear enough that realisation cannot be substituted by the description and discourse of truth, nonetheless it is out of compassion and love towards others that he preached and disseminated his knowledge of truth. After Buddha's passing

away the need and necessity of interpreting and reunderstanding his thought and experiences arose and multiplied in course of time. And this is how within the fold of Buddhism, hermeneutics originated and flourished.

This legacy of interpretative tradition further was reinforced by the movement of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism in general and *Yogācāra* tradition of Buddhism in particular, and later on against which the *Mādhyamika* trend within Buddhism emerged. In the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* (ca 100 B.C.) the seeds were sown and *Saṁdhinirmocana-sūtra* further added some points, but it is Asaṅga who systematically pioneered this trend of thought and hence is honoured by the status of one of the “Six Ornaments of Buddhism in the *Jambū-dvīpa*”.

This paper is an attempt to inquire into Buddhist hermeneutics in particular, by using Asaṅga’s *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* as a peep-hole. It is a humble endeavour to reinterpret and re-understand Buddhist thought and bring out its relevance by way of its appropriation for the present. This two-fold task — of interpretation and making it relevant in the present contexts — is attempted to be performed in three sections: In the first, a question of what is the nature and status of hermeneutic within Buddhism in general and Asaṅga’s *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* in particular is attempted to be considered. In the second, we shall attempt to inquire as to why hermeneutics is required. And in the third, we shall concentrate on the question as to how it is to be used significantly — the methods and procedures of its use for philosophisation and practice. The entire exercise hopes to be a methodological appropriation of historical facts, and focusing on linking our understanding of them to the present context.

**Keywords:** Asaṅga, *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra*, Buddhist hermeneutics, *Yogācāra*, *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, *Tripiṭakas*, *Mahāparinirvāṇa*, Buddhist tradition, interpretation.

Right from ancient times, within the fold of Indian Civilisation, attempts are made to emphasise the goal/s of life, viz. realisation of the ultimate truth.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless to those who have not yet realised the truth, there should be at least some avenue to know about the truth, and hence another mode – a stepping-stone and/or a direction-giving indicator – is available, viz. knowing truth indirectly through interpretation. It is obvious that although

interpretation is needed, it cannot be a substitute to direct/intuitive experience of the truth.<sup>2</sup>

Further, in India it is generally held that by distribution of knowledge, we grow. It means, by knowledge we get more and more clarity and precision in our understanding<sup>3</sup> and perhaps that is the reason why in India, knowledge of language and grammar<sup>4</sup> was held essential in any discipline to communicate and develop our knowledge. Though discovery of truth may be out of reach to all, its understanding through explanation should be open to all. This, it seems, provided a ground and scope to develop various skills of interpretation and the arts of expression to communicate our comprehensions of truth (*Paṭisaṃbhidā /Pratisaṃvid*).<sup>5</sup>

All the traditions in India – philosophical or otherwise – unanimously believe that the ultimate goal of life is to realise truth, but the question is: Is such a truth is one or many? Whether it exists objectively on its own, or is dependent upon and determined by human comprehensions? Whether it is eternal, absolute, permanent, certain; or non-eternal, relative, impermanent, uncertain in nature? Whether it has substantive-content, or it is non-substantive in character? Whether it is uniformly the same or its form differs? Just because primacy is given to intuitive-experience must it be mystical and sacred? Even if it is not completely objective, can it be at least inter-subjective? Is it that transcendental experience is necessarily non-rational, sacred and speculative; or can it be rational, objective and empirical? These are some of the issues where differences of opinion are experienced. There is diversity in comprehending, understanding and analysing the nature, status and role of truth on the one hand, and its communication and interpretation/s on the other. Historically, there may be continuities in discontinuities in preservation of our traditions, but such variety of thoughts and practices are imbibed, adopted and absorbed by generations to respond to the then prevalent problems confronted by all unanimously. And, Buddhism is not an exception to it.

As is well-known, Buddha had *Bodhi* (enlightenment),<sup>6</sup> and such a realisation of the truth, for sometime at least, so overwhelmed him that it made him speechless or forced him to keep silence.<sup>7</sup> However, many people around him were interested in knowing what he had realised. Similarly Gods, angles, supernatural beings and demons too earnestly requested him to speak,<sup>8</sup> and it is on demand he attempted to describe and narrate. Initially he gave advices and afterwards had a dialogue with those who showed interest, which later on came to be known as sayings/sermons delivered to his pupils and many followers. Here it is important to note one thing about Buddha's *Bodhi* – he himself never claimed that 'I have known the "truth"', nor did he start on his own spontaneously to describe it. Rather it is on the request he narrated his experience/s, gave advices to various people at different times and places – taking into consideration their problems.<sup>9</sup> And yet he often made it clear that I am trying to give direction,<sup>10</sup> taking into account their (i.e. listeners') conditions, situations and capabilities. It means, he is concentrating on understanding and comprehension of "truth" and "its interpretation", by using various ways and means.<sup>11</sup> He never proclaimed to be an authority,<sup>12</sup> nor held that what he had comprehended is the only truth; but he is humble in stating the facts about human beings and the world at large (viz. *Sarvaṃ Duḥkham*).<sup>13</sup> He is aware that truth is not "one – complete and uniform". He has clearly stated that my understanding of truth may not be useful to you, and hence you have to become your own guide and better realise it yourself being your own path-finder (*Attāno Pradīpo Bhava*).<sup>14</sup> In other words, what was Buddha's experience/comprehension of truth and how shall we relate ourselves with the Buddha through interpretation and understanding of it? Or alternatively, what is Buddha's thought/message and how shall we relate our lives with it through interpretation and reinterpretation of it as may be required? It is this understanding of truth, which is embedded in the very possibility of alternative frameworks of interpreting Buddhism, and provides historical background for us to understand its contributions especially in the field of hermeneutics.

Right from initial stages, during the life of the Buddha while circulating his thoughts various interpretations came to the foreground. Rather going one step ahead, one can see from the *Tripitakas* that his followers used different modes and Buddha himself had openly promoted and/or permitted them. Later on after the demise of the Buddha, attempts were made by his followers to collect his speeches and teachings, classify according to their content and/or form, and present them in an organized/systematic way. While circulating his thoughts in the form of systematic presentations, such differentiability paved a way for schism giving rise to the eighteen sects within Buddhism depicted in the *Tripitakas*. Again, after some centuries, there was, perhaps, a kind of paradigm-shift – from oral-tradition to written-tradition, which was perhaps concurrent with the emergence of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism. In this movement of shifting from oral-tradition to written-tradition flexibility was perhaps lost and due to the passage of time distancing of followers from the Buddha, a question of authenticity and reliability of the thoughts being preserved and circulated emerged. Thus, in the *Mahāyāna*-tradition an inquiry was undertaken to examine the facts. Since Buddha himself had used various dialects and various forms of communication, flexibility of understanding “his thoughts” was involved in the very framework of Buddhist thinking; and correspondingly that was reflected into the practices<sup>15</sup>. Hence, within the philosophical framework of Buddhism, there are differences and yet there is unity due to the Buddha – his thoughts and life. On the one hand, it provides commonality to all the sects, yet, on the other hand, interpretative differences of thoughts and practices, perhaps, bring in diversity and richness. It is this inclusive framework, which provided scope to accommodate alternativity and novelty to integrate and modify progressively, and tolerate differences too. Such interpretative-flexibility and tolerance towards differences and yet preservation of unity was, it seems, a reason to adopt, absorb and sustain Buddhism universally. This interpretative alternativity/plurality further provided scope to hold that truth is not necessarily “one”<sup>16</sup> or unilateral; rather the Buddha himself has expressed and

permitted others to express his comprehensions of the truth in variety of ways. Thus, Buddha's experience/comprehension of truth and his communication/expression his thoughts through his preaching are the facts. But our understanding of them through interpretation and reinterpretation at any stage is never final and irrevocable. Nor are our modes of relating to them invariable and permanent. Rather, they are also subject to the law of *Anityatā* and *Anātmata* (impermanence and non-substantiality). Such an inquiry into the understanding of truth was, it seems, focusing on the following considerations:

1] Already interpretation is involved in Buddha's sayings and their preservation in the form of *Tripitakas*, as they are not the texts actually being written by the Buddha, nor verified by him after their being written. As is well-known, it is after *Mahāparinirvāṇa* of the Buddha followers have collected, classified and systematically presented his thoughts. But in doing so, what the Buddha had said at different times and places could not be presented in exactly the same letters /words, because in between the two events – Buddha's demise and emergence of the *Tripitakas* – we are told that there is a gap of at least fifty years. Hence what is heard by the then disciples and codified later on cannot be exactly in the same word/s. Moreover, just as all the other Indian Philosophical traditions initially were preserved in the oral-forms, so too was Buddhism; and the written-form of preservation came to the foreground some time before or after 1<sup>st</sup> Century C.E. Thus, there may be similarity of thoughts and ideas, but not the sameness of letters in the sayings of the Buddha.

2] Further, Buddha himself had preferred to present his thoughts not in the same form monotonously, but according to the contexts, he also had made variations and modifications in his modes of sayings. They are of three kinds:

(i) Dialect/Language (*Bhāṣā*) – He knew many dialects and had not only used *Pāli* language in which the present *Tripitakas* are available, but had also used various regional dialects<sup>17</sup>

like – *Māgadhi*, *Kośalī*, *Paiśācī*, *Saṅskṛta*, *Prākṛta*, *Vrajasenī*, *Saurasenī*, etc.

(ii) Forms of Explanation – Taking into consideration the content and style of his expressions, later on classification was made into *Nava-Dharmas*<sup>18</sup> viz. *Sutta* (verse), *Geyya* (poetry/ songs), *Veyyākaraṇa* (explanation of words/ grammar), *Gāthā* (prose/stanza), *Udāna* (exalted/ spontaneous utterances), *Itivuttaka* (descriptive-reports/ narratives), *Jātaka* (stories of births), *Abbhuta-dhamma* (teachings regarding miracles) and *Vedalla* (analysis by questions and answers) in the early period. And in the *Mahāyāna* tradition three more forms were added later on and came to be known as *Dvādaśa-Dharmas*,<sup>19</sup> viz. *Avadāna* (legends), *Nidāna* (investigation), and *Upadeśa* (philosophical advices).

(iii) Variety of Methods—By using parables, similes, analogies, metaphors and illustrations the Buddha used to teach<sup>20</sup>. He used to insist that one should transcend the limitations of words, and better concentrate on the content and live life accordingly. For some primarily it is essential to have faith and convictions behind practices, for others rational and critical reflection is significant response, and further still for some others creative expressions of various potentialities and use of magnificent skills to motivate / illuminate one-self and others, etc., may be emancipatory. Taking into account complexities of their prevalent preconditions — internal or external — inclinations, abilities and situations in which they are placed, one is required to teach; and hence modes of persuasion and disciplining vary. And yet at a certain point of time all these techniques and methods turn out to be redundant and futile, and that is to be realised by oneself. Even the so-called philosophical doctrines and practices laid down by the traditions, become meaningless and vacuous. That's why Hīnayāna Buddhism advocated the importance of *Prajñā* (wisdom), *Śīla* (moral-character) and *Samādhi* (meditative neutrality)<sup>21</sup> to be practised through *Aṣṭāṅgika-mārga*. Later on, Mahāyāna Buddhism transformed this emphasis onto the understanding

and practice of Madhyamā-Pratipada (non-extremism or middle-way)<sup>22</sup>, perhaps, leaving flexibility and responsibility to understand rationally.

Everyone is endorsed to avoid what is of the nature of excess/extreme in order to avoid various kinds of attachments / bewitchments even by ignorance. Minimally by practising and elevating human abilities, viz. *Prajñā* (insightful understanding) and *Karuṇā* (compassion), excellence and perfection can be attained; and one can transcend<sup>23</sup> one's own limitations — inner or outer.

3] In the changing circumstances and situations neither the direct accessibility to the Buddha was possible, nor was there unwavering universal authenticity of his words which were circulated, yet Buddha's experience and narration of the truth prevailed. It was this background of understanding of his thoughts with the help of available scattered and sporadic texts or corrupt practices with which even *Mahāyāna* tradition was trying to adjust. Under such conditions how to comprehend truth in teachings of the Buddha, and what is meaning of the ultimate truth in our communicative-world of expressions – the tradition and our life-comprehensions – were the problems confronted by the then Buddhist followers. It is in this context Asaṅga is responding in a novel way. To study his thoughts and especially the nature, status and role of words used for interpretation, to take the insightful clues from him for the present, is an important and interesting task to which we wish to focus in this paper.

Asaṅga, a well-known *Yogācārin* in his *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra*, it seems, has attempted to draw the boundaries – scope and limits – of interpretation on the one hand, and the possibilities of knowing the ultimate truth on the other. It is, perhaps, an inquiry into Buddhist hermeneutics in general by using Asaṅga's *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* in particular as a peep-hole. It is an endeavour to reinterpret and re-understand Buddhist thought and bring out its relevance, by way of its interpretation and appropriation for the present. This two-fold task – of



interpretation and making it relevant for the present – is an attempt desired to be performed in three sections: In the first section, a question of what is the nature and status of hermeneutics within Buddhism in general and Asaṅga's *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra*<sup>24</sup> in particular is attempted to be inquired into. In the second, we shall try to consider why hermeneutics is required. And in the third section, we shall concentrate on the question of how it is used significantly – the methods and procedures of its use for philosophising and practice. The entire exercise aims at methodological preservation – absorption and assimilation – of historical facts, and focusing on integrating our understanding by them – a kind of our contribution to the preservation and growth – in the present context.

