SUNYATA AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN BUDDHISM

By—N.A. Sastri

The concept of Sunyata is one of the main topics in Buddhism. Its early reference has been found in the Majjhimakya, III, p. 104 in connection with the elucidation of Sunyata-vihara (सून्यताविहार). It is stated there that the monastery is Sunna, devoid of elephants, cows and horses, etc. but not devoid, asunna of monks and their common characteristics. One dwelling in the forest may be devoid of the village and its men, but not devoid of the forest existence. In the same way when a meditator meditates on the earth as one object without its rivers and mountains, etc. he remains devoid of men, forest or hills, etc. but not devoid of the earth-keness. When the meditator rises up to the fifth meditation concentrating his mind on infinite space, this much remains in his mind as a real object, asunna. Similarly in his subsequent higher meditations on infinite consciousness, on the state of nothingness, akincanya, and on the state of neither consciousness nor non-consciousness his meditations become devoid of every other object but not devoid of the meditated objects. In his last meditation on the absence of any object animittaceto-samadhi, he finds that even this concept is not everlasting and permanent and thus he gets rid of his three asavas of thirst, rebirth and ignorance. Even though the meditator in this last concentration is freed from the three impurities, asavas, he, however, retains the sense of his body as constituted of the six organs up to the end of his life. Thus we find explained in this Discourse the internal voidness Sunnata and the external voidness, Sunnata, viz. the former is the deliverance of one’s mind from the said impurities, whereas the latter is the absence of something else in a particular place or object, e.g. monastery, etc. It is most likely that this internal Sunnata is conveyed in such passages like: Suttaei gamphira Sunnata-patisunyutta, “Discourses are very deep... and concerned with Sunnata, internal purification “S. myutta, II, p. 267.

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

A new expression has been formed in S.m. I, p. 135 to convey the absence of soul in man in a stanza attributed to Arya Bhikini. It
reads: “To conceive a permanent living being in this body is a wrong view coming from the god of death, Mara. For, this body is pure collocation of the manifest elements, and there is not found a permanent living being, Satvā” Suddhasamkhara-punjo’ya yam noc’cha Satvā upalabhyati/The same expression in the Theragatha, 719: Suddham Samkhara-samvatim/ The idea that Suddha stands in lieu of Sunya has been suggested from the Sanskrit counterpart of the cited Pali stanza found in the Abhidharmakosa-bhasya of Vasubandhu, p. 466:

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

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

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

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

1. Note it is sunya (सून्य) because there is no Satvā, a sentient being in it.

2. संखारां समायं परमासुण्डतं विरोहिम निजीनवं।
अभ्रत्तमुच्छतं ब्रदिविलच्छं।
stand, just so is Nama-rupa, man; he is void, i.e. free from any living being and intention (nijjivam ni.th.m), yet he looks as if he has a self and intention and discharges duties, etc. (Vis. magga, ch. 18).

Even cert. in Mah.ya Sutras have favoured the idea the that Suny.ta concept counteracts Satkaya-drs~i, belief in soul (Lamotte, Vimal. kiriti, p. 148, n. 16 and Sunangamasamadhi, p. 22) as ag.inst the S.madhi-J-Sutra’s saying:

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

न शून्यता ज्ञाति नो च निःप्रयते न।
स्वभाव्यूः या इम संबंधम्: ॥
(ch. 7. Ver. 28 cited in Buddhg.m-Sanghara, p. 239).

Let us see now what N. ga juna, the great champion of the Suny.ta th sisy ph ays. He makes several t. aments on different occasions rending the problem rather my tised than clarified. However it should be noted that he is a P. as. ngik., that is a Pra.jy.-pratischchin, viz. he would comb. strongly and ridicule every proposition relating to any metaphy i. l topic put forward by his opponent. When, e.g. the proposition is presented, viz. certain cause produces certain result, he finds fault with every part of the proposition asking whether the cause and the result are existent or non-existent and conclude ultimately that both the cause and the result are Suny.a, void. This conclusion he makes eloquently in this a.sh:—

"This world is a mere continuity of causes and effect; there is no S. tiv., sentient being (except in the empirical talk). For mere void things come out of void things”.

