

A critical analysis on the accurate meaning of the Early Buddhist phrase of “*parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā*”

Bhikkhu B Dhammarama¹

Introduction

The effectiveness and the urgency of practicing meditation or training mind based on mindfulness (*sati*), has evidently been highly recognized by people throughout the world. People of the world practice various methods of mental training in order to develop their mind and to get rid of mental uneasiness. Due to this recognition given to mindfulness based on mental training, as mind is the highest concern in the teaching of the Buddha, Buddhism and its involvement in mental training is well admitted and highly admired by most of practitioners around the world.

Buddhism consists of ample instructions on mental cultivation and different meditative objects (*kammaṭṭhāna*). It also has a very much practical basic guidance which helps a person to prepare for the meditation. In the most common guidance of meditation, there is an important phrase as ‘*parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā*’. Although this Early Buddhist phrase plays a significant role in the ground of meditation there are some misconceptions have been emerged and no concerted approach on the Early Buddhist phrase of *parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā* which is recognized as one of the most significant, basic and, Early Buddhist instructions of meditation.

But according to our investigation, the accurate meaning of this instructional phrase which is the most important fragment of the preparatory level is different from how some other Buddhist scholars interpret and how the commentaries explain. In this research what would be attempted to delineate is that the phrase “*parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā*” cannot be confined into mere meaning as ‘establishing the mindfulness or attention at the nostril area or at the upper lip’ as depicted in some commentaries. And also this cannot be defined merely as the method which is only used in Breathing Meditation or *Ānāpānasati*. This phrase has much wider meaning to be recognized and re-examined by the instructors and the practitioners. This research will attempt to explain this phrase in broader sense.

¹. Instructor in Buddhist Studies, Department of Postgraduate Studies, Sri Lanka International Buddhist Academy, Pallekele, Sri Lanka. dhammaramab@gmail.com

Research Objective

To make an investigation into the accurate meaning of the early Buddhist phrase of *parimukham satim upaṭṭhapetvā*

Research Methodology

Qualitative analysis and both deductive and inductive reasoning are used in this research article.

Research Problem

The phrase '*parimukham satim upaṭṭhapetvā*' has been frequently mentioned in *suttanta* teachings not only as one of basic instructions of breathing meditation but also as basic instruction for all meditations. But it is to be investigated that whether this early Buddhist phrase has been properly interpreted in commentaries or not.

Research Literature Review

In order to make an investigative research on this research topic, the book titled as *Satipaṭṭhāna - The Direct Path to Realization* composed by Bhikkhu Anālayo, 'Mindfulness of Breathing' written by Ven. Nāṇamoli, 'The Heart of Buddhist Meditation' by Ven. Nyanaponika, and the book named 'Knowing and Seeing' written by Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw were referred as the resources for this research paper.

Research Framework

To make an investigative study on this research title, commentaries, and some modern interpretations given by some Buddhist scholars will be the limit of my research.

Research Discussion

Although the early Buddhist phrase of '*parimukham satim upaṭṭhapetvā*' is used as the basic preparation for mental cultivation in several occasions in the *suttantapiṭaka*, this phrase is being erroneously interpreted by most of meditation instructors as 'establishing the mindfulness or attention at the nostril area or at the upper lip'. This is the similar interpretation mentioned in *Vibhaṅgapakarāṇa* and the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*. It clearly states in the *Vibhaṅgapakarāṇa* that the term '*parimukha*' means the area of the tip of the nose (*nāsikagge*) or of the lip of the mouth (*mukhanimitte*).

The interpretation given to the phrase *parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā* in the above commentaries is accurate with regard to the meditation called *Ānāpānasati* or Concentration on Breathing. But when this phrase has been recommended as the preparation to other meditative objects then there is a controversial issue of interpreting this phrase as establishing the mindfulness or attention at the nostril area or at the upper lip (*nāsikagga* or *mukhanimitta*). Therefore some meditation masters interpret this phrase as establishing mindfulness at the front.

Therefore the discussion taken place of this research paper is to investigate the accurate meaning of this early Buddhist phrase and the places where the Buddha recommended this basic preparation with other meditative objects apart from *Ānāpānasati* meditation.

Research Conclusion

It is to be mentioned in the conclusive passage that the phrase “established mindfulness in front of him (*parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā*) is one of the most important instructions for all objects of meditation. It is possible to suggest that this phrase is not meant to focus on any kind of bodily place and conceivable to admit that this phrase would connote as having firmly established mindfulness (*sati*) on the present moment or focusing attention on an object of meditation that meditator wishes to practice.

Keywords: Meditation, Mindfulness, Mind, Buddhism, Accurate

References

- **Āṅguttara Nikāya. Vol.V.** (2005). Sambuddhajayanti Tripiṭaka Series. Dehiwala: Buddhist Cultural Centre.
- **Dīga Nikāya.** (2005). Buddha Jayanti Tipiṭakamālā. Dehiwala: Buddhist Cultural Centre.
- **Paṭisambhidāmagga.** (1979). London: The Pali Text Society.
- **Vibhaṅga.** (1978). London: The Pali Text Society.
- Anālayo, B. (2003). **Satipaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realization.** Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Dhammananda, K. (1996). **Meditation: the only way.** Malayasia. Publication of the Buddhist Missionary Society.
- Sayādaw, M. (2013). **Buddhist Meditation and its Forty Subjects.** U Pe Thin (tr). Buddha Sāsana Council Press.
- Nyanaponika. (1962, 2012). **The heart of Buddhist Meditation.** Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.