

## A STUDY OF ŚŪNYATĀ CONCEPT

Rev. Morawaka Dheeralankara<sup>1</sup>

In Mahayana Buddhism, there are books written about *sunyata* or emptiness. Mahayana Buddhism greatly elaborates *sunyata*, because their forefathers could not understand the concept of *Nibbana*. Unfortunately, many people who are introduced to Mahayana teachings believe that *Nibbana* is an abstract concept. It is a very simple concept if one understands the pure Buddha Dhamma. Emptiness is relative. There is no absolute “emptiness”. It is meaningless to say “this is emptiness” because there may be something there that we are not aware of. Still, one could say that “deep space is empty of tangible matter” to a good approximation. The Buddha said when the mind becomes empty of greed, hate and ignorance it becomes empty of those defilements and that mind has attained *Nibbana*. That is emptiness, *sunyata* with respect to defilements. When one attains the Arahantphala, one’s mind becomes *sunya* of raga, dosa, moha. But one still has *sanna* (perception), *vedana* (feelings), etc. and lives like a normal human being until death. At the death of an Arahant, “this world of 31 realms” becomes devoid of any trace of that life stream, except for the Arahant ‘*snamagoththa*’ there is no rebirth. So that is another *sunyata*. There is a sutta in Tipitaka that is about *sunnata*, and was delivered by the Buddha, called the *Cula-Sunnatasutta*. When I got to know about the sutta, I was glad to see that the sutta described emptiness very similar to the way I described it. This shows that the Dhamma is internally self-consistent. In the *Cula-SunnataSutta* Buddha has preached. There is no need to write books on emptiness that are full of meaningless words. In a recent online discussion forum, I saw a comment saying that emptiness describes *paticcasamuppada*. This is surprising because in Mahayana texts it is not explained what *paticcasamuppada* is. The Buddha said “One who understands *paticcasamuppada*, understands Dhamma” The Mahayana sects have moved so far away from Buddha Dhamma, I cannot fathom why they still call it Buddha’s Dhamma.

**Key Words:** *Sunnata* (Emptiness), Dhamma, *paticcasamuppada*, Mahayana Buddhism, relativity

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies