



The Role of Bhavaṅga and Khaṇavāda in the Development of Citta-vīthi Theory in Theravāda Buddhism

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Abstract

The cognitive process (*citta-vīthi*) model, as depicted in the *pāli* literature, emerges from the philosophical premise that the time spans of matter and mind dharma differ. According to *pāli* tradition, every mind and matter dharma passes through three sub-moments: arising (*uppāda*), endurance (*thiti*), and Passing (*bhaṅga*). The time span of arising and passing of mind and matter dharmas is equal, while the stage of endurance of material dharma is seventeen times longer than the corresponding stage of mind dharma. Thus, a moment of matter dharma can exist for the seventeen mind-moments when a sense object arises to the mind from any of the sense doors. This philosophical interpretation has created a ground for the theory of cognitive process (*citta-vīthi*) to be developed in the *Theravāda* tradition. The second concept, which also fosters the development of this doctrine, is the idea of life-continuum consciousness (*bhavaṅga-citta*). According to the *Pāli Aṭṭhakathā* literature, beings' psychological experience is determined when their *bhavaṅga-citta*, which is a process-free consciousness (*vīthi-mutta-citta*), is interrupted by the advent of an active process consciousness (*citta-vīthi*). Until the active process (*citta-vīthi*) starts in the flow, the consciousness remains in a state of *bhavaṅga* endlessly. This article contends that *bhavaṅga* and *khaṇavāda* should not be viewed simply as background concepts, but rather as essential structural preconditions for *citta-vīthi*. *Khaṇavāda* provides the distinct temporal framework that differentiates mind from matter, while *bhavaṅga* offers the continuity that makes any disruption by an active cognitive process understandable. Through an interpretive analysis of the *Pāli* commentarial and sub-commentarial texts, this article highlights the interdependence of these concepts instead of assuming it to be self-evident.

Keywords : *Bhavaṅga, Bhaṅga, Khaṇa, Thiti, Uppāda, Vīthi-citta*

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Introduction

The concepts of *khaṇavāda* (theory of momentariness) and *bhavaṅga* (life-continuum) play a crucial role in the philosophical and psychological framework of *Theravāda Abhidhamma*. These theories, while not outlined in detail in the canonical

texts, are extensively examined and elaborated upon in the post-canonical literature. They form the conceptual foundation upon which the theory of cognitive processes (*citta-vīthi*) is thoroughly developed and enhanced (Karunadasa 139).

Within the commentarial interpretation, *bhavaṅga* consciousness is presented as a passive but essential mental state that ensures the continuity of individual existence from the moment of conception (*paṭisandhi*) until the final attainment of *Nibbāna*. It is said to operate silently and subconsciously during intervals when the mind is not engaged in active cognitive processes. Importantly, every instance of cognitive activity is believed to arise from the ongoing stream of *bhavaṅga* consciousness. A cognitive process (*vīthi-citta*) only begins when the flow of *bhavaṅga* is momentarily interrupted, allowing the functional mind-consciousness (*manodhātu*), or sense-door mind element

(*pañcadvārāvajjana*), to perform the initial function of turning attention (*āvajjana*) toward a sensory or mental object. As stated in the commentarial exposition: “*bhavaṅgaṃ vicchindamānā viya āvajjanakiccaṃ sādhayamānā kiriyamanodhātu uppajjati*» - meaning that when the stream of *bhavaṅga* is momentarily cut off, the mind-door consciousness arises to perform the function of advertence (*Visuddhimagga* XIV.115; Warren 388).

The term *bhavaṅga* receives its first sustained doctrinal and psychological exposition in the writings of Buddhaghosa, most notably in his seminal work *Visuddhimagga* and the commentaries on the *Abhidhamma*, although the term itself occurs earlier, without systematic elaboration, in the *Paṭṭhāna*, *Petaḥopadesa*, *Nettipakaraṇa*, and *Milindapañha*. In these texts, *bhavaṅga* is characterized as a passive mental state that retains and cognizes the final object of the previous life at the moment of rebirth-linking (*paṭisandhi-citta*), and continues to arise between moments of active consciousness. It is said to operate during deep, dreamless sleep and in the silent gaps between active thought moments, thus providing a metaphysical and psychological anchor for the continuity of experience. This conceptualization leaves a crucial theoretical space for the emergence of *citta-vīthi*, which is considered to begin precisely at the point where the stream of *bhavaṅga* is interrupted.