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

"The seed while producing the prout does not think ‘I am producing it’; he prout also while being produced does not think ‘I am produced by the seed’; etc.” (p.4). Thus the entire process of causation is void free from any conscious agent, cijearn nijjivam (p.3). Compare the Thagath.: Suddham dharmasam upadami Suddham semkla-ma-
**samtatim** 1 "Pure is production of things and pure is the continuity of the manifest elements" substituting an old terminology *Suddha*, pure for Sunna, void, (Adhimutta-thera's ver. 12) and note his another saying: *Suddham anissaram etam*, "This is all pure and without an verlőrd" (Ibid.9).

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

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

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

The same idea he spells out in another context:

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

यः महोदयसुल्पादः: शून्यता संब ते मतः

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

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

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

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

The above introductory statement by Candrakirti in his Prasamapada makes clear that it was Nagarjuna who widened the application of Sunyata to the entire field of philosophical speculation. However, the
fact that the Sunyata-doctrine must be viewed as a suitable weapon to check all the wrong views and opinions has also been well stressed by Nagasena, a predecessor of Nagarjuna (See Milinda, p. 404).

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

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

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

अनित्यं हृत्यं विपर्यास्य योनिवर्धणा 
सूत्त्रं अनत्मैंति भथं वदति च

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

The mind’s watchfulness over the separate personality elements is one of the four ways of mindfulness, Satipatthana. It is explained in the Nikayas as to keep watch over the fact that dharmas like the removal of the hindrance, nivarana, seven factors of Bodhi and four noble truths, etc. are realized and so on. But Vasubandhu gives a different meaning of Dharmasriiti. “The person engaged in it penetrates into the elements under four aspects: anitya, impermanent, duhkha, sorrowful, Sunya, void and anatman, selfless” (Abh. Kosa, VI. 19). This interpretation should not be viewed as Vasubandhu’s own, but it is, in fact, based on that of the early Sarvastivadin authors as many other topics of the Kosa are. Cfr. the same interpretation in the Abh. dipa with Vitti, p. 316-17. We have the same four aspects stated in another context. The Sarvastivadins’ Abhidhama, e.g. Pana-vestuka, p. 10, insists that the comprehension of the four Aryan truths must be effected
under four aspects each. The first truth, d̄ukkha-satya is characterized as an itya, d̄ukkha, Sunya and anatman. Since D̄ukkha-satya covers the entire Universe (S. Siddhi, ch. 17) the authors of Buddhān made a great capital of such topics and proved their ontological outlook well founded. It was probably Nāgārjuna and his followers who picked up one important aspect of the elements, dhāmas, i.e. Sunya and built out of it a stupendous philosophy of their own (v. my paper on G. pad, Bulletin, Tibetology, Vol. VIII, 1, pp. 28ff. and Pratītyasamutpāda in my forthcoming Buddhist Idealism).

The Ratnagotra probably refers to the four characteristics (laksana) of dharma: anitya, d̄ukkha, anatman and sentanir GEN (IV. 32) and in its comment to four aspects (akāra) under nairyanikā: anitya, d̄ukkha, Sunya and anatman. Though these four are not spoken of here under d̄ukkha-satya the context implies that they are described as characteristics of things under that truth (p. 103). Four perversions (विपरेत) are mentioned as related to the phenomenal things: permanent-climax, towards impermanent things, happy-climax towards unhappy things. Self-climax towards selfless things and auspicious-climax towards ugly things. Since the root body of leśkagātra is freed from these four perversions, converse of them are attributed to the root body, viz. niitya-paramita, permanent-climax, sukha-climax, anap, self-climax and subhāparamita, auspicious-climax.

