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Keywords: buddhism, advaita-vedānta, being, inter-cultural ontology, heidegger, indian philosophy.

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The Hermeneutic of Concealing and Un-Concealing of Being in Madhyamaka-Buddhism and Advaita-Vedānta

Jaison D. Vallooran

Abstract- **In the history of Indian philosophy the relationship between Advaita-Vedānta and Madhyamaka-Buddhism is constantly disputed. It is argued, how one thought has eventually benefited from the other. This work explores the above-mentioned relationship in the context of Heidegger's intercession with Nietzsche, where concealment and un-concealment are understood as explicit ontological characters of Being. Subsequently, Nāgārjuna's description of reality as 'Śūnya' or void is explored as an expression of nihilism, nevertheless similar to Heidegger's observation of concealment of Being in '*nihil*'. And Advaita-Vedānta, as a thinking of non-duality expresses the hermeneutic of un-concealment of Being, i.e., of 'one' and 'the same'. These ontological characters of Being allow us to discover a sabotaging brotherhood between Nāgārjuna and Śankara, because the '*nihil*' and 'something' are ontologically two essential sides of the same thinking.**

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I. Introduction

In the history of Indian thinking the relationship between Advaita-Vedānta and Buddhism are of considerable interest. Many are they, who stand for and against this much disputed relationship, including the prominent figures like S. Radhakrishnan, S. N. Dasgupta and so on.[1]Chronologically and critically evaluating Śankara must have been in a close acquaintance with Buddhist thinking and it is argued that Gaudapāda, the teacher of Śankara's teacher was a Buddhist even.[2] The intended framework of this exploration is not to research, if we have any further evidence for this disputed relationship or how one thought has eventually benefited from the other; instead, we explore this asserted relationship in the light of ahermeneutic of concealing (*verbergen*) and un-concealing (*entbergen*) of Being. It is understood Halbfassthat the questioning of Being is an exclusive property of western ontological tradition. He asserts that there is no equivalent to the Aristotelian project of a 'science of being qua being' in the Indian thinking, nor to the Platonic perplexity about being and non-being; nor there is an explicit counterpart to Wolf's conception of 'ontology'. At the same time, he emphasizes that the concept of Being in its very original sense plays an essential and undeniable roll in Indian thought.[3]It becomes here clearer that a 'hermeneutic' of Being is inherent in the Indian thinking, whether it is called 'Brahman' or 'Śūnya'.

Heidegger argues at the beginning of his celebrated work 'Being and Time' that the long history of western ontological tradition since Plato and Aristotle is based on prejudices against the understandings of Being.[4] The conventional ontology, since Plato and Aristotle understands Being as the 'Highest', i.e. *causa prima*, the cause of every beings. To be the 'highest' means, to enclose all the attributes of time and space in its highest level; therefore it is understood as the superlative, i.e., the perfection. Hence, Heidegger argues that the fundamental question of Being remains primarily unexplored in the long tradition of western ontology, which Heidegger terms as the 'forgetfulness of Being' (*die Seinsvergessenheit*).[5] According to him, to philosophize means to explore Being in its meanings, i.e., to establish the original unity of Being. The idea of exploring the meaning of Being from a single unity does not mean the existing idea of the single and multiple meanings of Being adopted since Aristotle.[6] It stands for the idea of a still-original unit, from which even the Aristotelian representations of unity and diversity of beings, can arise.[7] Such an idea is the ontological origin of Heidegger's thinking, in which the possibility of the understanding of Being (*Verstehen*) is thought to be the origin. This is the idea of an origin, from which everything ontologically originates, which shall be neither compared with God nor understood as the

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[1] S. N. Dasgupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy*, (Vol., I, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1992), 493-4.
[2] Karl H. Potter (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophy – Advaita Vedanta up to Samkara and his pupils*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981), 14.
[3] Ibid.
[4]Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*(Tubingen: Max Niemeyer Publication, 2001), 02.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Aristoteles, *Metaphysik* (1003a 32 – 36), translated& published by Horst Seidl, (Hamburg: Meiner, 1982) 123.
[7]Claudius Strube, *Das Mysterium der Moderne: Heideggers Stellung zur gewandelten Seins- und Gottesfrage*, (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1994), 50.

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cause of the world;[8] it is the ontological *grounding* of Being. Without the destruction of metaphysically constructed ontology in the sense of manifold meanings of being, it is not possible to elucidate the fundamental thinking of Being as the most original unit, which forms the basis for all other previously overlooked associations in conventional ontology. This is the beginning of the post-metaphysical thinking of Being; and this is the ontological origin of Dasein, which is not ontically self-evident for the 'common sense', but opens the dubiousness of all self-evident.[9]