Equally significant for the development of *citta-vīthi* is the doctrine of *khaṇavāda*, which posits that all conditioned phenomena, including consciousness, arise and perish in discrete, infinitesimally small moments (*khaṇas*). This momentariness underscores the dynamic and transient nature of reality as understood in Buddhist metaphysics. In the *Abhidhammic* framework, mental events are considered to be even more fleeting than physical phenomena - a view reinforced by the assertion that the lifespan of matter is longer than that of consciousness (Ronkin 341- 65). This temporal analysis provides the structural logic for the detailed sequencing of mental events in the theory of *citta-vīthi*, where each moment of cognition is seen as a precisely ordered series of mental functions arising and ceasing in rapid succession.

Together, the doctrines of *bhavaṅga* and *khaṇavāda* enable Buddhist scholars to articulate a sophisticated model of mental functioning. In the commentarial and sub-commentarial literature, the cognitive process is elaborated as a momentary flow of alternating types of consciousness - both processual (*vīthi-citta*) and process-free (*bhavaṅga-citta*) - that together explain how the mind interacts with and cognizes objects. The *Theravāda* model of *citta-vīthi*, grounded in these two fundamental ideas, thus represents one of the most intricate theoretical systems in classical Buddhist psychology.

The article is constructed on the basis of the research question “what are the Concepts of *bhavaṅga* and *khaṇavāda* foundational to the formulation of the theory of *Citta-vīthi* within the *Theravāda* tradition” whereas the objective of the research is to explore, based on *pāli* commentarial and sub-commentarial literature, whether the concepts of *bhavaṅga* and *khaṇavāda* serve as the bases for the formulation of the theory of *Citta-vīthi* in the *Theravāda* tradition.

The researcher has adopted an interpretivist research paradigm, recognizing that understanding historical-philosophical constructs such as *bhavaṅga* and *khaṇavāda* requires a contextual, meaning-centered approach. Correspondingly, an inductive reasoning approach has been employed, allowing insights and patterns to emerge organically from the careful reading and analysis of the texts, rather than imposing a pre-determined theoretical framework.

The research utilizes qualitative methods, focusing on textual interpretation and thematic analysis. The study is analytical in nature, critically examining the arguments, structures, and assumptions within the texts. It is also fundamental, seeking to uncover the basic philosophical ideas underlying later theoretical developments, and exploratory, as it aims to open up new perspectives and understandings of how the concepts of *bhavaṅga* and *khaṇavāda* contribute to the *Theravādin* theory of *citta-vīthi*.

Analytical Interaction with Previous Research

Current research on *bhavaṅga* can generally be categorized into an external-development theory. Sarachchandra (79) contends that Buddhaghosa derived the idea from *Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma* interpretations, whereas Kalupahana connects it to the *Yogācāra ālaya-vijñāna*; both perspectives identify the doctrine’s origin beyond the

Theravādin textual tradition. In contrast, Wijesekera (348-52) and Cousins (22-46) point out implicit antecedents in the *Paṭṭhāna*, *Milindapañha*, and the *bhavaṅga* formula of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, implying an internal doctrinal development instead of outside influence. This article adheres to the internal-development perspective, arguing that external-origin theories fail to sufficiently explain the term’s appearance in texts (*Paṭṭhāna*, *Milindapañha*) that are earlier or concurrent with the materials suggested as origins. This does not answer the question conclusively, but it is presented here as the

article’s own stance instead of being an unassessed comparison of opposing perspectives.

Concept of *Bhavaṅga* Consciousness

The idea of cognitive process, in its developed version, is explicitly discussed in the manual

Visuddhimagga and *Abhidhammāvatāra* and the *Abhidhamma* commentaries.

These texts talk about two modes of consciousness: process consciousness (*vīthi*) and process-free consciousness (*vīthi-mutta*), and what role they play in our mental experiences. According to this concept, consciousness stays in a state of process-free mode (*bhavaṅga*) all the time like a river stream, until an active process consciousness (*citta-vīthi*) comes into being - “*punapi tādisanti evaṃ asati santānavinivattake aññasmiṃ cittuppāde nadīsotaṃ viya supinaṃ apassato niddokkamanakālādīsu aparimāṇasaṅkhyampi pavattatiyevāti evaṃ tesaññeva viññāṇānaṃ bhavaṅgavasenāpi pavatti veditabbā*” (Warren 388).