According to Vasubandhu there four perversions are to be checked by their four antidotes (pratītya), viz. four ways of mindfulness thus: The mindfulness on the body checks the pure-perversion, Suci-viparyasa, on the feeling, happy-perversion, Sukha-vi, on the mind, permanent-perversion, niitya-vi, and on the separate personality-elements the soul-perversion, ब्रह्म विपरेत (Kosa, VI, 15 with Bhas. and Abb. Dipa, p. 316). By exercising the fourth mindfulness the said four aspects are to be observed in order to check the soul-idea, a perversion. The poet Asvaghosa who preceded the S. Siddhi employs the terms in parallel and explains thus: The elements are Sunya, void because there is neither producer or enjoyer in them; they are anatman, (soul-less) because the universe is dependent (Sūtravad, XVII, 20-21. It becomes now evident that the S. Siddhi and Asvaghosa have faithfully kept up the earlier tradition in interpreting Sunya into soulless or selfless; but in respect of anatman, the S. Siddhi made it into nissvabhave, non-substantial, presumably following Nāgārjuna and his school whereas Asvaghosa put it into desireless. The above four characteristics of things are also mentioned by Nagarjuna in his Pra. hrd, without explaining them (op. cit. p. 16).
A CONTROVERSY BETWEEN THE YOGACARA AND THE MADHYAMIKA

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

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

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

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

Malala Sekhara, Pali Proper Names, p. 904-5.
the concept of Sunyata to the state of the Absolute Truth, which he
defines as free of four categorical attributes, ens. etc. (v. M. Vrtti,
pp. 176, 491 & 375); but he never says that Sunyata by itself
is the Truth.

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

When something is absent in a place, that place is devoid
(शून्य) of that something; what is left out there over and above
that something, exists there forever. Perceiving it in this manner
one is said to have grasped voidness in a true perceptive. Getting
this, one is said to have penetrated deep into voidness. This point
is further illustrated as follow:

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

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

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

1. The same idea is expressed in M. jh. III, p. 106:
य घि बो तत्व न हो ति। तेन रूप्य सन्तुष्ट्यति। य पन तत्त्व अविशेष
हो ति। तस्ते हद आ त्योति पञ्चात्ति। एवं पिन्सा एसा आनन्द यद्यपच्छ
अविद्यत्वश गुणगुणश्च गुणतत्तब्धति भवति।
Dharmata according to Kamalsila is prakrti, true characteristic of all elements that remains outside of all discursive talks:

सर्वथा यथागौतमेषु वर्तनि स्वामिः: - Panjika.

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

Speaking earlier of the Nihitists (Vijnaka) who denies absolutely any fundamental basic principle underlying our talks and designations Maitreya observes: We shall disclose how a Nihist who challenges the very basic principle hidden beneath the surface of things like rupa, etc. (matter) shall be fallen from this spiritual discipline (dharma-vinaya). To the person who denies even the basic principle (vastumatra) in such things it is impossible to speak of the basic truth and the designations. For example, the talk of the soul (pudgala) is possible only in the presence of five aggregates of elements, matter etc. but not in their absence. Likewise in the presence of the basic truth underlying the matter, etc. the designations of such things are possible but not otherwise. In its absence one makes a baseless talk. When there is no basic principle, the baseless talk also will not be there. Thus there are certain people who on account of their ill understanding, having heard the discourses that are inclined to Mahayanic ideas and attached to the elucidation of voidness and intentional meanings, do not grasp the true meaning of what is preached there, speculate wrongfully, and with the help of improper and ill formulated logic conceive wrong ideas thus: Designation is only one principal truth; one who conceives in this manner conceives not well. For them the basic principle that serves as substratum of designation is absent and the designation also by no means is possible. How can there be the designation itself as the basic principle? In this manner they destroy both the principle as well as designation. The basic principle being denied, he is to be declared as a principal Niblist (Pradhana-nastika). As such he deserves neither conversation nor co-existence with the wise men. He not only dupes himself but dupes others too. Buddha with
this idea in view says: Every thing is possible for certain person of the soul-view, but nothing is possible for him who mis-conceives the voidness. Why so? A man of soul-view may be deluded in respect of one knowable reality (jneya): but he does not dispute every knowable reality. Nor will he, due to that view, fall into unhappy state of life. He will neither dispute with any seeker of truth, nor will he dupe him. He may on the other hand, make the person secure a true dharma. But a man of misconceived voidness will be deluded in respect of knowable reality and neglect it. Due to that he will fall into unhappy state of life and destroy the seeker of truth and the end of minery. He will become finally negligent in his religious duties (sikSEPade). This person negating the truth (knowable reality) will fall from the spiritual discipline (dharmavinaya) (I bid.)