### **Section-I: Nature and Status of Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics is a science of interpretation (of text, thought, message or comprehension of truth). Restricting ourselves for the present to truth whether it is interpretation of the actual truth, or our understanding and/or comprehension of truth, is a crucial question. It has, perhaps, something to do with our conception of truth primarily. According to Buddhism, ontologically truth is unique, particular, un-instantial. It is beyond the possibility of expression, as our modes of communication bring in shareability and generality. Hence, the very possibility of such a unique truth being satisfactorily expressed in words is out of question. It transcends the limitations of our normal modes of expression – verbal as well as non-verbal. Truth exists on its own and does not depend on us nor is it determined by our comprehension/s of it. It is not what we create and/or believe to be true, but exists independently of us; and occasionally/incidentally we may have a chance to comprehend it. As the ultimate truth is unique and cannot be captured by words, naturally the entire possibility of normal modes of communication and expression is fraught with serious difficulties even *prima-facie*. Although actual existence of truth and our intuitive-experience /comprehension of it is impossible to be interpreted by way of expressions, it

is nonetheless not a mystical experience culminating into either agnostic and/or sacred exercise, or solipsism. Rather, Buddha's comprehension of the truth is not something above the world, but it is a truth about the entire world and all kinds of beings including human beings universally, viz. *Sarvaṃ Duḥkham* (that all living beings are susceptible to *Duḥkha*)<sup>25</sup>. It is in this context that Asaṅga's conception of truth and reality is worth to be analysed. According to him, there are three realms of understanding the reality – *Parikalpita* (illusive-imaginary, imputed), *Paratañtra* (given-conceptualised relative, contingent) and *Pariniṣpanna* (truth-original, unqualified)<sup>26</sup>. Out of them the former two are conventionally-real (*Samvṛtti / Vyavahāra-sat*), whereas the last one alone is real and/or true ultimately (*Paramārtha-sat*). Let us discuss them in the sequence in which they are given in the text:

**A] (*Abhūta*) *Parikalpita-sat*:** It is a world of expression and communication to start with. It is the realm of imaginatively constructed-reality, where communication and expression has unlimited scope. It is the world full of imagination and fabrication of ideas, and hence is real but only fictitiously.<sup>27</sup> It is not only mind-involving, but completely mind-dependent and determined.<sup>28</sup> It, *prima-facie*, helps us to peep into our imaginative and/or creative world. But, it is completely unreal, coherently untenable, and hence conventionally as well as ultimately it is not true. It provides a scope to create imagery-world, but exists only on the level of ideas.<sup>29</sup> Mind and mental artefacts may not be true objectively, but enable us to integrate our personality and help us to boost our passions to create originating from our potentialities.<sup>30</sup> It is through the exuberance of our instinctive passions and feelings that we out-burst, and produce spontaneously something excellent, at times giving us experience of the sublime. The depth of our comprehensions, perhaps, is depicted in the realm of integrated thoughts and sensitivity of feelings, sometimes not necessarily expressed verbally but by using non-verbal modes of expression and communication too; but it is far away from realisation of the ultimate truth.

**B| *Paratantra-sat*:** Whatever is not given to us but we create/express, is the world of our imagination and conception. It is our creation of ideas, images and articulation of artefacts based on the given sensations, thoughts and emotions.<sup>31</sup> Expressions are imbedded in certain presuppositions and assumptions of our past experiences, sentiments and beliefs prevalent through generations. It is a complex-whole of articulation of our images, and hence may be held as a product of causal-determination and/or intentional-motivation. With the help of memories, reflections and responses to facts, thoughts and emotions we attempt to express and share inter-subjectively our realisations and revelations. It is this conventional truth (*Vyavahāra-sat*) that provides the ground contextually and contingently for hermeneutics.

Human beings exist physically having mind and intellect. Through sense-organs we have sensations, but our physical body is endowed with instincts and passions too. One is capable to know/sense what is given to know naturally and spontaneously without adulteration of interpretation – in pure and simple ways. But human beings are also endowed with – sensitivity and sensibility – to sense thoughts and emotions is important even. It is a natural capacity to feel and think, which it is not a product of human creation. Human existence is not to be understood as a machine, which is able to acquire rationally what is given to know externally through physical body. But in the inner-world also – sensitivity and sensibility – prevails. We sense and feel the existence of thoughts and emotions, which are given to us and are real as well. These two aspects of our existence and/or personality are generally neglected, but Buddhism, it seems, high-lights their importance. Truth is not merely about the empirical /external objective world, but it is about the inner-world too, which *prima-facie* may appear to be subjective but is real nonetheless.

Our comprehensions of truth are normally derived through our commonsensical experiences based on sensations of physical body<sup>32</sup>. Yet, there are two more important avenues of cognition viz. thoughts and ideas, (i.e. conation); and the functional aspects of our existence (i.e. affection), existing in the form of instincts,

feelings and emotions. These two aspects of our existence play a vital role in our life. These two aspects are equally real, though not independently of us but with-in us. Just as our sense-organs are capable to acquire sensations physically, similarly we have spontaneous thoughts without words, and so too we have instincts, feelings and emotions, which though momentarily are often passive and un-communicated. Just as direct experience of truth existing in the empirical world is beyond the possibility of expression at times, so too expressing thoughts – rational or irrational – appropriately in the form of various modes of communication is impossible. Similarly is the case of our feelings and emotions expressed – verbally or non-verbally.<sup>33</sup> Thus, human beings intend to realise truth directly in all forms of its existence, which exists without various modes of expressions and communication. The scope of our knowledge of the truth should not be delimited apriorily to physical experience and objective empirical world only. It is this factual world of existence which is beyond the capacity of our creation. However, whatever is given to us when we try to know through inter-subjective modes of communication is *Paratantra-sat* (conceptualisation of the given-truth), according to Asaṅga, is regulated by patterns of communication and discursive thinking.

Our inter-subjective modes of communication apparently seem to be true, but ultimately it is neither real in the ontological world of facts nor objective in the inner-world of thoughts rationally. They are pragmatically useful in certain contexts. Verbal expressions are conceptual creations of mind, apparently real and coherently conceivable, but are not true ultimately and hence real conventionally. On the contrary, thoughts and ideas, emotions and feelings are real – though not existing ontologically (*Paramārtha-sat*) in the external world, yet are real in the realm of inner-world and hence exist conventionally (*Vyavahāra / Lok-saṃvṛtti-sat*). Nonetheless, they remain restricted to our conceptions and imaginations i.e., in the domain of *Vyavahāra / Lok-saṃvṛtti-sat*, and cannot transcend the limits and boundaries

of our normal modes of communication and expressions on the one hand and our understanding on the other, and hence they cannot claim to be basically real. Yet they open the grounds of possibilities of interpretation and expression, i.e., our understanding of facts and thoughts.