Out of these two types of consciousness, the process consciousness actively takes part in the cognitive process (*citta-vīthi*). In contrast, the process-free consciousness (*vīthi-mutta*) does not participate via any of the six sense-doors (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, as well as through the mind itself) in the cognitive process. Buddhaghosa has classified *bhavaṅga* consciousness as a passive and inactive form of consciousness that exists as a state of rest and of mind while the mind is at rest in itself but existing only as a transitional state of mind between each act of conscious activity through a purely mental transitional stage of consciousness in deep, dreamless sleep - “*...bhavaṅge vicchinne puna āvajjanādīnīti evaṃ laddhapaccayacittasantānaṃ bhavaṅgānantaraṃ āvajjanaṃ āvajjanānantaraṃ dassanādīnīti cittaniyamavaseneva punappunaṃ tāva pavattati...*” (389).

In the *Theravādin Abhidhamma* tradition, there are eighty-nine forms of consciousness, of which eighty types are capable of engaging in cognitive processes. Instead of taking part in the active process, the nineteen consciousnesses, namely unwholesome resultant investigating consciousness (*akusala-vipāka-santiraṇa*), wholesome resultant investigating consciousness (*kusala-vipāka-santiraṇa*), eight type sense-sphere resultant consciousnesses (*mahā-vipāka-cittas*), five type form-sphere resultant consciousnesses (*rūpāvacara-vipāka*), and four type formless-sphere resultant consciousnesses (*arūpāvacara-vipāka*), carry the function of process-free consciousness. *aṭṭha sahetukakāmāvacaravipākāni, ... du bbaladvihetukakusalavipākaupekkhāsahagatāhetukavipākamanoviññāṇadhātu cāti paṭisandhivasena nava vipākacittāni pavattanti. yadā rūpāvacarārūpāvacarakusalānubhāvena rūpārūpabhavesu nibbattanti, tadā nesaṃ maraṇakāle paccupaṭṭhitaṃ kammanimittameva ārammaṇaṃ katvā nava rūpārūpāvacaravipākāni paṭisandhivasena pavattanti... ekā akusalavipākāhetukamanoviññāṇadhātu paṭisandhivasena pavattatīti evaṃ tāvettha ekūnavīsatiyā vipākaviññāṇānaṃ paṭisandhivasena pavatti veditabbā* (387-88).

This nineteen process-free consciousness serves three purposes: (1) constituent becoming awareness (*bhavaṅga-citta*); (2) death consciousness (*cuti-citta*); and (3) rebirth linking consciousness (*paṭisandhi-citta*) - “*evaṃ tāvettha ekūnavīsatiyā vipākaviññāṇānaṃ paṭisandhivasena...evaṃ tesaññeva viññāṇānaṃ bhavaṅgavasenāpi... cutivasena pavatti veditabbā*” (388-90).

When a death process commences in a person, the sense object that appears to him/her in the form of *marañāsanna nimitta*. The sense object impinges at that moment of death as a sign of his or her previous good or bad deed (*kamma*), or it can appear as an image connected to that deed (*kamma-nimitta*) or as a sign of the realm in which the dying person will reincarnate (*gati-nimitta*). -“*Evaṃ*

kammaṃ, kammanimittaṃ, gatinimittanti saṅkhepato paṭisandhiyā tīṇi ārammaṇāni honti: kammaṃ nāma āyūhitā kusalākusalacetanā; Kammanimittaṃ nāma yaṃ vatthuṃ ārammaṇaṃ katvā kammaṃ āyūhati; ... Gatinimittaṃ nāma nibbattanakaokāse eko vaṇṇo upaṭṭhāti” (Buddhadatta Thero 155-56).

At the time of death, among the nineteen-door free consciousnesses, any one acts as the rebirth-linking consciousness (*paṭisandhi-citta*), and, to continue the current life after conception, the same consciousness works as the passive flow of the countless moments of the life-continuum consciousness (*bhavaṅga-citta*) to maintain the continuity of being. Again, the same kind of consciousness serves as that being's death consciousness (*cuti-citta*) during his/her death. Thus, the three functions - *paṭisandhi*, *bhavaṅga*, and *cuti* – are carried out by any one of the nineteen-door free consciousness that have grasped the same object. Some interpretations refer to these all three process-free consciousnesses as *bhavaṅga* consciousness in a broader meaning because it serves as an essential component for the life stream's continuity as well as its function of rebirth and death (Karunadasa 3).

In *Aṭṭhasālinī*, *bhavaṅga* consciousness is compared to a spider sitting motionless in the middle of its web. The mind adverts to its sense door, sees its sense object, receives it, explores it, and enjoys it in its active mode in the same way as the spider runs out along its web thread when it finds an insect gets stuck in it, bites it, and drinks its juice.