Nietzsche's proclamation that God is dead is characterised with the end of metaphysics. The death of God pre-supposes ontologically that the concept of God, which is understood in the horizon of time, is no more, i.e., the negation (*nihil*) is in God itself. According to Heidegger's Nietzsche interpretation, it is the historical moment, which characterizes Being explicitly as nothing (*nihil*) that negation and affirmation are in Being itself; they are the two sides of the same thinking.[10] Therefore, Heidegger understands in those words of Nietzsche not the dead-God of religions, but the end of long-established understandings of Being as *causa prima* and as *causa sui*. If Being is understood in the horizon of time, it is no more Being (*Sein*), but only a being (*Seiendes*), perhaps the highest being (*das höchsteSeiende*). God understood as *causa prima* or as *causa sui* can be conceivably this highest being, but not Being. Being can be understood neither in the horizon of time nor in the horizon of space, for Being is the fundament even for space and time. For this reason, Being is neither eternal nor non-eternal, Being is neither something nor nothing; in terms of Indian thinking, it is *nētinēti* (not this, not this). For the reason that the conventional ontology deficiently perceives Being in the horizon of time and space, it is often understood as *causa prima* or as *causa sui*. The eastern thinking, however is framed neither in terms of western metaphysics nor in terms of nihilism; still, it is the same 'highest something' that is understood by the term '*Saguna Brahman*' (Brahman with qualities). This is an understanding of Brahman in the horizon of time and space, because all qualities are ultimately the qualities of time or space.

II. The Concealing and Un-Concealing Character of Being

In Heidegger's essay, 'The Question Concerning Technology', we see the 'bringing forth' in the sense of revealing stands not only for the artistic and technical activities, but also for a 'bringing-forth-from-itself'. It is interpreted in the sense of the Greek word 'φύσις'. Assuming that the 'φύσις' is an act of 'bringing-forth-from-itself', it shows the urge towards the 'efficient cause' ('λέγειν', 'λόγος' German »*Überlegen*«); and ultimately stands for the revealing (*Entbergen*) of Being,[11] that the concealing of Being in beings becomes passive. Heidegger interprets Being as a completed fact in accordance with the Greek construction that is determined differently than the metaphysical understanding. He explores further that not only the handcraft manufacture or the artistic and poetical bringing into appearance or concrete imagery is a bringing-forth (π οίησις), but 'φύσις' also the arising of something from out of itself, is a bringing-forth. Hence, 'Φύσις' is indeed π οίησις in the highest sense, because, what presences by means of 'φύσις' has the bursting open belonging to bringing-forth. So, according to Heidegger the bringing-forth brings hither out of concealment forth into un-concealment that the bringing-forth comes to pass only insofar as something concealed comes into un-concealment. This act of coming into un-concealment rests and moves freely within, what we call revealing (*das Entbergen*). The Greeks have discovered the word αλήθεια for this revealing. The Romans translate this with '*veritas*', that we say 'truth' and usually understand it as the correctness of an idea,[12] i.e., *adaequatio rei etintellectus.*

In relation to the ancient question 'τίέστιν' and its answer in terms of '*causa efficiens*' (λέγειν, λόγος) Heidegger observes that the created-ness in the broadest sense of the produced-ness of something is an essential structural element of the ancient concept of being.[13] In making of presence of an idea, which 'idea' must look of the appearance of such, e.g., a table, it is a craftsman, who decides that the appearance of something in the presence of sensory visibility, that something specific (table) becomes present. However, this appearance of the table does not come by itself or it is a 'from' the craftsman, but possible only attended by a craftsman, to whole this idea of the table was already *a priori*. He looks back only to the pre-supposed idea and work to make this idea present. Hence, he is the one, who is 'bringing-forth' the 'idea' in the presence and keeps the area of this 'bringing-forth' the given 'idea'; the one, who thinks and executes this 'bringing-forth. This bringing-forth of something as the revealing of Being is what Heidegger discovered in the Greek Antiquities. This 'bringing-forth' in the sense of, letting to come into the presence, into the un-concealment'

[8] Martin Heidegger, *Über den Humanismus*, (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), 23.
[9] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 334.
[10] Martin Heidegger, *Holzwege: Nietzsches Wort ,Gottisttot'* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1980), 250 f.
[11] Martin Heidegger, *Die Fragenach der Technik*, (Pfüllingen: GüntherNeske, 1962), 11.
[12] Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, Translated and with an Introduction by William Lovitt, (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1977), 10.
[13] Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Willezur Machtals Kunst*, (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1985), 219.

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(ποίησις) represents a process, in which something passes from concealment in the un-concealment. This process, 'ποίησις' is on one hand a challenge and on the other hand a 'bringing-forth', that they both are the two ways of revealing of 'αλήθεια'.[14]

In conventional ontology being is often understood as the essence of beings. Heidegger criticises that in the understanding of being as the essence of beings the meaning and truth of Being remain un-discussed and unquestioned. It rests on the understanding of Being as the permanent 'Is-ness', as it has been thought, since the Platonic origin of philosophy. This constant presence is often interpreted as the Supreme Being or the divine, which confronts in Nietzsche's 'death of God' with its necessary end. The 'death of God' in Nietzsche advocates the absence of this permanent property that has not moved away from its constant presence by itself, but was killed by human. In an onto-theo-logical written metaphysics this proclamation of Nietzsche confronts with the dead God and consequently the question of being faces a 'no-way-out'.[15] It is the natural outcome of the Platonic philosophy, which thinks being in the horizon of constant 'Is-ness', i.e., as presence of the 'άείόν'. Hence in the onto-theo-logical constituted metaphysics, whether in the sense of 'ίδέα', or in the sense of '*causa prima*' or the 'will to power', Being is conceived as an ever present being. This attributed character of Being as the constant presence, as the supreme being, as divine, comes in Nietzsche's 'death of God' into its necessary end. Simultaneously this 'death of God' makes the time ripe for an unexplored and un-discussed unity of the essence of metaphysics as Being, i.e., the meaning of Being.