**C| *Pariniṣpanna/Paramārtha-sat*:** Ultimate truth is beyond the limits of duality (*Advaya*),<sup>34</sup> viz. (1) It is neither existent, nor non-existent, (2) It is neither identical nor different, (3) It has neither beginning, nor end, (4) It neither increases nor decreases, and (5) It is pure and unpolluted but does not purify anything. It is impossible to communicate and express the ultimate-truth, and is to be realized by one-self. It is indefinable and indescribable by its very nature (*abhilāpa-saṃsarga-ayogya/ Nirvikalpa*)<sup>35</sup>. It is beyond our normal modes of categorisation, and hence is neither one nor many. It is unique, discrete, particular, and yet unitary. Our comprehension of it is not eternal and stable. Such a truth does not have fixed core or nucleus, as it is non-substantial. It transcends the limits of our imagination and normal mode of understanding, and yet is realisable by all – anybody and everybody. It exists on its own and is real ultimately. It is beyond any kind of pre-determinations or presuppositions. It is insightful, perfect and excels all kinds of bounds and limitations. Basic, absolute but uncontaminated or unadulterated truth/s regarding human beings, human life or world at large together with interrelationship among them are neither regarding these relating to external or internal world on the one hand nor about fictitious or imaginary world on the other. Fictions, fabrications of imaginations, are baseless and the only truth concerning them is that they are unreliable and untenable. Any worthy hermeneutical exercise concerning them is not likely to cut any philosophically significant ice. Other things remaining the same, facts and objects of the external-world, mental processes and states-of-affair of the inner-world like feelings, emotions, sentiments etc. are impermanent, susceptible to change and substanceless. Truths concerning them are only conventional and communication concerning them as

well as its interpretation does not transcend commonsensical limits. Thoughts and emotions too occur spontaneously and contingently, and at times it is impossible to interpret or express them beyond certain limits.<sup>36</sup> That's why existence of the ultimate truth is objectively real, but not necessarily physical/ substantial/ material in nature.<sup>37</sup> This sort of truth is real and needs to be comprehended/ realised directly. Comprehension of such basic/ absolute truth/s is often an outcome of prolonged exercise of deconstruction, de-conditioning, purging and purification of various kinds of pollutions and deformities (*Pariniṣpanna /Paramārtha-sat*). And yet such a truth is realisable only by humans in so far as they are truly human.

These three realms of understanding enable us to interpret truth in various ways and make our life rich in scope and profundity. It is language through which generally we express and interpret our understanding of truth – ontological as well as conventional, subjectively given to us by cognition and intersubjectively verifiable, occasioned by facts, thoughts or emotions. Thoughts/ideas are generally shared by modes of expression and communication – through signs and symbols, verbally through words or non-verbally through various non-linguistic forms. Since, interpretation of truth is not merely possible linguistically / verbally through language, but through non-verbal modes as well, as they also enable us to express and interpret our experiences and thoughts about truth. Nonetheless, beyond expression and communication truth exists, and we try to analyse and explain our understanding of truth in various modes of expression and attempt to interpret them in different ways, using numerous means. A continuous search for discovery of basic truth by way of interpretation enriches our existence and provides scope for us to progress. It means hermeneutics is an integrative exercise, opening the vistas and depth of imagination, and creating imagery/ conceptual forms of expression; using our inner-world – subtle and sensitive – primarily. It is an exercise of exhibiting depth of understanding and profundity of comprehensions, and marking our developmental integrative-richness. Hermeneutics does not

remain merely as a science of interpretation of a text – sacred or profane, but by transcending the limitations of expression it opens the possibility of knowing the proper conceptions of truth. Now with this background, let us turn to another consideration connected to interpretation, viz. need of hermeneutics, in the next section.

## **Section II: Reasons behind Interpretation**

Interpretation need not necessarily be limited to text; rather it attempts to reveal the truth as comprehended/experienced/conceived by the author/s, and then described/explained and/or intended to be experienced by the reader/s – known or unknown. In the case of oral-tradition, spoken words directly perform a role of sharing the inner-world of comprehensions or thoughts of the speaker to be understood clearly and transparently by the listeners' primary. In the written-mode of expression also our knowledge of truth is at stake communicated to the unknown readers. However, in both the modes, oral or written, it is indirect cognition of truth through linguistic communication. Intentions differ according to changing circumstances and situations, medium to express our understanding of the truth varies; nonetheless, there is an inner urge to communicate.<sup>38</sup> It is because human beings are social by nature, and desire to progress by sharing,<sup>39</sup> and attempt to liberate by dissolving egoity/conceit. There are some reasons for prescribing /promoting hermeneutics, to which we intend to focus in what follows:

1] If what exists ontologically is momentary, incommunicable, and definable only in terms of itself and not by anything else, then correspondingly our knowledge should also become extremely difficult to fathom into. But, it is a fact that our comprehensions/knowledge of existence is not evanescent. Mere sensation/thinking/feeling – pure and simple – is not knowledge. It is only after sensation/thinking /feeling being understood and analysed, and articulated in the form of a knowledge-claim, it can be expressed properly. Thus, sensation is required to be interpreted to understand and communicate it appropriately, and for which

certain categories of understanding, conceptual schemes of formulation and articulation, and rules governing expression etc. are to be adopted. Although it is true that language is a product of human-creation, none of us articulate it individually. However, we generally follow and adopt language to communicate, which is given to us by traditions and cultures in which we live and yet there is scope to change and innovate something new. But, usually the prevalent terminology is used, and yet there is a freedom to select/choose words already available in circulation, in socio-cultural, intellectual and religious climate we live; or else to coin new ones. We generally use commonly available words, but when we are unable to express, our creative mind gives rise to either new meaning to already prevalent words or else tries to coin new ones.

According to Buddhism actual existence is impermanent<sup>40</sup>, yet we try to describe, communicate, name and express through our thoughts, ideas and conceptions in different ways, which are relatively stable/constant, though not eternal and permanent. We know that such a conceptual construction of reality cannot be mapped onto actual /existential reality, yet it is essential epistemically. There is no one-to-one correspondence between words and world. We need our knowledge to be shared, remain stable and continuous at least relatively, and certain minimally in the given context. Otherwise, human fund of knowledge cannot grow, and moreover we are likely to embrace something contrary to experience. Our comprehension of truth may be momentary, but our knowledge of truth should be relatively continuous. It may not be eternal and permanent; nonetheless, should have some kind of stability and certainty. This is possible only through interpretative understanding of the comprehended / communicated truth.

2] If one denies the very possibility of indirect modes of understanding truth – by way of explanations and analysis, descriptions and elaboration, cognition and certification – then the very teaching of the Buddha and his realisation of the truth shared will become redundant and futile. But many people



indeed use him as a role-model –an exemplar, and attempt to comprehend and follow his thoughts. Hence, to preserve the significance of the Buddha and his thoughts, it is required to have hermeneutics. Interpretations of thoughts of the Buddha change according to the contexts and situations in which we live, but they are essential and relevant heuristically.

3] Buddhism was, perhaps, attempting to deny eternality (*Śaśvatavāda*) on the one hand and total uncertainty and chaos (*Ucchedavāda*), on the other<sup>41</sup>. Although Buddhists deny the authority of text/person, they are not advocating solipsistic or sacred modes of thinking, and isolated form of living. There is a possibility to have organisation and systematisation through interpretative understanding of truth and that can be complementary to experiential realisations of truth. Hence, interpretation is required to be made for our understanding in an inter-connected and holistic manner.

