

Chapter III

The Concept of Emptiness (Suññatā) in the view of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu

Over the investigation into the concept of emptiness (Suññatā) in the view of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, he means the emptiness of mind being empty of the feelings of 'self' and of 'belonging to self'. All the myriad things that we are acquainted with are nothing but emptiness. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has explained the Buddha's sayings in the Saṃyutta Nikāya :

It is this emptiness that is the single highest teaching of the Buddha, so much so that there are no words spoken by the Buddha that are not concerned with Suññatā. The most profound teaching is that which deals with emptiness, any other subject is superficial. Only the teaching of Suññatā is so profound that there must be a Tathāgata enlightened in the world for it to be taught.¹

Also the Buddha said, "A discourse of any kind, of any class; though produced by a poet or a learned man; though versified, poetical, and melodious in sound and syllable, is not in keeping with the teaching if it is connected with Suññatā."² According to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, he

¹ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, **Heart-wood from the Bo Tree**, tr. by Suan Mok, (Chaiya, Surat Thani : Dhammadāna Foundation ,2005), p.53.

² Buddhadasa Bhikkhu , **The Truth of Nature** ,tr. by Ariyananda Bhikkhu (Roderick S. Bucknell), (Bangkok : Amarin Printing and Publishing Public Co., Ltd., 2007), pp. 59 – 60.

has interpreted emptiness (Suññatā) into two contexts, as ‘empty mind’ and ‘Nibbāna’. Thus the concept of the two contexts will be further studied in this chapter.

3.1 Emptiness (Suññatā) in the Context of ‘Empty Mind’

An overview of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s emptiness (Suññatā) in the context of ‘empty mind’, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has presented an idea for practicing Dhamma while working with ‘empty mind’ (or ‘cit-wang’ in Thai). According to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, the application of emptiness (Suññatā) as ‘empty mind’ in daily life’s work and activities is the great practice of Dhamma. The empty mind means the state of mind which is free from getting a hold of egoism and all desires. Thus the mind is full of wisdom and can realize the reality of the world that it is naturally empty. Hence, the concept of ‘empty mind’ is the reflection of the attempt to interpret and apply the essence of Buddhadhamma into the useful purposes in one's way of life by practicing Dhamma while working at the same time. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu emphasized :

Dhamma can be practiced in conjunction with our daily tasks. There is no need to separate Dhamma from everyday life. It is a very high practice. If there is mindfulness and self-awareness, not only will our work be successful and free from error, but at the same time, Dhamma in our hearts will develop and grow greatly. Not-having and not-gaining will be the normal state of mind.³

³ Ibid., p. 84.

The word 'having or gaining' refers only to the being that is accompanied by Upādāna by grasping and clinging to the 'I and mine'. This Upādāna will keep us away from truth-discerning awareness in daily life's work and any activities, but the more the mind is empty, the more wisdom to realize the reality of the world will be developed in our mind, thus arising the truth-discerning awareness bringing to the efficiency of work and happiness in daily life.

Upon an analytical study, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's interpretation of emptiness (Suññatā) in term of 'empty mind' (or 'cit wang' in Thai) is based on the concept of emptiness (Suññatā) in Tipiṭaka in the context of the lack of 'self' or 'Anattā'. In other words, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has widely and deeply presented the idea of 'Anattā' in the context of 'empty mind'. With regard to its meaning, it has explicitly been mentioned in the Fifty Suttas of Salāyatana. The Suttas state that once Venerable Ānanda desiring to know the significance of voidness put this question to the Master, "Why is that the world is said to be void? And the Buddha told him thus: "Because the world is void of self or of anything belonging to self, therefore, Ānanda, it is said that the world is void."⁴ The world being said to be void in this definition refers to the eighteen dhātus or elements, viz., eye, ear, nose, etc., together with their contacts and their results of contact. Thus in replying to the question "What, Ānanda, is void of self or of anything belonging to self?" the Buddha tells thus:

⁴ S. iv. p. 54, Ptsma. ii. p. 177, Nd.i. p.439 (P.T.S.).

The eye is void of self or of anything belonging to self. Objects (of eye) eye-consciousness.... eye-contact.... and whatever sensation pleasant or unpleasant or neutral, originates depending on the eye-contact, all these are void of ‘self’ or of anything belonging to ‘self’.” The Buddha speaks in the same manner with regard to the remaining senses also, and says, “This is why, Ānanda, the world is said to be void.”⁵

According to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, The term ‘void’ (Suñña) in the above definition implies two things: one is the voidness of self, and the other is voidness of whatsoever belonging to ‘self’. The former refers to the voidness of the doer or one who feels, and the latter refers to the voidness of its property. The former, however, seems to be the cause in the sense of which the latter springs from or belongs to, yet both of them are devoid of any substantial entities, since, as already said, they arise in dependence on proper conditions over which we have no power or control. Thus, in the light of Suñña or void, none of them can be regarded as ‘self’, and therefore none of them belongs to us.

From the above mentioned, ‘empty mind’ in the view of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu thus means the state of mind or internal sense media which is free from getting a hold of egoism and all desires due to ‘the lack of self’ or ‘Anattā’. Thus the mind is full of wisdom and can realize the reality of the world that it is naturally empty. We cannot get anything as the self at all.

The concept of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s empty mind is rendered into action as ‘working with empty mind’ in two occasions as follows.

⁵ S. iv. p. 54, Ps. ii. p. 177, Nd.i. p.439 (P.T.S.).

1) On the first occasion with doerless doing to realize the real freedom while working, one should avoid having and gaining with the feeling of “I” or “mine” despite our ownership because one with the feeling of not-having and not-gaining or another word doerless doing will be able to maintain the normal state of the mind or “the freedom of mind”. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu gave his explanation:

The principle of doerless doing must be taken up and utilized in our daily lives’ work and activities. Whether we're eating, sitting, lying down, standing, walking, using, seeking, whatever we are doing or working we must have enough truth-discerning awareness to prevent the arising of the feeling of 'I' - the feeling that 'I' am the doer, 'I' am the worker, 'I' am the eater, the walker, the sitter, the sleeper or the user. We must make the mind constantly empty of ego, so that emptiness is the natural state and we abide with the awareness that there is nothing worth having or being.⁶

The word 'having or being' refers only to the being that is accompanied by Upādāna, by grasping and clinging to the ‘I and mine’. If a room is piled full of gold and we have no feeling of 'having or being' its owner there is no gaining or having and no being. Although the ownership rights and social conventions recognized by laws of the world have certain validity, in our true hearts we shouldn't be misled into taking those relative truths to be ultimate. Those with truth-discerning awareness are on a higher level. They have the knowledge of the way to destroy the grasping and clinging that arises from such ignorance. It's not necessary to be the owner with grasping and clinging, the cause of every kind of

⁶Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, **Heart-wood from the Bo Tree**, p. 84.

suffering or Dukkha. That suffering is indeed the price of not knowing how to be an owner with empty mind, of being an owner with grasping and clinging is a way that does not conform to Dhamma and will result in suffering or Dukkha. Thus one can only realize the real freedom while working with doerless doing or the emptiness of self in whatever we have or gain.

2) On the second occasion to realize the real freedom while working, being mindful of the sense-media consciousness at the moment of contact with sense-objects. According to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, when there is a sense-contact, allow mindfulness and wisdom come to face and handle it in the best possible way. When the mind is full of mindfulness (sati) which helps preventing the arising of defiled craving. With no craving, there will be no clinging (or Upādāna) to anything and thus no birth (cāti). In the way of practice, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu advised, “Do not allow that part of Paticcasamuppāda (the Law of Conditionality) that leans towards suffering arise and proceeds along its course. Let there be only the ‘Paticcasamuppāda’ that extinguishes suffering.”⁷ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu gave his explanation :