Heidegger understands the 'death of God' as the essential part of the history of Being, in which the forgetfulness of Being comes to the light. Then, Being is conceived as concealing as well as revealing; and this lets Heidegger claim that his interpretation of Being is the interpretation of those unexplored unity of essence, which is based on the meaning of Being, i.e., the truth of Being; consequently Being is 'something' as well as 'nothing', and is characterized with the revealing (*entbergen*) and concealing (*verbergen*) in its history. Hence from this most original unit, which goes beyond the dichotomy of affirmation and negation, originates everything ontologically, and it shall be compared neither with God nor with the cause of the world.[16] Further the truth, the αλήθεια remains necessarily with being,[17] because 'to-be-true', means 'to-be-discovered', which refers yet again to the revealing and concealing character of the truth of being.[18]

III. Concealing Character of Being and the Question of '*nihil*'

There is more dreadful thinking, than the death of God of religions behind Nietzsche's statement: 'God is dead'. The 'death of God' ontologically means that everything eternal, the truth, the values are 'not'; it means further that the negation is in God itself. According to Heidegger, it is the ultimate withdrawal of Platonic metaphysics, in which Nietzsche reverses the very essence of metaphysics.[19] Hence, Nietzsche's 'death of God' makes the foundations of the innermost understanding of being in its long history of two thousand years unstable,[20]that he rewrites the Platonic interpretation of Being as 'ίδέα' as the 'will to power' ('*WillezurMacht*'). According to Heidegger the 'death of God' is immersed in the history of being since the Platonic interpretation of 'ίδέα'; and it was never an unexpected abruption of Nietzsche's thinking.[21] Nietzsche perceived this immanent and dangerous nature of Plato's thinking that he accuses Plato for establishing dogmatism. He says that the entire philosophical tradition since Plato, together with the Christianity and Indian Veda-Vedānta tradition are nothing but the dogmatic errors.[22]

It is to be assumed that a thinking appears to be dogmatic for Nietzsche, if the basic concept of a universal truth is designed and affirmed with a universal validity; in Plato's thinking it is the 'idea of good'; in Veda-Vedānta thinking it is 'Brahman'. Both of these concepts are attributed with all the positive features, including existence as the essential necessity and possibility of its very being; they are thought in their absolute totality and necessity. Nietzsche denies any idea of the absolute totality and necessity that the validity of any self-evident, hence un-reflected value is for him an error. Nietzsche hangs on the possibility of potential deception, where the factual security or objectivity of values and truths moves to the position of the subject; therefore according to him the last and the first are mixed up.[23] Subsequently, the supreme as absolute totality and necessity must come according to Nietzsche at the last. Thus Nietzsche proclaims, there are many truths; and subsequently none! Ontologically, this is the thinking of becoming; which pre-supposes the

[14] Ibid.
[15] Heidegger, *Holzwege*,, 255 f.
[16] Martin Heidegger, *Über den Humanismus*, (Frankfurt, Vittorio Klostermann, 2000), 23.
[17] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 213.
[18] Heidegger, *Holzwege*, 212 & 230.
[19] Ibid., 222.
[20] Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Der WillezurMachtalsKunst*, 218.
[21] Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Der europäische Nihilismus*, (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1986), 298.
[22] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse – ZurGenealogie der Moral*, (Munch: DeutscherTaschenbuch Verlag, de Gruyter, 1988), 12.
[23] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner, Götzen – Dämmerung, Der Antichrist . Ecce homo, Dionysos – Dithyramben, Nietzsche contra Wagner*, (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, de Gruyter, 1988), 76.

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rise, growth, decay and decadence. On one hand, this thinking of Nietzsche is an endless path of becoming that even the supreme becomes an ideal of perpetual quest, the eternal becoming, which Nietzsche experiences as the highest. On the other hand Nietzsche does not reject the belief in the opposites of values, but only the adoption of an assumed original concept, known as '*causa sui*' in the philosophy. So, Nietzsche had to declare that the '*causa sui*' is the best self-contradiction that has yet been devised. According to him, it is a kind of logical necessity, but un-natural; nevertheless the extravagant pride of man has brought it to this extend that the mankind too deeply and terribly entangled in this nonsense.[24] Hence, Nietzsche pioneered an ultimate return towards the Platonic thinking as a counterpart of the belief in constant values and truths. These all include in Nietzsche's words, 'God is dead, we have killed him'! Nietzsche experiences in this 'God is dead', not just a God, who is mortal, rather he experiences a God, who is already dead.