Before we proceed further, in the context of Buddhist Hermeneutics in general, one point of seminal importance needs to be noted here. After passing away of the Buddha his thoughts/message formulated and gathered in the form of *Tripitakas* was the only source of reaching to the Buddha, however indirect it may be. In this context, the form and language in which his thought/message was expressed was required to be interpreted, especially because such a language was the language familiar to the people with whom the Buddha conversed directly, but did not committed to anything in the written fixed-form. Regarding interpretation of the texts of the *Tripitakas* and the message / thought of the Buddha contained in them, two positions seem to have emerged in the course of time. The advocates of *Hīnayāna* seem to have held that Buddha's thoughts and message to people/followers is contained in the letter and form of the language in which it is communicated. And the spirit of the thought/message of the Buddha does not transgress the language in which it is expressed. In other words, according to them, we would be able to understand the thought of the Buddha by strictly following the letter and form of the language, especially since the spirit of the

thought is nothing beyond the letter and form of the language expressing it. We need to literally follow the language and its form. If we do this, we would be able to understand his thought. Thus, external mode of expression and communication is the crux of the matter. Against this, the *Mahāyānists* seem to have held that the language in which Buddha's message is expressed is after all only a tool, and that the spirit of his message goes beyond the form and letter of the language. Buddha's message certainly needs to be interpreted, so that we can co-relate ourselves with him through following his thoughts. But what is important is not the letter and form of the language expressive of Buddha's thought, but rather spirit, focus, thrust, perspective and message that he intended to place before us through it. In order to reach to it, we need to go beyond the letter and form of the language concerned. Its interpretation furnishes an occasion for our being able to peep into Buddha's thought. For this, according to *Yogācāra* Buddhists, we need to develop a particular mind-set, through prolonged practice of various *Yogic* exercises and techniques together with various kinds of *Pāramitas*. Emergence of this sort of mental set-up/mind-set paves a way for our being able to understand Buddha's thought and its seminal implications and shape our life in the light of them. Advocates of *Mādhyamika* trend, on the contrary, held that we would be able to understand Buddha's thoughts properly through penetrating insightful wisdom. But as a preparatory step towards it, we need to free ourselves from outward bewitchments of language and expressions, constructions, egos, conceits, and traps of various kinds – linguistic, conceptual, mental, cultural, religious, conventional etc. For them, hermeneutics is basically such a de-constructive, de-conditioning, fog-clearing exercise. It is important, but such an exercise in itself does not constitute the insightful wisdom mentioned above. At this stage of the present study, we need not dive deeper into this issue here.

4] As is well-known Asaṅga was follower of the *Yogācāra*-tradition of Buddhism, which believes that there is no-self metaphysically, but our actions, their results and consequences do exist; and they are preserved in a seed-form of consciousness

known as *Ālaya-vijñāna*.<sup>42</sup> Only when conditions are conducive, they (our thoughts and emotions) provoke us to respond and manifest contextually in the actual world. Similarly our knowledge is not completely lost at every moment, rather it can remain to continue in the form of innate pure-seeds of impressions (*Ālaya-vijñāna*). Thus, both the aspects of our existence continue in a series-form of consciousness (*Citta-santati*), and enable us to talk about gradual-development of a human being towards *Nirvāṇa*. And to make the spiritual-progress properly, it is helpful to make use of *Yoga*<sup>43</sup> – *Daśa-Pāramitās* (ten modes of perfection).<sup>44</sup> Asaṅga held that practising *Yoga* / *Pāramitās* in daily-life is essential for all to realise *Nirvāṇa*. It is not merely by denying the reality of the empirical world that one can comprehend *Nirvāṇa*, like *Śūnyavādins*, but it is necessary to live positively and constructively as a true Buddhist, through living with facts/truths. It is by practising the Buddhist way of life and performing *Yoga* in the light of *Pāramitās*, one can accumulate knowledge and morality, which is the crux of the true existence of humans. Otherwise, alternatively one can surrender completely and have faith in the *Bodhisattva*, who will take care of the devotees. It is emotional appeal and using feelings to liberate/realise – the supreme world of emptiness within. They reject sudden/spontaneous realisation of the ultimate truth, and stress on the gradual method of acquisition of truth.

5] According to Buddhism in general, there is no eternal permanent substance – self existing in-side (*Pudgala-Nairātmya*) or out-side (*Dharma-Nairātmya*). To realise this fact is itself a kind of blow to our misplaced sense of ego or identity.<sup>45</sup> We are part and parcel of the cosmos, but not the controller and governor of it. Our existence is real, but not eternal and permanent. We do not have fixed identity, but there is a possibility to discriminate and identify things and beings. To realise this ultimate truth and vacuousness of our commonsensical modes of understanding is possible, by making ourselves empty of misplaced cognitions and creations, which give rise to a sense of pride and attachments. But unless we create, we cannot dissolve or realise the scope

and limits of creations. And for creation, we have to express, communicate, think, image, explain and conceive. That is possible only when we interpret messages in terms of our experiential-cognitions, thoughts and emotions. Asaṅga emphasises on using creative potentiality for the joy of all beings to be shared, and hence various arts and crafts are the avenues to express.<sup>46</sup> That is how we find, on the one hand, he has written texts like *Śrāvaka-bhūmi*<sup>47</sup> and *Yogācāra-bhūmi*,<sup>48</sup> to stress on *Yoga* and/or *Pāramitās* to become perfect like the *Bodhisattva*, and, on the other hand, philosophical texts like *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* to support his arguments to realise *Bodhi* as *Lokottara/ Viśuddha-jñāna*.<sup>49</sup> According to him, creation is an integrative exercise, where depth of imagination is required. It is by using one's own inner potentialities one can develop personality in the field of arts and crafts. In the field of aesthetic, morality and religion, there is a possibility to transcend the limits of knowledge and enter into the domain of the unknown. Human creativity depicts imagery, forms that are not redundant and futile, but they are relevant to enrich our personality – the inner-world of consciousness. It enables us to understand the unknown and subtle world of reality, which depicts richness of our understanding in terms of variety and profundity of thoughts, and ultimately gives us peace and contentment. We can avoid extremities and follow the middle-path by active-participation and live-demonstration.

6] As according to Buddhism everything is impermanent and hence changing, naturally the contexts in which we live do not remain the same. So too, our pre-conditions and predicaments historical/socio-cultural/religious/political/economic/linguistic/psychological/intellectual etc. change, and to adjust/imbibe and absorb/assimilate those changes, we need proper understanding. It is this interpretative-integration – knowing oneself and the others – the world of thoughts/persons/cultures etc., paves a way towards hermeneutic.

With this philosophical reasoning behind advocating the need to interpret, it becomes interesting and essential to know about the methods adopted, to which we turn in the last section.

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### Section III: Methodology of Hermeneutics

Although we discussed in the last section the need and necessity to interpret, our exercise cannot be complete unless we spell out the methods and techniques to be used; and precisely that is the task we hope to undertake in this last section. To interpret is to understand the truth – in and of/about human beings, and the entire universe. If this widest sense of the meaning of interpretation is accepted, then the truth-realising techniques and methods turn out to be self and/or world conceiving-exercise also. It is by using linguistic-expressions already prevalent that we try to interpret our thoughts and experiences, and articulate our conceptions – starting from ourselves, others and the world at large. There is a continuous and consistent attempt to make our expressions and understanding clear, transparent and perfect, in order to have proper conceptions. It is a passage from imperfection to perfection, through conceptual comprehension of the world – inner or outer.

