

# **An Analytical Study on the First Dhamma-preaching of the Buddha**

Ven. Xu Lei (Mettavihari)<sup>1</sup>

## **Introduction**

According to the Buddhist tradition, the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* is the first dhamma-preaching given by the Buddha after he attained enlightenment. The group of five monks is considered as the first audiences of the Buddha's dhamma sermon. There is no doubt that the contents of this sutta are exclusively Buddhist teachings, and the choice of the first five listeners was the result of the Buddha's careful consideration that they could understand his teachings. Before the Buddha met the group of five monks, the Buddha had delivered different expressions to a small number of people, which also took place after his enlightenment. Therefore, from what point of view should these expressions of the Buddha be viewed, whether they have anything to do with the teachings of the Buddha. The analysis of these questions helps to view the Buddha's first speech from a different perspective.

## **Research Objectives**

The main purpose of this paper is to analyze the content of the Buddha's dialogue with several people before he met the group of five monks, and to analyze whether their conversation is related to the teachings of the Buddha.

## **Research methodology**

The method to be followed for the fulfilment of present paper is library based. By means of collecting of data from primary source (*Mahāvagga* and its exegesis) and applying them to analyze the data.

## **Research Problem**

If *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* is the first dhamma sermon, specifically delivered for the five bhikkhus by the Buddha, then before that, how to identify the Buddha's brief words which occurred before the meeting of these five bhikkhus? Should they be considered as the Buddha's teachings, or just simple conversation?

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<sup>1</sup>. Mphil (Reading), Department of Pāli and Buddhist Studies. University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka.  
[ptschanghui@126.com](mailto:ptschanghui@126.com)

## **Research Literature Review**

As *Rupert Gethin* in his book *Foundations of Buddhism* mentioned that the Four Noble Truths is the main topic in *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, which refer to and express the basic orientation of Buddhism.

And, *Revata Dhamma* points in *The First Discourse of the Buddha* that this sutta introduces fundamental concepts of Buddhist thought, such as the Middle Way and the Four Noble Truths which is considered as the first teaching given by the Buddha.

According to the book *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism*, the point of *Tilmann Vetter* is that inconsistencies in the oldest texts may reveal developments in the oldest teachings.

All of these discussions revolve around the contents of the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* itself and its position in the development of Buddhism, but do not take into account the words of the Buddha before this sutta.

## **Research Scope**

This paper is limited on the Buddha's dialogue with a few people after his enlightenment and before the deliverance of *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*.

## **Research Discussion**

It is well-known that *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* was the first Buddhist sutta preached by the Buddha to the five bhikkhus in the deer park. The choice of this group of five monks was a deliberate decision of the Buddha, when he was requested three times by Brahmā Sahampati and finally decided to preach the Dhamma to the world. After the Buddha made up his mind, this group of five monks became the first listeners of the Buddha's teaching. The reason why *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* to these five monks is regarded as the Buddha's first dhamma preach is because that when he decided to preach dhamma it was occurred to the Buddha: "Now, to whom should I first teach dhamma? Who will understand this dhamma quickly?" According to this, the Buddha's preaching to five monks as the first dhamma should be taken for granted.

It is interesting, in the time since his enlightenment, before he met five people, the Buddha also had conversations with four different people. They were a conceited (*huṃhuṃkajātiko brāhmaṇo*)

Brahmin, Tapussa, Bhallika and Upaka. It is worth noting that the Buddha's conversation with the first three took place before Brahmā Sahampati asked the Buddha to preach dhamma, that is, during this time he had not yet intended to share his exploration of dhamma to the world. It seems reasonable to believe that these conversations did not involve the teachings of the Buddha. Especially, Tapussa and Bhallika, they were able to know that the Buddha existed in the world because of information from the deva who encouraged them to offer the food to the Buddha for the blessing and happiness. The Buddha did not seem to communicate much with them, though they were the first offers after the Buddha's enlightenment, perhaps simply in response to their request for refuge. According to their requirement, in some sense, they also hoped that the Buddha would preach dhamma. Hence, it is easy to understand that the Buddha's dialogue with Tapussa and Bhallika contains nothing doctrinal, only general communication.

The last person the Buddha met before he preached *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* to five monks was Upaka. Their meeting took place on the Buddha's way to the deer park after the Buddha had decided to preach the Dhamma. So, it makes sense that the context of their conversation more than the previous mentioned, according to what the Buddha addressed, this is the first time that the Buddha has revealed himself to human being as an enlightened one. It seems that the Buddha had the intention to convince him. But even so, after hearing the verses of the Buddha's self-commendation, Upaka did not seem to have much faith in the Buddha as an enlightened being and went to the other way. What the Buddha uttered during their communication is all about himself, and there is nothing didactic or instructive about it. Although Upaka had not been persuaded, however, it may be contained to emphasis the Buddha's determination to preach first to the five monks in accordance with his decision. Therefore, this conversation is a one-sided narrative of the Buddha, with no specific questions asked and no educational answers, so there is no doubt that this is not Dhamma-preaching, but only a common communication.

The conversation between the Buddha and the conceited (*huṃhuṅkajātiko brāhmaṇo*) Brahmin seems to have been more than mere communication, and the Buddha's response is typically doctrinal instruction. This Brahmin was the first person talked to the Buddha after his enlightenment, and it is worth mentioning that at that time he probably did not know this was the Enlightened one, since he directly called the Buddha's previous name *Gotama*. This Brahmin's question was about "*brāhmaṇakaraṇā*", and to his question, the Buddha solemnly gave a short

and clear answer. For this conversation, unlike the one mentioned above, it was more than just an ordinary greeting which their conversation was clearly articulated in the form of questions and answers. The answer to this question was also explained by the Buddha in other suttas and the central idea was very similar, but more refined. So, this conversation between the Buddha and the Brahman becomes as a controversial point that whether the Buddha's answer about the brahman's question can be considered as the preaching or not.

### **Research Conclusion**

For this expression of Buddha, some scholars have translated them into hymns, prose, and paean and so on. In fact, the Buddha did not deny the value of a true Brahman and he also gave some more specific explanations in other suttas, however, here is just a general and popular concept. According to most of component of suttas, the Buddha usually speaks at the request of others, and the audiences will respond accordingly. On the one hand, this conversation is titled with *Huṃhuṅkasutta* which edited into Udāna (might be translated “inspired or emotional utterances”). This shows that this is the Buddha's own statement and has nothing to do with the questioner. On the other hand, even if the Brahman did not ask the Buddha such a question, the Buddha himself would have stated it. That is why there is nothing is mentioned of this Brahman's reaction to the Buddha's hymns. Therefore, this conversation can be understood as a sutta, but not a sermon because the audience is not considered.

**Keywords:** Buddhism, Dhammacakkappavattana, Dhamma, Brahmin, Study

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