According to Heidegger the nihilism is to be understood as the completion of Platonic metaphysics.[25] The metaphysics, which is exhausted in Nietzsche in its essential possibilities, marks a historical moment, in which the 'ίδέα' as the highest comes to an end and subsequently paves a way to a new beginning of thinking. This de-valuation of the highest values and ideals in Nietzsche's thinking as historical process of nihilism reveals itself as metaphysics since Plato. Then Nietzsche is integrated in the history of Being as the last metaphysician; subsequently, Heidegger aims at a new beginning for thinking, where Being makes itself free from the role of constant presence. As the result, the onto-theo-logical character of metaphysics becomes questionable for thinking, not because of any atheism, but from the experience of a thinking, which is located in the onto-theo-logy as the un-thought unity of essence.[26] Heidegger's understanding of nihilism as the completion of Platonic metaphysics and subsequent beginning of thinking asserts a kind of historical back-projection. This back-projection of philosophizing makes the forgetfulness of Being the starting point; and the highest expression of this forgetfulness is seen in Nietzsche's 'death of God'. Nevertheless this forgetfulness of Being is not strictly identified with nihilism alone, for, Heidegger recognizes that the danger of nihilism existed since the very beginning of thinking. The metaphysics increased this danger; consequently in thinking Nietzsche's 'death of God' emerges the ultimate development of Platonic 'ίδέα'. This does not mean that Plato is to be regarded as a nihilist, but the danger of nihilism drastically increased since Plato; and embraced its ultimate completion in Nietzsche's 'death of God', for, the 'death of God' was unable to uncover the concealed as the groundless ground of the truth.[27] Hence, Nietzsche as the last Platonic metaphysician experiences the necessary completion of metaphysics in devaluating the highest values, ideals, goals and reasons concerning God.[28] As the result the metaphysics is characterized with the forgetfulness of Being, which unfolds itself in the history of Being as an epoché since Plato to Nietzsche.[29]

As the reversal of Platonism, Nietzsche could say that the art is the 'stimulus' of life;'*stimulant*' is the apparent reversal of »*Quietiv*«.[30] Nietzsche's understanding that the truth is 'a kind of error, without which a certain kind of living beings could not live'[31] is a further example for the experience of this extreme reversal of metaphysics. In such experiences Heidegger discovers the substantive lack of Being as Being, and life as the essential access to the question of Being. This lack of Being terms Heidegger as the revealing of Being in its concealment, i.e., its truth as nothing, as void, as '*nihil*'.[32] Nietzsche's nihilism upholds a void, where the de-valuated *summumbonum* was constantly present. Nietzsche in his attempt of overcoming this void replaces the traditional value-orientedness with 'will to power'; that the will to power emerges as the new principle and standard of values. Hence nihilism holds itself according to Heidegger in the realm of Being, where the concealing aspects of being alone counts; for, the creation of new values hides Being effectively. However, the nihilism does not recognise that Being is also nothing, i.e., Being in his concealment understood as nothing, that is the '*nihil*' of Being.[33] This is the nihilism, which apparently remains hidden in Plato's metaphysics, which comes in Nietzsche's thinking to its explicit appearance as *nihil*. Therefore, according to Heidegger the history of metaphysics takes its course from Plato's interpretation of Being as 'ίδέα' and 'άγαθον', and its necessary completion Being is interpreted as 'will to power', which sets values and thinks everything in terms of values.[34]

What is explicit in Nietzsche's thinking is then nothing but the ultimate expression of Being as '*nihil*'. In the history of Being, Being that bears its concealment with itself, hides itself in its history; this is the metaphysical epoché marked with the forgetfulness of Being.[35] The overcoming of nihilism is the un-concealment of those hidden characteristics of Being, which would be ultimately also the overcoming of

[24] Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, 35.
[25] Heidegger, *Holzwege*, 212-213.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Der europäischeNihilismus*, 298.
[28] Heidegger, *Holzwege*, 226.
[29] Heidegger, *Holzwege*, 263.
[30] Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Der WillezurMachtalsKunst*, 35.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Heidegger, *Holzwege*, 264.
[33] Ibid., 264-265.
[34] Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Der europäischeNihilismus*, 298.
[35] Heidegger, *Holzwege*, 253.

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Platonic metaphysics. Nietzsche's superman (*Übermensch*) is the highest expression of the concealing of Being; he sustains the truth of beings as a whole. But this truth does not show straightforwardly, however it does reflect it off, as if in the art; this is the nature of superman, in which Nietzsche experiences Being as the 'will to power'. Then the essence of nihilism is not, what is explicit in the thinking of Nietzsche, but it rests in history of metaphysics as the thinking of 'ἰδέα', further as the denial of Being, which remains hidden in the history. In search of the essence of this immanent nihilism Heidegger asserts that the name 'nihilism' itself stands for '*nihil*', a thinking, in which the '*nihil*' becomes essential. Heidegger interprets Nietzsche accordingly and nihilism is that, which is concerned with Being as nothing, i.e., in all respects nothing; this is the experience of conceptualised emptiness. However, the nihilism is founded in Being itself, and it is the story of Being itself, the story of the concealing of Being. In the history of metaphysics Being as something and as nothing comes apart into its dividend explored constitution. This is the essence of Being, which remains un-thought and un-discussed in nihilism, because nihilism as '*nihil*' does not realize that the '*nihil*' is also to be understood as the synonym of non-*nihil*;[36] subsequently the two inherent sides of the same thinking, marked with 'revealing' (*entbergen*) and 'concealing' (*verbergen*) of Being.