In such an exercise of understanding /comprehending the truth and reality, we share freedom to use and create new words to obtain exactitude and precision, and everybody gets equal opportunity to understand the truth, create new conceptions, and use various modes of expression. Such a meaning-giving exercise can be individualistic in its inception, but it can be collective and collaborative in its reception. It is in a sense urge to share and distribute, in order to open the gate-ways of acquiring truth to be known by all. On the one hand, it is preservation of particularity and yet, on the other, accommodating all the individuals in general – both being the aspects of human personality. In our conceptions both the aspects – subjective and objective – are involved.

While undertaking such an exercise, one has to be flexible and accommodative to the changing demands of situations to which we respond. Thus, culture-specific relativities of the individuals/groups are bound to be there, but any interpretation aspires for universalisability. It originates in spatio-temporal context, but intends to be context-free. This is possible only when it observes

certain functional constraints regulating in a certain way. To consider some such constraints – internal and /or external – is worth-while, towards which we now proceed:

**External Constraints:** Since the interpretative exercise is expected to be undertaken in the Buddhist philosophical framework, to begin with such an exercise obviously should be consistent with its basic doctrinal commitments, which operate as external constraints. They are three:

i] *Anityatā* – Whatever is real is by its very nature impermanent, and hence subject to change. To this, any interpretation and understanding cannot be an exception. Having roughly grasped the importance of the Buddha's thought/message and the need of our living in the light of it to emancipate ourselves individually and/or collectively, people from various walks of life – with different cultural, intellectual, social background – try to understand his thought through interpretation/re-interpretation of the language in which it is expressed. To be able to get better insight, his thought too is interpreted to derive implications from it. But such interpretations are often relative to the period of time, place, level of understanding; and are subject to change to such an extent that they could be contested/challenged and forced to be given-up, being untenable. The sphere of *Anityatā* does not cover only the field of objects and events. It also extends to interpretations, conceptions of truth, modes of analysis/ explanation/ justification, etc. however *prima-facie* satisfactory they may seem.

ii] *Anātmatā* – Anything real is non-substantial, and essencelessness – internal or external – according to Buddhism. The doctrine of no-self and selflessness entails in the context of Buddhist hermeneutics that no interpretation or re-interpretation of the Buddha's thought/message at any stage put forth by anybody can revolve around any substance/nucleus of whatever kind. But it also entails that although it might have been put forth by a particular advocate in a certain context, it should not aspire to monopolise the hermeneutic-space in Buddhist tradition. As is evident from Buddhist history, various interpretations and

hermeneutical trends were in vogue at the same time without trying to eliminate others. And although they were at variance with each other they nevertheless brought forth richness, depth, variety contained in Buddha's thought. Any Buddhist hermeneutical exercise compromising with this aspect was not well-received.

iii] *Duḥkha* – Susceptibility to annoying states of affair, agony, angst and restlessness, according to the Buddha, is a natural state of affair of existence of any living organism and to this even a human being is not an exception. The Buddha and his followers did emphasise universal phenomenon of pain and suffering coming to the lot of living beings. But they never entertained the possibility of human beings engulfed by pain. Nor did they preach pessimism of any sort in face of pain and suffering. Any interpretation of Buddha's thought should never lose sight of this. Due to ignorance and attachments, pain and suffering emerges. In the process of expression/interpretation, pain and suffering can provide foundation to any work of art, and give scope to discover our inner-world of thoughts and ideas rationally, emotions and feelings aesthetically, faiths and beliefs religiously, and passions and instincts morally. They are apparently normative and non-rational, but a systematic inquiry into our subtle forms of realisation of truth is important. Any expression/interpretation can be good or bad, depending upon its authenticity and originality. Any interpretation cannot apriorily avoid bewitchment, deception and mis-interpretation, as there can be a gap between understanding the intentions and motives on the hand and actual expression and interpretation on the other. Under such circumstances, there is a need of tolerance and compassion or sympathetic mode of understanding of the other – creator or appreciator. Interpretation – verbal or non-verbal – should be flexible and accommodative to provide scope for readers / listeners/observers to understand their comprehensions of truths, and hence could be incomplete. Interpretation and understanding of phenomenon of pain and suffering or of the manner and mode of overcoming of it as taught by the Buddha should be free from

one-sidedness, dogma, regimentation and misconception as far as possible to keep the possibility of its universalisability open.

iv] *Nirvāṇa* – Any line of interpretation, reinterpretation and reunderstanding Buddha's thought should not compromise in any way with the basic tenet of *Nirvāṇa* so that on the one hand it is transcendence of de-humanising and de-moralising forces – internal and external – operative on humans individually and collectively, and attainment of peace on the other. By attempting to express and interpret one can progress, but such a development is not eternal; there is a permanent possibility to understand newly and alternatively. Any interpretation can transcend the boundaries and limitations of common-sensical world, provided it expresses hitherto-unknown and enables to realise the truth involving both sublimity (*Audārya*) and depth (*Gambhira*).<sup>50</sup> Rather, if it pacifies the need to share emotions and comprehensions originated in inquisitiveness, then only it gives peace and contentment through novel-creativity taking different forms of expressions – depending upon availability of medium, materials, inclinations and conditions. Though potentiality to create is by nature given to us, it depends upon our moods and modes to express the truth we experience, think and feel.

**Internal Constraints:** As said earlier Asaṅga was a *Yogācārin* and hence the marks of the *Yogācāra* Buddhist tradition are traceable in his writings. Some of them we wish to bring out which is also essential:

i) Physical-Body: *Prajñā and Karuṇā – Mahāyāna* is a paradigm-shift from individual-good upheld by *Hīnayāna*, to social-interests and/or well-being of all, especially preserving the interests of the majority of laity, which were neglected and marginalised. Physical body is neither pure nor impure. It is not impure by its very existence naturally, but it can be used as a tool to do social-work by performing morally good acts (*Śīla*) for the betterment of society at large. In the external world, *Bodhisattva* works for the people, who are ignorant and suffering, and up-lifts them all by using his *Prajñā* – (insightful wisdom/



discriminative understanding) and *Karuṇā* – (overflowing love and compassion). But for doing such acts, one needs to understand and realise (*Bodhi*) facts actually, and interpret the life-problems/ worlds appropriately. Thus, it is interpretation of and for others, selflessly by the ideal interpreter, viz. the *Bodhisattva*. Here the interpretation is not of the objects/things, but of beings in the living-world. Hence, *Bodhisattva* has to develop *Prajñā*<sup>51</sup>, which is the highest one amongst the *Daśa-Pāramitās* prescribed by *Mahāyāna* Buddhism.