Following this state, it again rests like the spider before moving to capture and consume the bug (Muller 279; Anagarika Govinda 134-42; Aung 30-32). *Bhavaṅga* moments persist throughout a person's life, much like a spider at rest. It is meant to carry a person's personality traits, which can change during the process of death and rebirth but remains constant during this specific life. The final complete consciousness process of the previous life determines the fundamental aspect of the *bhavaṅga* consciousness for this particular life. In order to avoid the gap that occurs in the calm flow of the cognitive process when there is no active activity occurring, the mind continuously returns to the state of *bhavaṅga* consciousness (Gethin 20; Cousins 26). Even though the *bhavaṅga* mind cognizes the object it obtains during the rebirth-linking (*paṭisandhi*) process, it is comparable to the process consciousness when analyzed from the *Abhidhammic* concept of consciousness. It is neither a parallel process of these two streams to operate side by side nor an undercurrent process to manifest the consciousness process. But these two streams alternate with each other (Sarachandra 88).

Bhavaṅga consciousness is the starting point for any cognitive process (*citta-vīthi*).

When a sense object touches a sense-door in a five-door process, the *bhavaṅga* flow is simultaneously disrupted for two moments before the mind uses the functional mind-element consciousness (*pañcadvārāvajjana*) to navigate to the proper sense door (Muller 72; Tin 96). The functional mind consciousness element (*manodvārāvajjana*) directs the mind to the mind door if the object is a past or future sense-object, the *citta* or *cetasika*, or a concept (*paññatti*) (Gethin 22). Therefore, the vibrating moments of *bhavaṅga* prepare for the emergence of the cognitive process, even though they do not become part of it (Karunadasa 5). The corresponding sense-door consciousness, receiving, investigating, determining, impulsive, and registration consciousness are all successful in the five-door process; in the case of a mind-door process, the impulsive and registration consciousness succeed the *manodvārāvajjana*.

While *bhavaṅga* originates in *Nikāya* texts, its detailed explanation in the Buddhaghosa period addresses a particular interpretative requirement: the teaching of anatta prevents the assertion of a permanent, self-like essence to clarify psychological continuity; however, such continuity still needs to be explained in phases devoid of active cognition, like dreamless sleep and the period surrounding rebirth-linking. *Bhavaṅga* addresses this requirement by presenting continuity as a genuine yet passive flow of resultant (*vipāka*) consciousness rather than a fixed substrate, which contributes to why its systematic analysis only becomes essential after *Abhidhammic* commentary thoroughly explores the implications of momentariness (*khaṇavāda*), and explains why, as discussed below, the two doctrines evolve alongside each other instead of separately.

In regard to the genesis of the concept of the *bhavaṅga* consciousness in *Pāli* literature, the earliest implicit foundation is found in the *Dutiya-aggā Sutta* of *Aṅguttara Nikāya*. The word “*bhavagga*” comes as one of the four most important things in this *Sutta*: shape (*rūpaggaṃ*), feeling (*vedanāggam*), perception (*saññaggam*), and becoming (*bhavaggam*) - “*cattārimāṇi, bhikkhave, aggāni. katamāṇi cattāri? rūpaggaṃ, vedanāggam, saññāggam, bhavaggam - imāni kho, bhikkhave, cattāri aggāni*” ti (Morris 79). The term “*bhavaggam*” is assumed by contemporary academics such as A.B. Keith, Steven Collins, and O.H. de Wijesekera to be the origin of the concept of *bhavaṅga* for the future. In order to complete the five integrated *khandhas* under the *Pañcupādānakkhandhā*, they propose that the ideas of *saṅkhārā* and *viññāṇa* must be understood under the unified concept of “*bhavaggam*” (Keith 194; Wijesekera 88; Collins 238-39). This theory holds that the flux of *saṁsāric* continuity (*bhava*) is the fundamental source of *saṅkhāra* and *viññāṇa*. This concept is represented in the causal relationship of *saṅkhārapaccayā viññāṇaṇ, viññāṇapaccayā nāmarūpaṃ* in the *Paṭiccasamuppāda* formula. Expanding upon this notion, the concept of *bhavaṅga* is further developed in the sub-canonical texts such as *Nettipakaraṇa* and *Peṭakopadesa* by referring to each of the twelve factors of dependent co-arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) working together as *bhavaṅga*, which causes the life-cycle to run continuously - *imāni bhavaṅgāni yadā samaggāni nibbattāni bhavanti so bhavo, taṃ saṁsārassa padaṭṭhānaṃ. niyyānikalakkhaṇo maggo, so nirodhassa padaṭṭhānaṃ* (Hardy 29).