IV. The Concept of 'Śūnyata' and the Concealing Character of Being

Madhyamaka school of Nāgārjuna describes the universe as totally devoid of reality, that according to them everything is called 'Śūnya' or void. 'Śūnya' or void is the explicit expression of '*nihil*' that there are in certain perspectives the nihilistic inclinations comparable to Nietzsche. Hence, in many of the comparative studies, Madhyamaka school is often described as being explicitly nihilistic. Nevertheless, a considerable amount of such studies depend on the superficial and apparent nihilistic characteristics of this school. This is due to the (mis)understanding of the term 'Śūnya' or 'Śūnyata' that is often used to describe the indeterminable and indescribable reality in Madhyamaka school. In western nihilistic tradition the term nothing is a hypothetical possibility that can neither conceived as a reality in the sense of affirmation and negation. This is a kind of conceptual emptiness, which would lead to no further; that every possibility of describing or understanding becomes strange to this conceptualized emptiness. It can neither be affirmed nor be negated, because it is just '*nihil*' alone.

The core of Nāgārjuna's theory of Śūnya is the doctrine of dependent origination, called Pratityasamutpāda. The Pratityasamutpāda advocates that the reality lacks Svabhāva, i.e., 'essential nature'. In the context of explicit historical rivalry between Buddhism and Vedānta, it is also to be noted that Svabhāva is intrinsically linked with understanding Brahman in Upanishads. According to the Upanishads (Saguna) Brahman is understood as the *summumbonum*, i.e., the perfection of all (Sva)Bhāva. Buddhism, which rejects Brahman should therefore assert on the lack of Svabhāva. According to Pratityasamutpāda the phenomenal realities know no *causa prima* as the origin of their Bhāva, but always dependent on other specific things forming a chain of causation. Every object is thought to be necessarily relative, hence neither absolutely real nor absolutely unreal. Subsequently, all phenomenal realities hang between 'something' and '*nihil*', avoiding the extremes eternalism and nihilism. Hence there is neither eternal Svabhāva, nor a reality, where the Svabhāvas can be rooted. Everything is originated therefore dependently that there is no room for any eternal Svabhāva. This is the teaching of Pratityasamutpāda, and the lack of this Svabhāva is described as Śūnya by Nāgārjuna. He comes forth with his dialectical brilliance to negate the concept of Svabhāva; subsequently the theories of Satkāryavāda and Asatkāryavāda proposed by Sāmkhya and Nyāya schools respectively, and even Ajātivāda and Vivarta-vāda are essentially immune to Nāgarjuna's dialectics.

Nāgārjuna's dialectical approach pre-supposes the Pratityasamutpāda (dependent origination) that everything is originated depending on something else; that there is a cause for every effect and every cause is the effect of a previous cause. Subsequently he describes in his Śūnyathasaptati on Śūnya that everything, (self, not-self, both self and not-self) being nameable thing, are like nirvāna, devoid of essential nature. Since there is no essential nature in things, causes and conditions, whether taken separately or collectively, everything is empty (E11; T24).[37] Further, Nāgārjuna asserts that Śūnya is itself Śūnya, that it lacks the Svabhāva. Does this mean that Nāgārjuna understands Śūnya as conceptualized emptiness and subsequently holds a position comparable to Nietzsche? No; Nāgārjuna asserts that even Śūnya is not an essential nature (Svabhava), in contrast to the nihilistic claim of conceptualized emptiness. Nāgārjuna does not assert on conceptualized emptiness; the term Śūnya provided Nāgārjuna the best possible way to express on the real nature of intrinsic reality as such. The intrinsic reality as such is understood as something that is indeterminable and indescribable, avoiding the extremes. In contrast to nihilistic standpoints Nāgārjuna

[36] Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Der europäischeNihilismus*, 44.

[37] Nāgārjuna, *Śūnyatasaptati*, Karl H. Potter, *Encyclopedia of Indian philosophies - Buddhist philosophy from 100 to 350 AD*, (Delhi: MotilalBanarsidass, 2002), 135.

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does not intend to deny the intrinsic reality as such, but the apparent phenomenal world perceived in terms of 'is' and 'is-not' that according to him existence and non-existence, beginning and end, better and worse are not actual (tattva), but only practical ways of speaking.[38]

The term 'Śūnya' stands then for the expression of the reality, (lōkavyavahāra) (E10; T24) which cannot be expressed in terms of lōkavyavahāra, that means, in terms of affirmation and negation. Nāgārjuna' sunderstanding of 'Śūnya' is something similar to the position of 'zero' in a mathematical scale; that positives and negatives are neutral to it. There, the reality in itself becomes something that is understood beyond the objectivity and referentiality, which can neither be perceived through the perspective possibilities nor understood through cognitive capacities. Hence, the reality, being devoid of phenomenal characters is understood by Nāgārjuna as Śūnya.In the opinion of S. Dasgupta, Nāgārjuna used the word 'Śūnya' in order to designate both phenomenal and trans-phenomenal reality in a somewhat technical sense. He adds further that the world is called Śūnya, because it is emptied or devoid of any intrinsic nature.[39]Hence the reality can neither be real, nor be unreal. The indeterminable and indescribable real nature of things called Śūnyatā or voidness. This transcendental reality (noumenon) behind the phenomenal is termed by the Madhyamakaas 'Śūnya', and as indeterminable and indescribable it goes beyond the possibility of Nāma-rūpa. The 'Śūnya' must therefore free from change, conditionality and from any other phenomenal characters. According to Potter, when Nāgārjuna calls something empty, he is implying it doesn't really exist, but he is by no means suggesting that it doesn't seem to exist and that its functioning may well seem to occasion results such as misery and pain,[40] that the Śūnya evolves to be a technical term for Nāgārjuna.