ii) Mental Conditions: Although in the *Hīnayāna* tradition while explaining *Daśa-śīla*, one rule is that people should not entertain themselves by indulging into *Nṛtya* (dance), *Nāṭya* (drama), *Śaṅgīta* (music) etc. but better concentrate on individual moral codes of conduct. In contrast to this, later on, Nāgārjuna, who is the founder of *Mahāyāna* tradition, himself has written *Nāṭya* (drama), viz. *Saudarānanda*. It may apparently sound to be contradictory, but in-depth-analysis reveals that such a rule in the *Hīnayāna* tradition is not meant for all the members of the society; it is only for *Bhikkhus* and *Bhikkhunis*. By suppressing one's own instincts and passions one cannot grow naturally, rather they can be used creatively by training and cultivating – culturing and nurturing –appropriately. Such a realisation compelled the later followers of Buddhism to think about interpretation of the rules to be practised. Perhaps, that's why within the fold of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, in the list of essential-trainings of the *Bodhisattva*, out of the five sciences to be learnt important place is given to sciences like *Śilpa-sthāna-vidyā* and *Śabda-vidyā*. Both are the modes of expression and originate in our instincts and passions, which spring from our emotions and feelings; but if trained properly can create aesthetic joy, which is witnessed through Buddhistic creation of master-pieces, viz. *Śilpa*, *Citra*, *Nṛtya*, *Nāṭya*, *Kāvya*, *Śaṅgīta-kalā*, etc., that are considered as marks of Buddhist culture.

iii) Spirituality/Religiosity: Just as for living life we require body and mind, and hence passions and instincts are bound to

be there; so too we have emotions and feelings. Emotions and feelings by their very existence are not hurdles, rather if trained properly they can enable us to understand the inner-world. One can create a spiritual-world through contemplation and integrate the inner depth of understanding by using various practices of *Yoga*. There is a chance to interpret the religious-world of faith and devotion, which is apparently mystical and occult; but such practices too can enable us to develop and integrate our worldly-existence. And that is exactly done by Asaṅga's *Yogācāra* Buddhism.

As analysed and explained above, it should be amply clear that there are on the one hand constraints, but on the other hand giving scope and providing grounds to develop and integrate our personality in various ways. It is this method of transcendence – of what is given/ prevalent to be transformed into an artefact, conversion of limitations and constraints into assets, and adjusting with the present to live truly – taught by *Mahāyāna* Buddhism in general and Asaṅga in particular. It has unlimited scope and enormous possibility to become perfect truly as a human being. To live as a human being with all limitations and assets, and practising humanity in its all aspects to create peace and harmony is a new mode of culturing man and his world. It is a sense of true hermeneutics – a mode of interpretation and understanding ourselves, others and the world at large in the widest sense of the term, a vision given to us by Buddhism.

Buddhism attempted to create a new world of expression, by using the complementarity between understanding and interpretation, and *vice-versa*. By using what is not given as a medium, to create artefacts uniquely. It is a novel and originality-preserving mode to produce hermeneutic-world. One is creator of his own world by expressions of his culture, which depicts the value he preserves and makes his progress by giving meaning to his own life and the world through his contributions. It means: What you create, How you create and Why you create, truly be-speaks for your own culture.

Everything is evanescent and fragile,<sup>52</sup> but to convert it into ever-lasting joy is a technique worth to be learnt from Buddhism. A good interpreter is one, who converts and succeeds in absorbing the reader/listener /observer and unites with the object of expression and creation. This method of critical-reflection on the complexities of world, transforming into excellence and perfection is a unique contribution of Buddhism. It is worth to contemplate in the contemporary world too, and if possible, appropriate according to our inclinations and intensions living in the present. It is a mode of following tradition and yet making it relevant for the present universally.

## Notes

1. *Studies in Buddhism*; Chinchore, M.R.; pp.285-99: 327-343.
2. *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* of Asaṅga; Ch.18, K.34-36, pp.131-34; K.77-81, pp.142-3;  
*Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra*; Ch.2, K.1-7, pp.21-22. *Buddhānām lakṣaṇam jñānam*---/ *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*; Ch.3, K.60, pp.69-70; Ch-10, K.781, p.158; K.864, p.163.
3. Asaṅga in the *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* states that language must have six qualities: *Snigdha* (polite), *Mṛduka* (softness), *Manojña* (intense), *Manorama* (pleasing), *Śuddha* (clear) to interpret the truth; Ch.12, K.9, p.78.
4. Here it is pertinent to note that Asaṅga in his *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* [pp.70, 131], explains that there are three verbal modes of expression, viz. *Lipi* (script), *Gaṇanā* (counting numbers) and *Mudrā* (drawing figures); and out of that scriptural language is one. Study of language is an essential component of education (even according to Buddhists), and hence within the five essential subjects to be studied, *Śabda-vidyā* is one. For further details see also my article on *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* especially discussion on *Pañca-vidyā*; Chinchore, M.R.; *Studies in Buddhism*; p. 315. See also *Studies in Buddhist Culture of India*; Lal Mani Joshi; pp.126-7,143.
5. It is worthwhile to note in this context that comprehension/knowledge (*pañisaṃbhidā*) has four aspects, viz. insight into principles (*Nāma-jñāna/dharma-cakṣu*), the objective meaning/denotation (*artha-jñāna*), the connotation/ etymological meaning (*niruktiabhilapa-jñāna*), and finally the intuitive/insighting-power (*pratibhāna/pratibha-jñāna*). *Pañisaṃbhidāmagga*; Ch.4, See also *Abhidharma-dīpa* with

*Vibhāṣā-prabhā-vṛtti*; Ch.7, K.513-14, p.393; Warder, A.K.; *Indian Buddhism*; p. 299.

6. *Bodhi of the Buddha*; *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra*; Ch.5, K.53, p.94. *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* of Asaṅga; Ch.19, K.75-80, pp.166-67. See also Warder, A.K.; *Indian Buddhism*; pp. 44-45.
7. *Tuḥṣṇīmbhāva*; *Ibid*; pp. 48-9. *Mahāvastu*; Ch.4. *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra*; p. 3. *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*; pp.143-44 quoted in Chinchore, M.R.; *Studies in Buddhism*; p.322.
8. On Gods' request to speak; *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra*; Ch.1, p.3; Ch.3, K.23, p.48; Ch.7, K.24-34 pp.110-12.
9. Teaching should be according to listener's interest; *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* of Asaṅga; p.1, 4, *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra*; Ch.2, K.47, p.30; K.55, p.31.
10. *Mārga-darśaka / Kovida*; Asaṅga; *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra*; Ch.1, K.20, pp.7-9. *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra*; Ch.7, K.12, p.107. *Lalitavistara*; Ch.1, K.5, p.3.
11. For different methods of teaching, *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra*; Ch.2, K.109, p.38. Nakamura, p.71; Winternitz, p.68.
12. Rather, later on in the *Mahāyāna* tradition, we find that the Buddha was insisting that *tāpātchedāt ca nikaṣāt sūvarṇamiva ----Tattva-saṃgraha*; Vol-II, Ch. 26, K. 3587 p.1115.
13. Please see for details my paper 'Duhkha: An Analysis of Buddhist Clue to Understand Human Nature', in *Studies in Buddhism*; pp.181-194.
14. *Attāno pradīpo bhava*; *Dhammapada*, Verse. 160-61. *Sutta-nipāta*-513/ 17- 23, 622/43-46. *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*; pp.143-4. *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* of Asaṅga; Ch.12, K.2-3, p.76.
15. *Śrāvaka-bhūmi* of Asaṅga; p. 354 fn. *Abhidharma-dīpa* with *Vibhāṣā-prabhā-vṛtti*; p.3 fn.
16. *Arya-satyas* even are numerically four and not one.
17. *Culla-vagga*; 5/33/1. See also for further discussion on variety of *Bhāṣas* and scripts. *Lipi, mudrā and Gaṇanā, kāyavākkarma* in the *Lalitavistara*; p.218.
18. *Artha-viniścaya-sūtra*; p.71. *History of Indian Literature*, Winternitz, p.1011.
19. *Nava-aṅgas*; Asaṅga; *Śrāvaka-bhūmi*; pp.134-40. See also Asaṅga; *Abhidharma-samuccaya*; Pradhana, P. (ed.); pp.78-9. And also Chinchore, M.R.; *Studies in Buddhism*; p.313,