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

It is interesting to note that the above passage throws among other things a new light on the origin of the Idealistic thought is Buddhism. Maitreya makes absolutely clear that his school was started with a view to reinterpret the concept of Sunyata (००००००) which was elaborated in the Prajnaparamita Sutras and which was made again the subject matter of the Madhyamikasutra. It was the Madhyamika who upheld the view that Sunyata stands for an absolute negation of any conceivable thought about the ultimate truth. He never speaks of any fundamental principle (अधिपत्य) underlying our daily experiences. The Idealist characterizes it as sat, existent whereas the Madhyamika keeps it clear from such characterization. For him the absolute is free of any attribute, existence or non-existence.

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

"The relative existence (paratantra) ought to be upheld since it is considered to be the basis of entire chain of imaginations. The illusion of snake arises on the support of a rope. No such illusion would arise in the absence of rope. Likewise the idea of blue, etc.
arises on the support of some basic mind. If this basic fact is absent, what would be the basis of the idea of blue, etc.? Therefore we ought to uphold paratantra, the basic mind as basic cause of the blue-idea, etc. It is also causing agent of defiling elements as well as purifying ones. In this manner one realizes that what is absent in a place is no-existing truly. This (realization) is what is called truly entering into voidness. By realizing thiswise voidness becomes well conceived” (v. my Sanskrit text, p. 42. f. publ. in JOR. M. Supplement, 1930).

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

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

V. Subendhu’s definition of the perfect knowledge is that when the basic consciousness, paratantra is made born of all imposed ideas (parikalpa), it becomes perfect knowledge (parinispāna). Since the latter is evolved from the former, the former is considered as a real entity. In Maṭṭeya’s terminology samala Tathāta (समला तथता) is paratantra and Vimala Tathāta (विमला तथता) is parinispāna or, as in Tathagatagarbha is paratantra and Dharmakaya is parinispāna, or according to Madhyantā-vibhanga Abhutaparikalpa (अभूतपरिकल्प) is paratantra and Tatra Sunyata (तत्त्व सून्यता) is parinispāna.

Māṭṭeya remarks that the Absolute is sometimes contaminated with impurities and sometimes freed from them. Owing to its contamination men strongly adhere to the idea of subject-object relations in his mind and entertains a misgiving about the concept of Sunyata, i.e. ideation alone, cittamātratā. When he gives up that idea and acquires the true knowledge, then the true concept of voidness dawns in his mind and he is said to be freed from impurities. Thus the pure or
impure state of mind is contingent (अविष्कृत) or conditioned and does not affect its own nature; for it is forever shining in its nature (prakritiprabhaswaran). The water or gold, e.g. is pure in its nature but becomes impure on account of its contamination with impure elements. Likewise is the mind. But the contaminated state is something actual and not our guess. Otherwise all people would become at once wise and noble (M. Vibh. Tika, p. 42-3). Its original purity also cannot be questioned; otherwise all our efforts for our spiritual betterment would be in vain and produce little effect. A Bodhisattva takes to the spiritual path in order that he should serve people and fulfil their desires. That is the primary purpose in his life.