When visible forms, sounds, odors, flavors and tangible objects contact the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body we must practice letting phassa stop at phassa and letting vedanā stop at vedanā. Letting phassa stop at just phassa is an extremely high level of practice. On the ordinary level, phassa develops into vedanā and then we stop it just there, without allowing the further development of craving and

⁷ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, **The Three Wishes of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu**, tr. by J. Ratana Nantho Bhikkhu, (Bangkok : Thammasapa & Bunluentham Institution, n.d.), p.115.

grasping of 'I' and 'mine'. Some of the articulate talkers in monastery halls and teachers in Buddhist colleges say that stopping just at phassa is impossible, that there is always the development of vedanā. That is because they cling to the written word. It's not the truth. In fact, the Buddha taught that when seeing forms there should be just the seeing, when smelling odors just the smelling, tasting flavors just the tasting and touching tangible objects just the touching. If anyone can do it then there is no feeling of 'I' and 'mine', the ego is not born, thus the end of Dukkha or suffering.⁸

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu emphasized,

Dhamma can be practiced in conjunction with our daily tasks. There is no need to separate Dhamma from everyday life. It is a very high practice. If there is mindfulness and self-awareness, not only will our work be successful and free from error, but at the same time, Dhamma in our hearts will develop and grow greatly. Not-having and not-gaining will be the normal state of the mind.⁹

The word 'having or gaining' refers only to the being that is accompanied by Upādāna by grasping and clinging to the 'I and mine'. This Upādāna will keep us away from truth-discerning awareness in daily life's work and activities, but the more the mind is empty, the more wisdom to realize the reality of the world will be developed in our mind, thus arising the truth-discerning awareness bringing to the utmost efficiency of daily life's work and activities. Even we succeed or fail sometimes; we with truth-discerning awareness will never stop or shrink back. Most people who succeed in work will be very happy admiring

⁸Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, **Heart-wood from the Bo Tree**, p. 91.

⁹Ibid., p. 84.

their success, thus stop working or forget to develop their work and those who fail in work will always shrink back due to Upādāna in their work by grasping and clinging to the 'I and mine' that I succeed or I fail in work losing the truth-discerning awareness (Pañña) of what and how to do next for the efficiency and success of work.

Over the investigation into Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's regarding 'empty mind', he emphasizes practicing Dhamma with the concept of the 'empty mind' and do any work at the same time. Even success or failure in work, one, with 'empty mind'. will never stop or shrink back , but continue doing work for the sake of work , thus gradually eliminating the feeling that 'I' am the doer and 'I' am having or gaining with Upādāna by grasping and clinging to the 'I and mine'. It is a great deal of usefulness, especially practicing Dhamma along with the concept of the empty mind causing the release of Dukkha or suffering. Furthermore Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's advice on common ways to practice Dhamma in common life with the concept of 'empty mind' has launched a great responsiveness towards the Lord Buddha's intention to give usefulness from Buddhadhamma to human being.

Upon the analytical study, the issue is how to work with empty mind. An important problem for people is the issue of work, because we work to live. We can say our life has value because of work. In the view of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, if one doesn't want to suffer, then work with an empty mind. Then work will be fun and the results will be excellent. Details such as how one will work, for whom, what one will gain - all of these should not remain. When it's time to put our hands to work, we must think it through from the beginning and fix our intention with certainty. Just go to work with 'empty mind' and don't wish for anything

beyond the power of one's intelligence. Don't take on duties beyond one's own ability. Let one's ability develop first, then expand one's responsibilities appropriately. One must work with pure intention. The work has to be of value sufficient for our sacrifice. When one knows this, then go to work. Even ordinary daily chores, although they're seldom paid, these too need to be done with 'empty mind', otherwise one falls into hell, even with the little, and everyday tasks. Even miscellaneous things, as well as the most important work of one's life - they all must be done with an empty mind. So the most important question and challenge is simply to work with 'empty mind', and then to expand on that by offering all the results to voidness and eating the food of voidness. If one understands how to work with 'empty mind' and can practice it. Once one can do that, then one will understand what it is to offer the fruits of work to emptiness, and to eat the food of emptiness as Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's saying, "Do work of all kinds with a free heart. Offer the fruits of work to voidness. Eat the food of emptiness as the noble ones do. Die to one's self from the very beginning."¹⁰ Upon realizing the emptiness this way, one can really observe things going on in the mind and always takes that which is true in one's own mind. To keep observing the nature of our thoughts generates a mind emptied of ego or 'self', and so is the best knowledge there is. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu gave his comment over the best knowledge or pañña as sayings:

When the mind is empty of foolishness, empty of 'I' and 'mine', there's perfect knowing or pañña. So the wise say that emptiness and pañña, the discernment of truth (satipañña or truth-discerning

¹⁰ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, **Huakho Dham Nai Kum Korn**, (Bangkok : Dharmasabha Press, n.d.), p.113.

awareness) are one. It's not that they are two similar things; they are one and the same thing. True or perfect pañña is emptiness, absence of the foolish clinging of delusion. Once the mind is rid of delusion it discovers its primal state, the true original mind which is pañña or truth-discerning awareness.¹¹

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu further gave his explanation:

Knowledge and understanding can arise only in those people who have been taught that all things should not be grasped at or clung to. If one is taught that there is a self that must be grasped at and clung to, then there is no way that one can practice to realize the non-existence of self. Thus we must examine the point that just as it is necessary to see the danger of fire in order to be afraid of being burnt, so also must we see the dangers of those things which are the root-cause of all fires, the fires of greed, aversion, and delusion, of grasping and clinging, in order to become gradually bored with and averse to them, and be able to relax our grip on them without thought of lighting any more fires.¹²

Upon an analytical study, what difference between working with empty mind and a mind that isn't empty of me and mine. One can observe oneself whenever one works mindfully and wisely, as opposed to working with defilement, the mind becomes empty. If the mind is empty and free, it works with wisdom. If the mind is busy, it works with craving and defilement. Why is it that so few people benefit from working with empty mind? Because people don't reach the level of 'working mindfully with wisdom', which requires intelligence that is true and pure. There

¹¹ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, **Heart-wood from the Bo Tree**, p. 43.

¹² Ibid., pp. 51-52.

must be truth and purity within oneself, and the wisdom has to be the kind that is empty of me and mine, that is free of egoism. In other words, the intelligence and wisdom we refer to is that which naturally exists in a heart void of 'me' and 'mine.' When 'me' and 'mine' arise in the mind, wisdom changes into something deceptive, clever, and cunning for the sake of 'me' and 'mine.' This is the kind of intelligence the world seeks and rewards: cunning for the sake of 'me' and 'mine,' which deceives and tricks continually. The wisdom that seeks only to survive is called worldly wisdom, and it serves craving and selfishness. Our world doesn't respect pure and honest wisdom. When one speak of wisdom, one need to stress that it is genuine wisdom - wisdom that is also pure. Don't take the wisdom of the market, which people claim to be wisdom, and claim that surviving is the supreme benefit - that's all they understand. That's a whole different kind of wisdom - it's the cleverness of craving, clinging, and selfishness. If the mind is truly void there will be pure wisdom that is cleansed of 'me' and 'mine' and works wonderfully. Work is fun. It isn't even thought of as work anymore. Try this out in one's everyday tasks whether they are pleasant or not, or whether they are tiresome chores. If one still thinks of it as work then the mind isn't empty. Watch this carefully, and try it again with an empty mind, so that one will be someone who can do all kinds of work with 'empty mind'. At least be able to do it once in a while. Even if there are times when one's mood is busy. To have the fiery eye that sees all things as void, without any craving, clinging, or suffering, requires the knowledge that is wise enough to see even work as empty, so that it's no longer seen as work. Destroy all the meaning of the word 'work' and it becomes enjoyable play. One will be at ease and comfortable in such work.