20. *History of Indian Literature*; Winternitz; pp. 12-13, 68.
21. *Dīgha-nikāya*, 33/1/10. *Abhidharma-samuccaya* of Asaṅga; p.64.
22. Although in early stages Buddhism stressed on *Adhi-prajñā*, *Adhi-samādhi*, and *Adhi-śīla* in contrast to non-Buddhists traditions as a way to live, later on, it seems, followers of the thoughts of the Buddha stressed on the middle-way, leaving the decisions to the concerned using their potentialities; *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* of Asaṅga; Ch.5, K.8-11, pp.22-23. Ch.10, K.11, p.54; Ch.11, K.1, p.55; Asaṅga; *Śrāvaka-bhūmi*; p.261. *Abhidharmadīpa*, p.3. See also *Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka-śāstra* with *Candrakīrti's Prasannapadā*; Ch.18, K.4-8, pp.151-157.
23. Asaṅga in *Yogācāra-bhūmi* gives five transcendental characteristics of *Parāmārtha*- 1] *Anabhilāpya /Avyakta* (inexpressible), 2] *Advaya* (non-dual), 3] *Avitarka/ Avicikitsā* (non-discursive), 4] (*Bhinnābhinna*) neither different nor identical, and 5] *Samatā* (equality of all things); In this context it is also worth to see Asaṅga's *Bodhisattva-bhūmi*, printed as an Appendix (III) in the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra*, p.128. *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* of Asaṅga; Ch.6, K.1-4, pp.24-25; Ch.10, K.75-80, pp.166-67; Ch.11, K.13-16, pp.59-60; See also *Abhidharmadīpa*, Ch.5, K.304, pp.262-63.
24. *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* of Asaṅga; intro. pp. 2, 18.
25. *Abhidharma-samuccaya* of Asaṅga; pp.36-38, 62-63.
26. *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* of Asaṅga; p.24; [and p.92 corresponding to the three kinds of *Śūnyatā*. and corresponding to *Nirvāṇa*-p.143]; *Abhidharma-samuccaya* of Asaṅga; *Parikalpita*, *Paratantra*, *Pariniṣpanna*, pp.31, 84.
27. *Parikalpita-lakṣaṇa*, *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* of Asaṅga; Ch.10, K. 31-39 pp.63-67; p.167.
28. *Abhūta Parikalpita* is defined by three marks: *jalpa* (thought constructions), *artha* (association of ideas) and *saṃjñā* (applicative use), and out of them *artha* (association of ideas) is due to *nāma* (nouns/words), *pada* (letters), *vyāñjana* (terminations), *lakṣaṇa* (marks of differentiations) and *prayoga* (functions); i.e. the five modes of *vikalpas* created by mind. Asaṅga; *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra*; Ch.11, K.15, 24, 27, 30, 39, pp.55-75.
29. *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* of Asaṅga; Ch.11, K.15-31, pp.60-65.
30. *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* of Asaṅga; *Śīlpakarmasthānavidyā*; Ch.6, K.6, p.28; Ch.17, K.25-27, pp.131-32. *Ibid*; *Bodhisattva-kāyavāksaṃpatyā sampanno bhavati*; p.90-91. *Ibid*; *Bodhisattva viv-*

*idha-guṇa-vardhamānā bhavati*; pp.23-24.

31. *Paratantra*; *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* of Asaṅga; *Ibid*; Ch.6, K.1, p.24; Ch.11, K.40, pp.64-65; Ch.18, K.81-104, pp.143-53; Ch.19, K.75-78, pp.166-67.
32. *Karma* is not only *Kāyika* (physical/material bodily), but it is of three kinds: *Kāyāvācāmanah* Asaṅga; *Abhidharma-samuccaya*; p.23.
33. *Kṣaṇika* is *trividha*; *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* of Asaṅga; pp.143-7.
34. *Ibid*; Ch.6, K.1, p.24.
35. *Ibid*; Ch.11, K.13, p.59.
36. *Laukika-lokottara — Nirvikalpa*, Asaṅga; *Abhidharma-samuccaya*; p.18. *Nirvāṇa*-Asaṅga; *Abhidharma-samuccaya*; p.12.
37. In this context it is worth to note how words originate and are momentary, explained in the *Lalita-vistara*, Ch.13, K.111-16, pp.127-8. See also *Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka-śāstra with Candrakīrti's Prasannapadā*; pp.176-77; *Abhidharmadīpa*; pp.109-113.
38. *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* of Asaṅga; Ch.19, K.75-79, pp.166-67; Ch.20, K.56-61 pp.179-180.
39. By sharing knowledge we grow, the moment we use/misuse it as a power, we degrade and ruin ourselves, is witnessed by history. Hence, dissemination of knowledge is essential.
40. *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* of Asaṅga; Ch.17, K. 89-91, pp. 146-153.
41. *Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka-śāstra with Candrakīrti's Prasannapadā*; Ch.18, K.6, pp.152-53.
42. *Bodhisattva, Citta-ālaya-vijñāna*; *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* of Asaṅga; Ch.19, K.75-80, pp.166-67
43. It emphasises on living *Yoga*, and that's why it is known as *Yogācāra*.
44. *Abhidharma-samuccaya* of Asaṅga; pp. 67-77; *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* of Asaṅga; pp.15-16, 70-73, 97, 126, 158-9, 173-75.
45. *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* of Asaṅga; p.58.
46. *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* of Asaṅga; pp.23, 126. *Abhidharma-samuccaya* of Asaṅga; pp.90-91.
47. Asaṅga; *Śrāvaka-bhūmi*; pp. 6-7, 192-93.
48. Asaṅga in the *Yogācāra-bhūmi* talks about seventeen *bhūmis*; p.1.
49. *Lokottarajñāna*, *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* of Asaṅga; pp.6, 32, 63, 83, 104, 151.

50. *Abhidharma-samuccaya* of Asaṅga: intro. p.29.
51. According to Buddhism *Prajñā* is of three kinds – *Srutamayī* (human fund of knowledge acquired through the tradition of the learned), *Cintāmayī* (acquired through independent discursive thinking) and *Bhāvanāmayī* (contemplative intuition), which means feelings and emotions along with thoughts and sensations are to be paid enough attention to.
52. Asaṅga in the *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra*, while explaining the excellence universally, has stated that it (*yasya yatra yathā yāvatkāle yasmin pravartate*/), is *aprameya* (difficult to know) Ch.9, K.41, p.43.

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