Now let us note the Ratnagotra’s comment on Sunyata. Tathagatadhatu is void of the accidental impurities which are of separable character, and non-void of the highest virtues of inseparable character (l. 153). There is nothing to be removed, nor is there anything to be imposed upon it (absolute). The absolute (मूर्त) should be viewed as such; one who views it in its true perspective gets released. In these statements the characteristic of Sunyata is elucidated as a middle path (aparyanta) since it has been denied of either imputation or impuption. The author further denounces the Madhyamikas and their mode of thinking; Those whose thought is distracted from the enunciated import of Sunyata or not composed or concentrated upon it are declared to be drifted from the Sunyata. In the absence of true comprehension of sunyata of the highest import (paramarthika) the indiscriminated absolute element (अत्म) cannot be comprehended or cognized introspectively. With this intention it is stated (by Buddha): Tathagatas’ comprehension of Sunyata is no other than that of Tathagata's bha which is unknown or unrealized by the Sravakas and Pratyek-buddhas, etc. (P. 76). The same treatise decries those who profess and adhere to the Sunyata-concept itself are maddened in the doctrine. Buddha declares towards such persons: Far better is the belief in soul (सर्वकालवृत्त) of Sumeru mountain dimension than an absessed sunyata-concept (p.28. I. II). Nagarjuna too is not less emphatic in denouncing such obsession: Those who adhere to the Sunyata-concept by itself, we call them incorrigible (M. Sastra, XIII, 8). These two statements make it plain that each school holds its own interpretation prima facie correct and condemns other’s one a fallacious. An interesting parallel to this idea of Sunyata, not ideal by itself can be traced in the Isopanisad, mantra2.

Bone of contention between the Yogacara and the Madhyamika schools is the question of Paratantra. The Yogacara (Vijnana-śravaṇa) holds it as real and existing, because it serves as a basis of our designations and imputations. However Bhaviveka, a champion of Svatantrika Madhyamika school refuses to accept its reality. He has also
criticized the interpretation of Sunyata as has been shown in the above cited passage (of the Yogacarabhum: शैव शूर्य तिलकस्ते etc.), Read his Karatalaratna (Visvabharati pub 1949, pp 15-16 57-59). He has been accused by Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Hsuan Tsang and others that he has made Mahayana lacking in laksanas, paratantra, etc. (y. My Intro.p. XII-III, Karatala).

For the Vijnavadin, paratantra, relative entity may be unreal only in so far as its imposed aspect is concerned कल्पितपूर्वक अवस्था but not absolutely unreal. It is an entity which consists of eight consciousness elements (अष्टविष्ण वैश्वव परत्र:;) M. Vibh. Tika I, p. 15).

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

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

Here the foundation of imputation is the mind and mental states (verse 9); they continue by way of causes and conditions upto the time of Nirvana and cover the three spheres of existence (Madh. Tika, p. 13. L-10-I; also Trimsika, p. 41).

The later schools of Buddhism in Tibet and Mongalia which sprang from the Yogacara school have admitted the mind as the ultimate principle and viewed it as sunya with the implication of advaya, non-dual. Note, for example, Tibet’s great Yigin Milarepa’s statement (Lema Kazi Dawa Samdup.s translation)" I understood the Samsara and Nirvana to be dependent and relative states and that the Universal cause is mind which is distinct from ideas of interestendness or partiality. This universal cause, when directed along the path of Disbelief (or selfishness) resulteth in the Samsara; while, if it be directed along the path of Altrusim, it resulteth in Nirvana. I was perfectly convinced that the real source of both Samsara and Nirvana lay in the voidness (of the Supre-mundane Mind) ‘— p. 109. Previously Milarepa is said to be well versed in the exposition of the science of the clear void of mind, wherein all forms and substances have their course and origin. Here the mind is viewed as the void which however is not the void of nothingness, but the primordial uncreated, unformed, incapable of being described in terms of phenomenal experience (pp. 36-7). The primordial cause is pri-
mordial Mind, the one unity. All pairs of opposites being but concepts of mundane mind - when viewed by the supra-mundane-ness of enlightenment merge in at-one-ment, and Duality is realized to be Illusion (p.35. n. 1. v. Evans Wentz, Milarepa, Oxford, 1958).

Note

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

सुन्यां धप. XXV, 14, Milindap. Bombay edn. p. 360
सुन्यां सम-निकाय, IV, 192ff.
शौच बास्कृत्तम्, Amarusataka, Ver. 82.

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

नासीयस्तिविपक्षण शून्यम्।
अत्यस्तिविपक्षण अनात्माः।

नासीत्यपापुरुसस्तिविपक्षण शून्यम्।
जनामकारित्वात् अनात्मा।

नासीत्यपापुरुसस्तिविपक्षण शून्यम्।
स्वयम् नात्मात्वात् अनात्मा।

Kosabhasya, p 400.

N. A. Sastri,
Santiniketan.