The *Paṭṭhāna* and *Milindapañha* are where the concept of *bhavaṅga* as a passive state of consciousness first emerges (Wijesekera 348-52). In the *Visuddhimagga* and various commentators and sub-commentaries that follow, this concept is extensively explored in relation to the notion of cognitive process (*citta-vīthi*).

Concept of *Khaṇavāda*

A hypothesis developed to explain the uninterrupted continuity and spontaneous change present in the phenomenal world (*sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā*) is known as the notion of momentariness (*khaṇavāda*). The notion of cognitive process (*citta-vīthi*) has been strengthened in the commentarial period by the distinction between material and immaterial phenomena in terms of their respective life duration, which is listed in the doctrine of momentariness and the concept of material cluster. The teaching of *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anatta* of the conditioned phenomena (*saṅkhatadhammā*), which predominates in the *Sutta* teachings, coincides with the development of the idea of momentariness during the

commentarial period. According to the commentaries, the conditioned phenomena (*saṅkhatadhammā*) are of the nature of origination (*uppāda*), cessation (*vaya*), and endurance (*thitassaññattha*). This further elaborates the principle of *anicca* as a phenomenon of constantly changing and dependently originated in the *Sutta* understanding.

To illustrate the transient character of the phenomenon, *Aṅguttara Nikāya* presents a simile of a moving river that doesn't even stand for a moment or a particle of time like an instant and a second - “*nadī pabbateyyā dūraṅgamā sīghasotā hārahārīnī, natthi so khaṇo vā layo vā muhutto vā yaṃ sā āvattati, dharati, avatīṭṭheyya, atha kho sā gacchateva vattateva sandateva*” (Hardy 137). Thus, the *Sutta* uses the term “moment” (*khaṇa*) to describe a little portion of time (*tena khaṇena...tasmiṃ khaṇe*), which subsequently evolved into a sub-moment of the entities in the commentators.

Nonetheless, the first mention of the doctrine of momentariness can be found in the commentary to the *Majjhima Nikāya* and the commentary to the *Suttanipāta* (*Mahāniddesa*) in the early *Theravāda* text. There, it is claimed that all aspects of the phenomenal world, including life, individuality, pain, and pleasure, are covered in a single conscious moment, which ends as soon as it arises - “*jīvitam attabhāvo ca, sukhadukkhā ca kevalā; ekacittasamāyuttā, lahuso vattate khaṇo*” (*Majjhima Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā, Mahāhatthipadopamasutta-vaṇṇanā; Suttanipāta Aṭṭhakathā, Sallasutta-vaṇṇanā*). Within the context of the dhamma-theory, the idea is expanded upon in the *Abhidhamma* commentaries as a theory of moments (Karunadasa 235). Therefore, there is a conceptual change in time scales from the *Sutta* understanding of *anicca* to the doctrine of momentariness. The *Abhidhamma* views the three times as stages of the moment of conditioned *dhamma*, whereas the *Sutta* reads them as relating to past, present, and future existence.

The idea is expanded upon as a theory of moments within the context of the dhamma-theory in the *Abhidhamma* commentary (Karunadasa 235). As a result, there is a conceptual change in time scales from the *Sutta* understanding of *anicca* to the doctrine of momentariness. The *Abhidhamma* views the three periods as stages of the moment of conditioned dhamma, whereas the *Sutta* understands them as pertaining to past, present, and future existence.

When the question of whether the life span of an entity of material and immaterial phenomena (mind and mental factors) is equal is raised, there is a conceptual shift from the principle of impermanence that is portrayed in the early *Sutta* literature to the developed theory of momentariness that is interpreted in the *Abhidhamma* commentaries. The *Pubbaseliya* and *Aparaseliya* Buddhist Schools assert that the length of mind and matter is equal to one moment of consciousness (*ekacittakkhaṇika*), according to the

Kathāvatthu-aṭṭhakathā (Jayawickrama 198). According to the *Theravādin* School, matter has a longer lifespan than the mind. The big earth, the ocean, the ruler of Mount Sineru, water, fire, wind, grass, and twigs are examples of material occurrences that cannot synchronize with every mental phenomenon. This concept is emphasized in a *Khaṇikakathā* portion of *Kathāvatthu* - “*ekacittakkhaṇikā sabbe dhammāti? āmantā. citte mahāpathavī saṇṭhāti, mahāsamuddo saṇṭhāti, sinerupabbatarājā saṇṭhāti, āpo saṇṭhāti, tejo saṇṭhāti, vāyo saṇṭhāti, tiṇakattāhavanappatayo saṇṭhahantīti*” (Taylor 620).