Upon the analytical study of the interpretation, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu renders *Suññatā* as ‘empty mind’ in the sense of self-centered emptiness or voidness. ‘Empty mind’ or in Thai ‘cit-wang’ is the state in which all the objects of the physical world are present (and being perceived) as usual but none of them is being grasped or clung to as ‘mine’. Thus ‘empty mind’ is not a vacuous mental state. It is not, ‘void’ of content. All objects are there as usual and the thinking processes are going on as usual, but they are not going the way of grasping and clinging with the idea of ‘I’ and ‘mine’. The non-attached mind as regard to *Suññatā* in this sense of ‘empty mind’ is psychologically the way to end suffering or the attainment to salvation from suffering.

3.2 Emptiness (*Suññatā*) in the Context of ‘*Nibbāna*’

An overview of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s emptiness (*Suññatā*) in the context of ‘*Nibbāna*’, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has presented an idea whenever the mind is free from the enslavement of ‘self’, *Nibbāna* fills it instantly however temporary that may be. According to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, the empty mind as being studied in chapter 3.1 has the state of *Nibbāna* in it. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has interpreted emptiness (*Suññatā*) as ‘*Nibbāna*’ into two concepts, ‘*Nibbāna*’ as supreme emptiness and ‘*Nibbāna*’ as temporary emptiness.

3.2.1 ‘*Nibbāna*’ as Supreme Emptiness

An overview on ‘*Nibbāna*’ in the view of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, ‘*Nibbāna*’ is supreme emptiness. When there is total emptiness or

freedom, this is what is called ‘Nibbāna’. The condition of emptiness resulting from the complete and thorough elimination of the self-idea is called Nibbāna. According to the Tipiṭaka, the Enlightened One says that all Buddhas say Nibbāna is the supreme state. ‘Supreme state’ means the ultimate, the highest goal for man. According to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Nibbāna has nothing to do with death as his sayings :

We have been wrongly taught that Nibbāna means the death of the Arahants (the enlightened Noble Ones). To define ‘Nibbāna’ in this way is sheer blind or baseless talking. (Words used in religion should not be always taken literally). An Arahant such as the Buddha could not ‘die’, but what actually happened was that the ‘Khandas’ or ‘the Group of Five Aggregates’ which supported the mind simply broke away and disappeared, therefore the word ‘Nibbāna’ could not exactly be used as the word for the death of the Arahant. The Arahants did not die, but their physical bodies could get decayed in the course of time and the elements which constituted the body’s disintegrated; thus we describe the death of Arahants as the extinguishing of the Khandas (Aggregates) by ‘Anupādisesa – nibbāna’. ‘Anupādisesa – nibbāna’ is Nibbāna without any stratum of life remaining. It is not physical death. It is the death of group of five aggregates (Rūpa – khandā – corporeality; Vedanā – khandā – feeling; Sañña – khandā – perception; Saṅkhāra – khandā – mental formations; Viññāna – khandā – consciousness). Such death can occur even before the ordinarily known form of physical death. Thus do not be so silly as to say that ‘Nibbāna’ of the Buddha refers to his physical death. When the mind has reached the stage in which it can no longer be embellished by whatever factors anymore, it is supposed

to have attained a permanent Nibbāna. The attainment of Nibbāna is supposed to be the noble and final goal of every Buddhist. Even though right now we have not yet reached that stage, we must aim to reach the goal, otherwise we will not be living up to the name of being Buddhists.¹³

Phra Brahmagunabhorn (P.A. Payutto) has classified Nibbāna into two categories as sayings :

1. Saupādisesa-nibbāna refers to Nibbāna with the substratum of life remaining which is the extinction of the defilements or Kilesa-parinibbāna.

2. Anupādisesa- nibbāna refers to Nibbāna without any substratum of life remainin which is the extinction of the aggregates or Khandha-parinibbāna.¹⁴

Upon an analytical study, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's view on the concept of 'Nibbāna' as supreme emptiness is exactly based on Theravada Tipiṭaka as saying : "Nibbāna is supreme emptiness. It is that unique vision that transcends ordinary knowledge. We can transcend the various types of ordinary knowledge through seeing that 'Nibbāna' is perfect emptiness."¹⁵

3.2.2 'Nibbāna' as Temporary Emptiness

¹³Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, **The Three Wishes of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu**, pp.109 – 111.

¹⁴ Phra Brahmagunabhorn (P.A. Payutto), **Dictionary of Buddhism**, 16th Edition, (Bangkok : S.R. Printing Mass Products Co., Ltd., B.E.2554), p.27.

¹⁵ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, **What did the Buddha teach? : Buddhadhamma for student**, tr. by Ariyananda Bhikkhu, (Bangkok : Sublime Life Mission, 1982), p.109.

In the view of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, ‘Nibbāna’ is also rendered into temporary emptiness even for a moment or ‘a foretaste of Nibbāna’ or ‘ideal example of Nibbāna’. Most Buddhists are taught only the account of Nibbāna after death. However in the Tipiṭaka, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu doesn’t find this. He has found expressions being said in the Tipiṭaka as sayings :

Sandiṭṭhika-nibbāna, that is, Nibbāna, which a man can see for himself; and Diṭṭhadhamma-nibbāna, that is, Nibbāna in this very life. We are told that the blissful states of consciousness experienced in the four rūpa-jhānas and the four arūpa-jhānas (states of rapt concentration on fine-material and non-material objects respectively) are Sandiṭṭhika-nibbāna, or diṭṭhadhamma-Nibbāna.¹⁶

Thus upon Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s view on the above concept of ‘Nibbāna’, one may understand these states to be a foretaste of Nibbāna. They have the flavor of, but are not identical with real Nibbāna. Because these states are not perfect and absolute, they have been called Sandiṭṭhika-Nibbāna or Diṭṭhadhamma-Nibbāna. This has become a significance on Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s view regarding ‘Nibbāna’ and thus has led him to interpret Suññatā in term of Nibbāna for even a moment to be ‘a foretaste of Nibbāna’ or ‘ideal example of Nibbāna’.

The reason why Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has broadend the meaning of ‘Nibbāna’ as temporary emptiness is that he cited the Buddha’s teaching as shown in the discourse that Dhammathinna Upasaka with a group of 500 fellows going to visit the Buddha and asking for Dhamma that would be of eternal benefit to householders. In reply the Buddha

¹⁶ Ibid., p.117.

taught them this Sutta about Suññatā. When they objected that it was too difficult, the Buddha gave them instead something which could not escape it. For there is only one way to truly realize the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, and that is to be continually seeing the futility of grasping and clinging, or in another word emptiness (Suññatā).

According to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, the initial cause is the attachment to ‘self’ at the moment the feeling of ‘I’ or ‘my’ arises; suffering will also come along at that very moment. That means whenever the sense of ‘self’ or having ‘self’ arises, it is just as though we are ‘burning’ with all sorts of feelings and desires associating with ourselves such as greed, anger, ignorance, love, hatred, fear, anxiety, sentimental attachment, jealousy and concern. They are like fire burning in us. But there are times when such feelings do not arise. Those are the moments when the mind is not being embellished to give rise to this obsessing with ‘self’ and is therefore enjoying a brief period of calmness and voidness – void from ‘self’. This is what we call ‘temporary Nibbāna’. However temporary it may be, it is nevertheless a state in which the mind becomes free from all disturbing, manipulating and embellishing factors. That there are times when one somehow manages to be free from the embellishment of ‘self’ and other mental defilements rather frequently. Were there to be no such moments of peace, and were there to be only cravings, desires and whatever mental defilements for twenty-four hours a day, we would surely die or at least be dragged into a near insane situation, but now nature has arranged it in such a way as to relieve us of this danger of being preoccupied with self. It puts us to sleep for some hours during which we do not engage ourselves in any thinking process at all; or even if we remain awoken, there is yet enough

mindfulness and wisdom in us even a moment to prevent us from allowing our sense of attachment to ‘self’ to overcome us. Do make the utmost effort to notice that when exactly is the time when we feel most comfortable with ourselves. It will be the time when we have no consciousness of our egoistic sense of ‘self’, which, in actual fact, is something which can happen naturally, but the trouble is that we take no interest in it and very often tend to overlook it.

