

Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Background and Significance

Emptiness (Suññatā) in Theravada Buddhism is an issue of interest among the argument of Buddhist scholars since Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has emphasized it as the central idea of Buddhism and written it in many of his literature. The concept and the application of emptiness is thus in the researcher's interest to find out the main concept and its application.

In Theravada Buddhism, the concept of emptiness is the emptiness of mind from any attachment and all defilements (kilesa) ie. lust, hatred and ignorance, thus leading to the cessation of suffering for the highest aim. From the concept, one should see the importance of emptiness in Theravada and learn how to apply it in daily life for efficient work and happy life, even in some levels. Upon the realization of its importance, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has interpreted emptiness as 'empty mind' or 'cit-wang' by emphasizing the 'empty mind' or 'cit-wang' as a condition in which "one does not cling to anything, is not anything, does not feel that one gets anything or that one gets to be anything."¹ When the

¹ Buddhadasa Bhikhu, **The Method of Practising Samadhi-vipassana - in Thai "Withee Fuk Samadhi-vipassana"**, (Bangkok : Samnak-phim Phutthasan, n.d.), p. 78.

mind is freed, it is “free from suffering, free from dogmatic clinging and attachment.”²

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu stresses that “working with empty mind is the actual practice of Dhamma.”³ This motto is his one goal leading one’s life based on emptiness. Leading one’s life with this motto will face no suffering but gain utmost benefit of human beings. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu also instructs, “we should do every kind of work with ‘empty mind’. All the results of work should be given up to ‘emptiness’. We should eat the food of ‘emptiness’ the way a monk eats. Die to oneself completely from the beginning.”⁴ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu emphasizes working with empty mind in all process of work, while working or even the completion of work devoted to emptiness. Those who do the job with empty mind even success or failure will never stop at the completion of work but always develop their work for the better outcome and more efficiently. Thus working with empty mind is working with detachment from ‘self’ or things pertaining to ‘self’ or any attachment which will bring forth the efficiency in work and happiness in life and lead finally to the end of sufferings. Even emptiness being said by the Buddha supermundane states (Lokutara-dhamma) and only the refuge of Ariya-puggala, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has interpreted emptiness for everybody of all ages to apply it in all kinds of work or activities with detachment of ‘self’ or

² Buddhadasa Bhikhu, **The Goal of Education - in Thai “Cutmay Khong Kansuksa”**, (Bangkok : Dhammabucha Press, B.E. 2522), p.83.

³ Buddhadasa Bhikhu, **Two Kinds of Language**, tr. by Ariyananda Bhikkhu, (Bangkok : n.d., 1974), p. 10.

⁴ Buddhadasa Bhikhu, **True Happiness Exists Only in Work – in Thai “Khwam Suk Thi Thae Mi Yu Tae Nai Ngan”**, (Bangkok : Dharmabucha Press, B.E.2521), p.6.

with no idea of ‘I’ or ‘mine’.⁵ Thus working with empty mind is working with selflessness or no clinging to ‘self’ or things pertaining to ‘self’. No clinging or detachment of ‘self’ is the heart teaching of the Buddha.

Working with empty mind with detachment of self or the feeling of ‘I’ or ‘mine’ in the view of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu is a way to apply emptiness in daily life in accordance with one perspective of emptiness approached by the lack of ‘self’ in Tipiṭaka. But in Cūla-suññatā Sutta⁶, Mahā-suññatā Sutta⁷ and Suñña Sutta⁸, there we can find emptiness approached from three perspectives, treating it (1) as a meditative dwelling, (2) as the lack of self or Anattā, and (3) as a type of awareness-release or full awareness, but in fact all three approaches play a role here. Thus this thematic paper is expected to analyze all the three perspectives above so that one might learn how to apply emptiness in daily life from these three perspectives properly for efficiency of work and living with happiness which is the purpose of this study.

1.2 Objectives of the Research

1.2.1 To study the concept of emptiness (Suññatā) in Tipiṭaka.

1.2.2 To study the concept of emptiness (Suññatā) in Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s view.

⁵ Buddhadasa Bhikku, **Keys to Natural Truth**, tr. By Santikaro Bhikkhu, Bangkok : Sukkhapabjai, (2008), pp. 66-67.

⁶ M.121, tr. by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

⁷ M.122, tr. by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

⁸ S.38.85, tr. by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

1.2.3 To study the application of emptiness (Suññatā) in daily life.

1.3 Statement of the problem

1.3.1 What is the concept of emptiness (Suññatā) in Tipiṭaka.

1.3.2 What is the concept of emptiness (Suññatā) in Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's view.

1.3.3 How can we apply emptiness (Suññatā) in daily life?

1.4 Definitions of the Terms Used in the Thematic Paper

Suññatā : The Pāli word for "Emptiness" or "Voidness". Suññatā signifies the emptiness of 'self' or things pertaining to 'self' or the emptiness of any illusion of egoism as "I" or "mine", but not the emptiness of wisdom and mindfulness in dealing and doing things with no attachment for the freedom of mind and leading to the cessation of suffering for the highest goal.

Empty mind : the word interpreted by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. It signifies the emptiness of mind from 'self' or things pertaining to 'self' or no clinging to the feeling of 'I' or 'mine' or 'egoism'.

1.5 Literature Review

Phra Fong Abhivanno (Sawasdee), in his thesis "**An Analytical Study of Buddhadasa's Concept of 'The Empty Mind'** (cit-wang), states that the meaning of 'Empty Mind' (cit-wang) according to

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's teachings as found in his lectures and writings. The study emphasizes Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's innovative interpretation of the term in the Tipiṭaka, problems in his Dharma propagation, and the application of 'cit-wang' in one's daily life. Especially, while most people hold that 'cit-wang' is the dharma for the holy (ariya). Buddhadasa Bhikkhu teaches that 'cit-wang' is indispensable for everyone.