The causal state described in the pre-nascence condition (*purejāta-paccaya*) and the post-nascence condition (*pacchājāta-paccaya*) in the *Paṭṭhāna* can also be used to understand this truth. The *purejāta-paccaya* holds that a material object (sense object and sensitivity) that lasts longer is a prerequisite for the eventual emergence of sense consciousness - “*rūpāyatanam cakkhuviññādhātuyā tam sampayuttakānañca dhammānam purejātapaccayena paccayo*” (Davids 4). According to *Pacchājāta-Paccaya*, the pre-nascent corporeality (sense-bases) is regarded as conditioning the post-nascent awareness and its related mental contents - “*pacchājātā cittacetāsikā dhammā purejātassa imassa kāyassa pacchājātapaccayena paccayo*” (5). According to these interpretations of the *Tikaṭṭhāna*, matter’s lifespan is inevitably longer than consciousness’s, regardless of whether it is thought of as transient or not. The evolved theory of cognitive process (*citta-vīthi*) was made possible by the *Theravādin* School’s concept that the life span of mind and matter differs.

In a similar vein, the second contentious issue addressed by the *Theravādin* School concerns whether a single unit of awareness endures for a fairly long time. The canonical text, *Kathāvatthu*, views the arising and dissolving as the sub-moment of arising and dissolving - *ekam cittam ...uppādakkhaṇo ...vayakkhaṇoti* (Jayawickrama 58). Along with the times of arising and passing, *Aṅguttara Nikāya* also discusses the moment of endurance (*ṭhiti*) - “*tīṇimāni, bhikkhave, saṅkhatassa saṅkhatalakkaṇāni. katamāni tīṇi? uppādo paññāyati, vayo paññāyati, ṭhitassa aññathattam*” (*Aṅguttara Nikāya, Saṅkhatalakkaṇa Sutta*). According to *Aṅguttara Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā*, *ṭhitassa aññathattam* means deterioration (*ṭhitassa aññathattam nāma jarā*) (*Aṅguttara Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā, Saṅkhatalakkaṇa Suttavaṇṇanā*).

Karunadasa claims that this explanation represents the shift in continuity, which is a metaphor for “the sub-moment of duration” (Karunadasa 250 - 51). A complete theory of momentariness is later presented in the commentary literature, in which a single experience is divided into three distinct sub-moments: arising (*uppādakkhaṇa*), enduring (*ṭhitikkhaṇa*), and going away (*bhaṅgakkhaṇa*). One single dhamma, or consciousness moment, is characterized by these three stages of a single brief phenomenon. The *Sīhaḷa-aṭṭhakathā* literature and the commentary and manual of Ācariya Buddhaghosa both contain this refined form of the notion of momentariness.

According to *Visuddhimagga*, mental phenomena are quick and undergo faster transition when they originate simultaneously, whereas material phenomena are slow and have a ponderous transformation process - “*rūpam dandhanirodham garuparivatti, cittam khippanirodham lahuparivatti*” (Warren 526). It demonstrates that the three sub-moments of material things are arising (*uppāda*), endurance (*ṭhiti*), and cessation (*bhaṅga*), while the two sub-moments of awareness are arising (*uppāda*) and cessation (*bhaṅga*). The length of each of these sub-moments of phenomena is the same.

Nonetheless, the sixteen moments of consciousness are equivalent to the sub-moment of persistence of the material realities - “*cittassa uppādakkhaṇopi ṭhitikkhaṇopi bhaṅgakkhaṇopi ekasadisā. rūpassa pana uppāda bhaṅgakkhaṇāyeva lahukā, tehi sadisā. ṭhitikkhaṇo pana mahā, yāva soḷasa cittāni uppajjitvā nirujjhanti, tāva vattati*” (Clark 526). At the end of the sixteen consciousness moments that are counted from the rebirth-linking consciousness (*paṭisandhi-citta*), the kamma-born material phenomena that emerges alongside the rebirth-linking consciousness dies. The matter that arises at the

moment of dissolution passes away at the arising of the seventeenth consciousness, and the kamma-born material phenomena that arise together with the rebirth linking consciousness arise at the moment of endurance - “*paṭisandhicittassa uppādakkhaṇe uppannaṃ rūpaṃ paṭisandhicittato uddhaṃ soḷasamena cittena saddhiṃ nirujjhati*.”