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu gives further explanation :

When the mind is free from the enslavement of ‘self’, Nibbāna fills it instantly however temporary that may be. The original mind, if not filled with defilement or craving, has the state of Nibbāna in it. It is a pure or clean mind, but this purity of sublimation of the mind is susceptible to change. It can be penetrated by mental defilement or craving of any sort. One needs to train, readjust and shape that temporarily pure mind so that it may remain brightly clean and pure. The mind of the Arahant is the purest mind of all. It is a mind of no return – no return to mental defilement.¹⁷

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu gives further notice :

One may call it ‘temporary Nibbāna’, ideal example of Nibbāna, little or short period. Nibbāna or a periodical Nibbāna is devoid of the sense of ‘self’. We must admit that we manage to remain sane in life is largely due to this ‘temporary Nibbāna’ which though temporary as it is, it has come to us in the nick of time to give us a break from the tension of life. It saves us from going insane or die an untimely death. If there were to be no ‘temporary Nibbāna’ of this kind, and its place

¹⁷ Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, **The Three Wishes of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu**, pp.113-115.

were to be replaced or taken by human cravings or desires of twenty – four hours a day (and night!), it would take perhaps only day for the entire humankind to be totally exterminate.¹⁸

Upon an analytical study, the above concept of temporary Nibbāna in the view of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu means the freedom of mind from enslavement of ‘self’; however temporary it may be that there are times when one somehow manages to be free from the embellishment of self and other mental defilements rather frequently. According to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, a regular occurrence of temporary Nibbāna in one’s life can be ‘stretched’ longer and longer, prolonging the period of coolness, till it becomes a perfect Nibbāna.

3.3 Conclusion

Upon an analytical study of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s interpretation of emptiness (Suññatā), it is found that he interprets emptiness (Suññatā) into two concepts as ‘empty mind’ and ‘Nibbāna’. The concept of ‘empty mind’ is based on the concept of emptiness (Suññatā) in Tipiṭaka in the context of the lack of ‘self’ or ‘Anattā’. In other word, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has widely and deeply presented the idea of ‘Anattā’ in the context of ‘empty mind’. The term ‘void’ (Suñña) in the above context implies two things: one is the voidness of ‘self’, and the other is voidness of whatsoever belonging to ‘self’. The former refers to the voidness of the doer or one who feels, and the latter refers to the voidness of its property. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu emphasizes working with

¹⁸ Ibid., pp.99 – 100.

empty mind in two occasion, the first occasion with doerless doing to realize the real freedom while working and the second occasion to realize the real freedom while working, being mindful of the sense-media consciousness at the moment of contact with sense-objects.

For the interpretation of emptiness (Suññatā) in term of ‘Nibbāna’, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has rendered emptiness (Suññatā) into supreme emptiness or Nibbāna and temporary Nibbāna or a foretaste of Nibbāna. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has broadened the meaning of emptiness to a degree of emptiness for the practice, even not the perfect one or just empty for a moment. But the important thing is that the mind is set on practicing to the best of one’s abilities to make the mind empty. If the mind is empty of grasping at and clinging to all things, then it is itself emptiness, the remainderless extinction of ego or self or the feeling of ‘I’ and ‘mind’, that is the cessation of suffering. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu thus emphasizes that Nibbāna is here and now, not after death or not somewhereelse. It is found that Nibbāna here and now or ‘a temporary Nibbāna’ or ‘a foretaste of Nibbāna’ as interpreted by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu has played an important role in the teaching of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu as well as the ‘empty mind’. Upon the right understanding of emptiness (Suññatā) with reference to the concept in the Tipiṭaka in chapter 2 and Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s view in this chapter, the application of emptiness (Suññatā) in daily life would be widely studied in the next chapter.