However the term Śūnya or Śūnyata itself is something that is intelligible, primarily in the sense of the negation of the ultimate reality, i.e., the description of 'what it is not'. The real nature of object cannot be established by the intellect and cannot, therefore, be described. That which is real, must be independent, i.e., it should not depend on anything else for its existence and origination. According to S. Dasgupta, it is Śankara, who takes up the popular connotation of the word Śūnya as 'nothing' while criticising the Śūnya-vāda, and consequently he condemns the expressive character of '*nihil*' in 'Śūnya-vāda'. Śankara argues that a philosophical position, which pictures the empirical world as a transitory show of non-substantial appearances (Śūnya) is not even worthy of a criticism, because absolute unreality of sheer appearances without any underlying reality (Tattva) to appear is a self-defeating proposition, which cannot be defended by any instruments of valid cognition.[41]

Even though it may for the moment look as a misinterpretation from the side of Śankara, he as someone, who asserts the unity and realty of Ātman could recognise only the '*nihil*' in the theories of Nāgārjuna. Nāgārjuna perhaps was not meaning to deny the existence of the ultimate reality as such; however it is also true that he explores the '*nihil*' of this ultimate reality, but not the nihilism that Nietzsche experiences in similar western context. Nietzsche experiences nihilism as 'nothing', i.e., *nihil* in Nietzsche is not the counterpart of something, but the conceptualized emptiness of nothingness. Heidegger on the other hand understands essence of Nietzsche's thinking as something negative, as *nihil*, i.e., as the concealing of Being itself. The understanding of nihilism as conceptualized emptiness fails to look at the '*nihil*' as the synonym of non-nihil,[42] but only as two dividend exploring extremes. That is why Heidegger says, nihilism means, the essential incomprehension of the essence of nothingness and Nietzsche, the last metaphysical thinker, is caught in metaphysics and consequently not able to realise that *nihil* is the synonym of non-*nihil*. In its essence Śūnyavāda can perhaps compared with the theory of relativity that there is no fixed thing, no fixed phenomenon to be experienced. The absolute is independent of its own Svabhāva, hence also beyond the Nāmarūpa, i.e., beyond any phenomenal description, which should be unconditionally true. Then there is nothing metal or non-mental, which can be considered as real. Does this assumption mean that there is 'nothing', and the universe is understood in term of '*nihil*', that even the values are not?

V. Advaita-Vedānta Un-Concealing Character of Being

The Advaita thinking of Śankara encloses the unity of the Brahman (the Absolute) and the Ātman (the individual self). It is all about the unconditional unity that the individual self is nothing but the Absolute itself. However, it seems due to '*Avidya*' that the individual exists. In terms of intercultural ontological thinking, it is the hermeneutic of Heidegger's understandings of 'belonging-together' between Brahman and Ātman that Śankara assertively proclaims as the '*A-dvaita*' ('Non-duality'). The strict ontological concept of Brahman in the Advaita statement endorses the Brahman as the

[38] Ibid.
[39] Sanghamitra Dasgupta & Dilip Kumar Mohanta, *Some reflections on the relation between Sankara and Buddhism*, in *Indian philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. XXV, (Pune: University of Pune, No.3, July, 1998), 351352.
[40] Potter, *Encyclopedia of Indian philosophies - Buddhist philosophy from 100 to 350 AD*, 15.
[41] Dasgupta & Mohanta: *Some reflections on the relation between Sankara and Buddhism*, 351.
[42] Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Der europäische Nihilismus*, 44.

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'one' and 'the same' that there is no room for differences, because Brahman is understood as difference-less in itself and it is the only true entity. Therefore Brahman for Śankara is neither '*Sajātīya*' (homogeneous) nor '*Vijātīya*' (heterogeneous). Simultaneously the Advaita illustrates Brahman in ontologically relevant terms like, truth, consciousness and bliss ('*Sat-Chit-Ānanda*'). These essential, the only possible positive expressions of Brahman mean that Brahman is the only reality (Sat), pure consciousness (Chit) and eternal bliss (Ānanda). Hence Brahman is un-tinged by difference, the mark of ignorance; Brahman is one that is not sublatable, for, sublation itself depends on there being consciousness;[43] and Brahman is eternal bliss, which is understood not in the horizon of time, but goes beyond the limitations of horizons.

The Advaita thinking of Śankara is considered to be the most loyal exploration of the essence of Upanishadic teaching. According to Śankara's interpretation the world is *Māya*, means the super-imposition of Brahman, the ultimate reality. This ultimate reality is not different from Ātman, which is pure and objectless consciousness. Brahman as 'one' and the 'same' is the point of assertion according to Śankara. The perceived difference is the superimposition due to ignorance, i.e., '*avidya*'. Similar to Buddhism, the Brahman is understood in Advaita as that, which is beyond 'Nāmarūpa'. The name and form are always the expression of categorization; that objects (phenomena) are named, so that one may be distinguished from another. As one and same Brahman is the difference-less, means, beyond Nāmarūpa. Hence, Brahman as one and the same is understood as the fullness, unborn, uncreated, undying, and hence immortal and eternal. Between 'Brahman' and 'Ātman' prevails only the absolute and difference-less unity; that is the Advitam, the nonduality. According to Advaita we can, therefore, sum up that Brahman alone is absolutely real.