ṭhānakkhaṇe uppannaṃ sattarasamassa uppādakkhaṇena saddhiṃ nirujjhati. bhaṅgakkhaṇe uppannaṃ sattarasamassa ṭhānakkhaṇaṃ patvā nirujjhati” (526-27).

The *Theravādin* idea of momentariness is described in *Sammohavinodanī* by listing the five *khandhas* in the *Pakiṇṇakakathā* section. The *Pakiṇṇakakathā* describes a theory that analyzes the relative life span and the generative potentiality of the intellect and material *khandhas* by examining the five *khandhas* in terms of “order of succession” (*pubbāparato*) and “limit of duration” (*addhānaparicchedato*). In this regard, *Sammohavinodanī* established the idea that a material entity’s generative potentiality is stronger at the moment of enduring (*ṭhiti*) but weaker at the moment of arising (*uppāda*) and cessation (*vaya*) in the discussion of “order of succession” (*pubbāparato*). However, this is not the case for mental phenomena - “*tattha rūpaṃ uppādakkhaṇe ca bhaṅgakkhaṇe ca dubbalaṃ, ṭhānakkhaṇe balavanti ṭhānakkhaṇe rūpaṃ samuṭṭhāpeti. Cittaṃ ṭhānakkhaṇe ca bhaṅgakkhaṇe ca dubbalaṃ, uppādakkhaṇe ya balavanti uppādakkhaṇe ya rūpaṃ samuṭṭhāpeti*” (Buddhadatta Thero 25).

Because of this concept, a material entity creates another material entity when it endures (*ṭhiti*); on the other hand, mental phenomena create a material entity when they arise (*uppāda*). This premise is used to develop the idea that rebirth connecting awareness (*paṭisandhi citta*) cannot produce materiality because it loses its capacity to produce material phenomena at the sub-moment of enduring and disintegration - “*paṭisandhicittassa na rūpajanakattā*” (22).

Sammohavinodanī further establishes the idea that consciousness and material phenomena arise simultaneously during the cognitive process (cognitive process) and that the sixteen moments of consciousness arise and pass away until the endurance (*ṭhiti*) of the material phenomena in the discussion of the “limit of duration” (*addhānaparicchedo*) - “*rūpe dharanteyeva soḷasa cittāni uppajjitvā nirujjhanti*” (26). Similes such as the time it takes for a fruit to fall and a leaf to fall from a tree, or the difference in step between a man with short legs and one with long legs, are used to explain this concept. These similes link the time required by the long-legged guy and the falling leaf to tangible phenomena, whereas the short-legged person’s steps and the falling fruit are compared to moments of consciousness (26). When both are coextensive, the short-legged person must take sixteen steps in the same amount of time to match the long-legged person’s walking pace. Similarly, if the fruit and the leaf fall simultaneously, the fruit hits the ground first. These occurrences are comparable to the situation where sixteen consciousness moments have passed while the material phenomena are still there - “... *Dīghapādo lakuṇṇakapādassa soḷasa padavāre attano pādaṃ añchitvā ākaḍḍhitvā ekameva padavāraṃ karoti... phalāni ca pattāni ca ekakkhaṇe ya vaṇṇato mucceyyuṃ. Tattha phalāni attano bhārikatāya paṭhamataraṃ pathaviyaṃ patanti, pattāni lahukatāya pacchā*” (26).

The duration of the mental phenomena is sixteenth that of a moment of materiality is also stated in *Aṭṭhasālinī* as - “*yāva paṭuppannaṃ rūpaṃ tiṭṭhati tāva soḷasa cittāni uppajjitvā bhijjanti*” (Muller

60). The *Yamaka Aṭṭhakathā*, in its explanation of the creation of mind-produced matter, addresses the comparative length of time that mental and material events persist. It states that mind-born materiality (*cittasamuṭṭhāna-rūpa*) lasts for sixteen moments of consciousness. This material aspect comes into being at the instant a consciousness manifests and remains until an additional sixteen moments of consciousness have passed.

