

Introduction to Buddhist Logic (©2017-2020)

Lecture 7: Dignāga and the New Buddhist Logical Method

As it can be easily ascertained that because the Buddha kept silent about many philosophical issues and speculative topics (for instance his famous **Arrow metaphor** in the *Cūḷamālukya sutta* of *Majjhima-nikaya*), such a silence or rejection left quite a lot of challenging issues to the later generations of Buddhist philosophers. This then result in some extensive studies of Buddhist texts by way of commentaries such as the production of *abhidharma* literature or later Pali commentaries.

By the time of Nagarjuna, the first stage of *abhidharma* articulation was almost completed and further development seemed to have needed new insights. As a result, Nagarjuna started to strenuously criticise the scholastic philosophy of *abhidharma*. Such criticisms then shifted the intellectual focus from analytical approach to metaphysical and psychological issues to the dialectical approach to the ontological problems. By the time of Vasubandhu and Asaṅga, the focus seemed to have once again reoriented from ontological issues to phenomenological and analytical approach to the metaphysical and psychological issues.

Also, the time was coincided with the introduction of traditional logical method and epistemological inquiries into Buddhist philosophy, which reflected by Asaṅga and his brother Vasubandhu whose early Buddhist logical treatises we have discussed in early lectures. Perhaps because his studies under Vasubandhu, Dignāga was the most creative systematiser of Buddhist logical method (Cf. Stcherbatsky, 1930:27) whose contributions shall be discussed in the next few lecture.

As we have mentioned, all Indian logical reasoning can be attributed to the insights and ideas from traditional Nyāya philosophy. As such, most of the treatises regarding logical reasoning are revolving around the *Nyāya-stūtra* and the subsequent commentarial and sub-commentarial works. That was changed slightly when Vasubandhu composed the first Buddhist logical treatise. But It was Dignāga who first used the term *hetuvidya* rather than *nyāya* to discuss matters concerning logical reasoning. Because the same reason, Dignāga and the logical method after him is called *new method* or *new hetuvidya*;

With Dignāga life, just like most ancient Indian philosophers, it is always difficult to be precise. It is comparatively clear that Dignāga was one of the disciples of the renewed Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu. Also, the influential Nyāya philosopher Uddyotakara (*ca.* 6th century CE) recorded his awareness of Dignāga's criticism levelled against Nyāya logical method. (Randle, 1981:2) It is therefore reasonable to suggest that Dignāga was later than Vasubandhu and earlier than Uddyotakara. Unfortunately, the dates of all these three are very uncertain. This issue is further complicated by the fact that it is indeterminate as to the age gaps between Dignāga and his teacher as well as Uddyotakara. That said, it is tentatively concluded that Dignāga was around 400 to 480. (For example, Randle suggests the possibility between 300 and 500; Randle, 1981; some scholar, on the other hand, dates Dignāga's life as 480 to 540; see Westerhoff, 2018-217)

The place of Dignāga's birth seemed to be certain. That he was born in ancient Kāncī, a great city of culture and learning, in south India. Other than that, we do not have more information to elaborate on the details of his life. With regard to his educational background, it was conventional enough. He was first educated in Buddhist teachings of different schools (in particular Pudgalavada philosophy (*Vātsīputrīya* School); see Westerhoff, 2018-217), although none of them were

Mahayana. It is said that due to his disagreement with the idea of a person (*pudgala*), he left his teacher. (Stcherbatsky, 1962:32) When he became the disciple of Vasubandhu, his learning experience was broadened to the newly developed Mahayana doctrines. By the time he arrived in Nalanda (the first university of high learning in the world, more than 500 older than the first universities in Europe), it is said that he was so good at debate that many great debaters of the day were defeated by him. He was called therefore *tarka puṅgava* or *debating bull*.

Having completed his philosophical apprenticeship and established his reputation as an excellent scholar, Dignāga is said to have led a typical life of Buddhist master of the day, teaching whenever he could and travelling around from one place to another, occasionally took residence in a monastery for a while. But again, there is not much information regarding details of his travelling and teaching, except that he passed away in a secluded place.

Perhaps because of Dignāga's excellence, Buddhist philosophy and logical reasoning developed to its maturity around the time of Dignāga by the time of his passing away. But it seemed that precisely due to that reason, it meant that the priority of Buddhist masters of the time was not meditation but debating with others. This then resulted in the popularity of Buddhist philosophy during the 1st and 7th centuries. At the same time, Buddhist practice seemed to have retreated to part-time monastic leisure, which would completely disappear after another 500 years in its birth place.

We shall discuss Dignāga, his major works and his noticeable ideas in detail in the next few lectures so here we just listed them below.

Major works:

Hetucakraḍamaru: The Wheel of Reasoning

Pramāṇasamuccaya: Compendium of the Valid Means of Knowledge

Nyāyamukha: Introduction to Logic

Alambanaparīkṣā: Treatise on the Objects of Cognition (with auto-commentaries)

*Abhidharmakośamarmapradīpa: Commentarial work on Vasubandhu's
Abhidharmakośa*

Notable ideas of Dignāga:

Reform of logical reasoning; reduction of the 5-membered logical sequent to 3-membered sequent. As we said, this was already initiated by Vasubandhu, although he did not explicitly explain the reason for doing that.

Hetuvidya and neo-Hetuvidya: although before or even after Dignāga the term *nyāya* was occasionally used in Buddhist logical system, it was more well known as *hetuvidya* after Dignāga in Buddhist tradition. Moreover, it is general known that before Dignāga Buddhist logical method was called *hetuvidya* or old *hetuvidya* and since Dignāga it was known as *neo-hetuvidya* or new *hetuvidya*

Trairūpya: triple character of inferential sign/reason

Reading suggestions:

For this week's reading, because we have an extra article for our *Buddhism and Economic* course, you may spend less time to read the textbook of *Buddhist Logic*. When you have time, however, you should reread or if you have read, read pp.283-

319 about *syllogism*. Please pay particular attention to those examples and the detailed analysis of them. In addition to that, may I also emphasize that you should read one or two pages regularly from *Logic: An Introduction* by Greg Restall. It would refresh your memory because you already studied that book not long ago. That will benefit you a great deal in terms of understanding logical reasoning and critical thinking.