The results of his study can reveal the most important meaning of which relates to the meaning. If emptiness (Suññatā), in other word 'cit-wang', is the mental detachment of "me-and-mind" which leads to the emptiness of all sufferings. This conception of 'cit-wang' is consistent with that of Suññatā in Tipiṭaka in which the Buddha warns all Bhikkhus to mindfully cultivate the right view, i.e., seeing the world as emptiness or voidness. Similarly, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu teaches all Thai Buddhists to apply 'cit-wang' in daily life so that they can understand the true meanings of their activities, e.g., working, eating, living, and so on, and finally can lead their lives in peaceful happiness.⁹

Charoon Vonnakasinanont, in his thesis **"An Analytical study of Self Rejection in Theravada Buddhism"**, states on the concept of non-self of Buddhism. The concept of 'non-self' (or Anattā) rejects 'self' directly. The other doctrines believes that the mind or the consciousness are eternal or 'self', but Buddhism rejects that mind or consciousness is 'non-self' because the mind or consciousness appear and disappear

⁹Phra Fong Abhivanno (Sawasdee), "An Analytical Study of Buddha's Concept of "The Empty Mind (cit-wang)", **M.A. Thesis**,. (Graduate School : Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, 2002).

gradually all days and nights. One mind happens and disappears, after that a new mind will appear. The mind is not a permanent self. Consequently the concept of ‘non-self’ is a rejection of the self directly. ‘Non-self’ is, however, not the opposite of ‘self’, for example if the meaning of ‘self’ equals to the white colour, ‘non-self’ will be equal to non-white colour and not equal to black. If ‘self’ equals to black colour, non-self will equal to non-black colour, and not equal to white. Therefore the concept of non-self is not the opposite of self.¹⁰

Komentr Chinawong, in his thesis **“A Comparative Study of The Concepts of Anattā and Suññatā in Theravada Philosophy and The Philosophy of Nagarjuna”**, states that there are two schools in Buddhism of important views: They are Theravada philosophy and Nagarjuna's philosophy which present the same concept of truth, i.e., all states are soulless or without a permanent self. Both philosophies use the theory of Dependent Origination or the Middle Way to explain the world and all phenomena in the way of metaphysic, epistemology, ethics and psychology, etc., in order to avoid the two extreme views of eternalism and annihilationism. Thervada Philosophy, by virtue of the doctrine and the concept contained in the Pali Tipiṭaka, has the world view and philosophical explanation culminated in the doctrine of "Anattā." (non-substantiality). Nagarjuna's philosophy uses the way of criticizing all philosophies and then summed up the views on the principle of ‘Suññatā’. By the way of analytical study comes out the conclusion - Thervada

¹⁰ Charoon Vonnakasinanont, “An Analytical study of Self Rejection in Theravada Buddhism”, **M.A. Thesis**, (Graduate School : Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University), B.E.2547.

Philosophy and Nagarjuna's philosophy have the same philosophical point of view that all states are not self or non-substantial by taking non-substantiality or emptiness as the central theme in explaining the teachings of early Buddhism.¹¹

Phramaha Charan Vicāranamedhi (Nilaphan), in his thesis, **“Analysis of the Concept of Santuṭṭhi in Theravada Buddhism”**, states that Santuṭṭhi is none other than ‘self-control’ or ‘self-contentment’, which is regarded as the intrinsic nature of human mind; it cannot be obtained from any other places, it cannot be given by others but it can be created in the mind by anyone only. If one does not know how to create it and how to use it, then it will result in encountering with the economic problem, because one will fall a victim on one’s own craving, which is the root cause of all problems in life. Buddhism holds that man can develop himself, can solve his own problem by himself, and he even can help solve the problem of society. This can be done by developing his mind first. When his mind is developed, he can solve any problems outside the mind. Those problems may be ranged from small ones to big ones. When the mental problems are solved, the physical problems which mean the economical and environmental problems will also be solved accordingly.¹²

¹¹Komentr Chinawong, “A Comparative Study of The Concepts of Anattā and Sunnata in Theravada Philosophy and The Philosophy of Nagarjuna”, **M.A. Thesis**,. (Graduate School : Chulalongkorn University, B.E. 2544).

¹² Phramaha Charan Vicāranamedhi (Nilaphan), “Analysis of the Concept of Santuṭṭhi in Theravada Buddhism”, **M.A. Thesis**, (Graduate School : Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University, B.E. 2541.

1.6 Method of the Study

This work is documentary research of which research methodology can be divided into five stages as follows:

1.6.1 Collecting data in relation to emptiness from the primary sources in Tipiṭaka and the secondary sources from Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's writings. Due to the scope of this thematic paper, this research will primarily focus on the Suttanta Piṭaka of the Tipiṭaka, particularly the four Nikāyas (Dīgha Nikāya, Majjhima Nikāya, Aṅguttara Nikāya and Saṃyutta Nikāya).

1.6.2 Analyzing the raw data as well as systematizing the collected data to give a clear picture of the application of emptiness (Suññatā).

1.6.3 Constructing the overall outline of the work.

1.6.4 Discussing the problem encountered.

1.6.5 Formulating conclusions and identifying significant results.

1.7 Expected Findings and Advantages of the Study

Upon the completion of the research, the following advantages and outcomes may be obtained.

1.7.1 To clearly understand the concept of emptiness in Tipiṭaka.

1.7.2 To clearly understand the concept of emptiness in Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's view.

1.7.3 To clearly know how to apply emptiness in daily life.