Ultimately, it concludes when the sixteen moments of consciousness come to an end, resulting in a total of seventeen consciousness moments when we include the consciousness that emerges prior to the sequence of sixteen. Similarly, mind-born materiality is said to neither disintegrate when consciousness arises nor during the duration; it also does not come into existence during the phase of endurance or at the moment of any consciousness's dissolution.

cittasamuṭṭhānarūpaṇca cittassa uppādakkhaṇe uppajjitvā yāva aññāni soḷasacittāni uppajjanti, tāva tiṭṭhati. Tesam soḷasannaṃ sabbapaccchimena saddhiṃ nirujjhatīti yena cittaena saddhiṃ uppajjati, tato paṭṭhāya sattarasamena saddhiṃ nirujjhati. Na kassaci cittassa uppādakkhaṇe vā ṭhitikkhaṇe vā nirujjhati, nāpi ṭhitikkhaṇe vā bhaṅgakkhaṇe vā uppajjati (*Yamaka Aṭṭhakathā, Saṅkhārayamaka, Pavattivāraṇṇanā*).

Thero Buddhaddatta, in his work *Abhidhammāvatāra*, condenses in a few stanzas the process of how each sub-division of a moment of consciousness related to rebirth connects with the thirty types of materiality arising from *kamma*. He describes how material phenomena arise in beings at the moment of rebirth and continue through the life process. For instance, he precisely quotes that for beings born in a womb, at the moment of rebirth-linking (*paṭisandhi*), the material phenomena arise at the very moment of rebirth consciousness. And just at its arising, thirty kinds of material phenomena also come into being, at the moment of endurance and the dissolution -

“Gabbhaseyyakasattānaṃ, paṭisandhikkhaṇe pana; Tañca kho sandhicittassa, uppādeyeva jāyare. Yatheva tassa uppāde, tiṃsa rūpāni jāyare; Tatheva ṭhitibhaṅgesu, tiṃsa tiṃseva jāyare” (Buddhadatta Thero 78).

Thus, with the emergence of the *Visuddhimagga* and other *Abhidhamma* commentaries by the Ācariya Buddhaghosa, it is assumed that every sentient being experiences a particular kind of consciousness in every moment. There is no moment when a being does not experience any object (*ārammaṇa*), either physical or mental. A complete series of cognitive processes consists of several consciousness moments (*citta-khaṇa*). In *Abhidhamma*, each such consciousness moment is considered to consist of three temporal instants, sub-moments like *uppāda* (arising), *ṭhiti* (presence), and *bhaṅga* (cessation). Thus, the lifetime of one consciousness is equal to these three temporal instants. Within the brief life-span of each mind-moment, a consciousness arises, carries out its momentary function, and then perishes, conditioning the subsequent consciousness and passing on all its potentialities to its successor. In this way, the flow of the consciousness process runs in a sequence of consciousness moments (*citta-khaṇa*) without any interruption, like a river (Rewata Dhamma 53).

Conclusion

The *Theravāda* tradition's unique contribution lies in its development of the concepts of *bhavaṅga* consciousness and *khaṇavāda*. *Bhavaṅga* consciousness is described as a passive and dormant form

of mental process that occurs briefly between each active mental state. In this tradition, the description of any cognitive process (*citta-vīthi*) begins with *bhavaṅga* consciousness. For example, in a five-door process, when an object is detected by any sense organ, the *bhavaṅga* flow must be interrupted for two moments in order to initiate the active mental state (*citta-vīthi*), before the mind can focus on the correct sense door through the functional mind-element consciousness (*pañcadvārāvajjana*). As previously mentioned, the detailed explanation of *bhavaṅga* fulfills an internal interpretative requirement brought about by the *anattā* doctrine, instead of being a mere, insignificant extension of unrefined *Nikāya* content.

The *Theravāda* tradition created the concept of *khaṇavāda* to account for the intrinsic spontaneous and continuous change of the phenomenal world (*sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā*), grounding it in the *Nikāya* teachings of *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā* while explicitly expanding on it during the Buddhaghosa period. The philosophical comprehension of the difference between material and immaterial phenomena concerning their life spans, along with the notion of the material cluster, marks another important pivotal moment in the evolution of the *citta-vīthi* doctrine.

Thus, the philosophical underpinnings of *bhavaṅga* and *khaṇavāda* combine to form the concept of *citta-vīthi*: *khaṇavāda* asserts that mind and matter function on distinct temporal dimensions, while *bhavaṅga* provides the continuity that makes the disruption of an active cognitive process understandable. Neither doctrine by itself produces *citta-vīthi*; it is their integration - a rapid mental level of distinct moments situated within a slower, more consistent material and dispositional continuum - that the *Abhidhamma* commentaries and sub-commentaries expand into the theory of cognitive process analyzed in this article.

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