

## Is *Sūnyatā* Unknown to Pāli Buddhism?

Ven. Dr. M. Dhammajothi

Pāli and Buddhist Studies Unit, University of Colombo

[dhammajothi@yahoo.com](mailto:dhammajothi@yahoo.com)

Over the last five decades or so, there has been considerable amount of research carried out in English on the subject of *ūṭnya/ūṭnyatā* or emptiness as presented in the Madhyamaka Philosophy of Ācārya Nāgārjuna. One of the epoch making publications on this, is the book titled *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of the Madhyamaka System* by Prof. T. R. V. Murti. Prior to him there were scholars such as Theodore Stcherbatsky who attempted to show that the Doctrine of *ūṭnyatā* is an innovation of Mahāyāna. Murti took this view to the climax and presented Madhyamaka Philosophy as the Copernican Revolution in Indian philosophical thought, especially on Buddhist Philosophy. This paper will argue that there are numerous instances in the *Nikāyas* where the Buddha himself uses the term *suñña/suññata* in a sense very much similarly to the one found in Madhyamaka. Not only the *Nikāyas*, but Pāli Commentaries too contain many such references. The paper will present the *suñña* concept in detail, as presented in Pāli Buddhism. Very often the Buddha used many terms, phrases, sometimes even similes, metaphors etc, to bring out this idea of emptiness. To obtain a comprehensive view of the Buddha's emphasis on the emptiness of all phenomena, these related concepts and ideas need to be examined. Thus, the presentation incorporates an in-depth analysis of these related concepts.

Keywords: *ūṭnyatā*, Pali Buddhism, Madhyamaka Philosophy, Nāgārjuna