In inter-cultural ontological context, this is the understanding of Brahman in terms of 'is', hence, experienced as the constant presencing (*An-wesen*), as 'bringing-forth'. This is the hermeneutic of the revealing of Being, because this ontological un-concealment is always present in all phenomenal modes of being. The conventional western ontology understands Being as the highest being (*das höchste Seiende*), subsequently it tends to categorize. The understanding of Being as the highest being pre-supposes always the existence of lower beings, hence there is a hierarchy. In such a hierarchy there is no 'belonging-together'; there prevails only categorization as the clear expression of system-building-mechanism. Hence, every attempt of categorization experiences Being not as Being in the sense of belonging-together, for, categorization stands always for a hierarchy, the hierarchy of the highest being and the relative beings (*das Seindeste und die Seiende*). The Advaitam, which Śankara advocates is all about the mutual belonging, which asserts the difference-less unity between Brahman and Ātman. This difference-less unity is the belonging-together between the absolute and the individual that the hermeneutic of Being as 'one' and 'the same' plays a central role in Śankara's thinking.

We have already seen that Heidegger's understanding of Being goes beyond the horizon of time and space, subsequently it goes beyond all attributes. Researching on intercultural ontology, if it is not the same un-concealing (entbergen) of Being, what else shall we understand under the concept of (Nirguna)Brahman, the very primary concept of something, that is immanent in everything and without any qualities of time and space? In the realm of intercultural ontological thinking Śankara's understanding of Brahman is nothing but the un-spelled hermeneutic of Being! The exposition of this ontological understanding is grounded on a 'belonging-together' ('*zusammengehören*'), i.e., the 'belonging-together' of Ātman and Brahman. This is the *advaitam*, the non-duality, which goes beyond any categorization. The unique ontological thinking in Advaita is based on Śankara's explication of a still fundamental concept than the highest (Saguna), rather the quality-less Brahman. Such a fundamental concept of (*Nirguna*)Brahman must be difference-less, formless and without any attributes; and this is understandably the unifying whole behind the verity of appearances and the groundless ground behind all the existence. Hence Śankara's '*Nirguna* Brahman' transcends all categorization; and it is free from all attributes and is described as '*netineti*' (not this, not this), meaning that none of the attributes would adequately describe this part-less whole, hence it is neither this nor this. The ontologically relevant terms '*Satyam*', '*Jnānam*', and '*Ānandam*' are the only positive ways of expressing this ultimate. Then, the positives as well as the negatives comprise in same ultimate, for, it is the ultimate even for positives and negatives, and any of these alone would express this ultimate only deficiently.

Our language is mostly in the forms of affirmation and negation; we often affirm something or affirm the negation of something. A language, that is framed in the horizon of affirmation and negation would be evidently inadequate to expresses the ontological mystery and completion. Does this understanding of Nirguna Brahman not hark back to a 'mystical union', as Heidegger understands Being in the post-metaphysical thinking? Of course, this exploration is not about discovering the complete essence of equality or the total difference, but paying attention to the basic hermeneutic features, which make these two remote ways of thinking in the realm of Being comparable, without making the uniqueness of a thinking in the other dissolved. Hence, it

[43] Potter, *Encyclopedia of Indian Philosophy – Advaita Vedanta up to Samkara and his pupils*, 07.

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is all about discovering the hidden ontological possibilities, which are covered by the ordinary modes of language, culture and further the science. Such an attempt finds its essential expansion in the field of hermeneutics.

In early Greek thinking Being stands for the phenomenological emergence of 'αλήθεια' behind the multiplicity of the phenomenal world, that the pre-Socratic thinkers asked for a unifying aspect behind the verity of appearances. At the very beginning they named it water, fire and so on, and later Parmenides understands it in terms of the dichotomy of Being and non-Being. In the metaphysical era it was perceived as the *prima sui*, the creator God. This experience that Being often finds itself compared with the highest something in the history of western ontology, is seen in Advaita as well, that is the '*Saguna* Brahman'. Important is that Śankara was able to distinguish clearly a higher (ontologically fundamental) from a lower Brahman, which is evident in his Brahmasūtrabhāsya and elsewhere. This ontologically fundamental Brahman is viewed from the aspect of knowledge (*vidya*), and is free from all adjuncts, all name and form. It is *Nirguna* Brahman, and it is the knowledge of this Brahman that constitutes liberation according to Śankara. *Saguna* Brahman or God (*Ishwara*) is the lower Brahman; it is Brahman viewed from the aspect of ignorance (*avidya*).[44] Further it is also to be noted that in the context of our ontological exploration S.N. Dasgupta is very accurate in assuming that Sankara's Brahman was very much like the Śūnya of Nāgārjuna, because it is difficult indeed to distinguish between pure being and pure nonbeing as a category.[45]

VI. Conclusion

The Advaita thinking can be claimed as metaphysical and the Buddhist thinking can be understood as nihilistic; but they strike simultaneously a chord of hidden ontological possibilities, exactly the hermeneutic completeness and mystery of Being. To experience the revealing and concealing aspects of Being in the thinking of Advaita and Buddhism demands an ontological destruction comparable to Heidegger's destruction of western ontology,[46] so that the experience of Being may come to its phenomenological light. The experience of the hermeneutic of Being in the Advaita thinking lays hidden in the dogmatic ascribed characteristics of Brahman. But, for a keen observer this hidden ontological experience is evident in the passages such as, where the Upanishads ask towards the 'Sat' of the Brahman. In such an expression, the 'Sat' is conceived independently of the divine principle of creation and the hermeneutic of Being becomes explicit. To research such hidden possibilities and explore them is the intended obligation of this work; in the words of Heidegger, it is the destruction of conventional understanding of ontology; and every destruction intends and subsequently encloses a construction.

In the realm of the hermeneutic of Being, the Śūnya-vāda of Nāgārjuna and Śankara's understanding of Brahman are non-different; rather they are one and the same! What is explicit in the thinking of Nāgārjuna is then nothing, but the expression of Being as '*nihil*'. In the history of Being, Being that bears his concealment with itself, hides itself in Nietzsche's thinking. Therefore Heidegger interprets nihilism as a thinking, in which Being becomes explicit as *nihil*, as the essence of Being that Being carries its oblivion with itself.[47] Hence the nihilism emerges itself as the concealing of Being in the thinking. In Heidegger's thinking Being is understood as 'something' as well as 'nothing', and subsequently is characterized with 'revealing' (*entbergen*) as well as 'concealing' (*verbergen*). Hence the exploration of Śūnya in the thinking of Nāgārjuna is ontologically similar to Heidegger's understanding of nihilism. The term reality is considered to be 'something' that shows the essence of existential certainty, where the counterpart of the same is also inherent. Ontologically this comes closer to the understanding of the revealing and concealing of 'α-λήθεια'.

However, it is also to be noted that there is no watertight metaphysical distinction in Indian thinking similar to Heidegger's understanding of the dividend explored dichotomy of Being in western metaphysics. Nevertheless the hermeneutic of Being as *nihil* and something is entangled in Indian context. The western metaphysics is condemned by Heidegger, not because it deals with *summumbonum*, but because it understands Being in terms of the dichotomy of something and nothing, the two dividend explored opposites. This may not be the fact in Indian thinking that we can find the sparks of the thinking of something in the Śūnya of Nāgārjuna and the sparks of the thinking of *nihil* in the Nirguna-Brahman of Advaita, though both of these thinking represent somehow the hermeneutic of *nihil* and something respectively. Hence we find the Śūnya of Nāgārjuna as well as the absolute reality of Advaita go beyond the reach of all concepts, conventions and remains un-contradicted. For this un-contradicted absolute the Madhyamakas use the term '*advaya*', whereas the Advaitins use the term '*advaita*' and both surprisingly enough mean that the absolute is 'non-dual'.[48]

[44] Ibid., 74.
[45] Dasgupta & Mohanta: *Some reflections on the relation between Sankara and Buddhism*, 353.
[46] Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 2-3.
[47] Heidegger, *Holzwege*, 265.
[48] Dasgupta & Mohanta: *Some reflections on the relation between Sankara and Buddhism*, 354.

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According to Heidegger, the comparisons as well as Translations are always the explanations, i.e., they are the modes of transmission or deceptive appearance; therefore this attempt as any other comparative study is also not free of any such transmission, especially, when we discuss the thinking Śankara and Nāgārjuna under the set standards of western ontology and metaphysics. It is also to be noted, that any distinctive attempt to set a thinking under given standards and subsequently to compare with another thinking gives the impression that is still metaphysical. Likewise if we ask, what is the recognizable distinction between something and *nihil*, between Brahman and Śūnya, then between Being and thinking, it is still metaphysical, because, to assert the distinction means to categorize under distinctive order; and the ontological research on 'belonging-together' must go beyond any such attempt. Here the concept of Śūnya emerges having tremendous significance, as an attempt to go beyond the apparent metaphysical tendencies in Śankara's thinking.

This work is evidently not an attempt to compare or to classify two different thinking, but to understand the hermeneutic of the thinking of Being in its intercultural context and depth. In such an understanding the metaphysical distinction gets dissolved; the hermeneutic of 'belonging-together' stands beyond the terms, language and culture. This hermeneutic of 'belonging-together' provides the foundation to ask the question of Being in Indian thinking, even if, there is no specified synonym similar to its western ontological counterpart. However, the hermeneutic of Being as 'one' and 'the same', as '*nihil*' and 'something', which goes beyond any categorizations of time and space or the subject-object relationship plays a central and pervasive role in Indian thinking, especially in Madhyamaka school of Nāgārjuna and in Śankara's understanding of Advaita-Vedānta. Considering that the thinking of Nāgārjuna expresses the hermeneutic of *nihil* of Being and the thinking of Sankara holds a position similar to the understanding of Being in its very beginning, they are not two opposite poles in thinking, but the two different sides of the one and the same thinking. In the realm of the hermeneutic of Being, it is a sabotaging Brotherhood, and in this sabotaging Brotherhood, the un-spelled thinking of Being as 'one' and 'the same' is asserted in the understandings of Brahman, likewise the exploration of Śūnya explicitly expresses the *nihil* of Being.

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